



This project is co-funded by  
the European Union



Hate speech, gender, social networks and political parties

# Anti-Gender Hate Speech in Populist Right-Wing Social Media Communication

Antigona Research Group – Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)  
Center for Policy Studies (CPS) – Central European University (CEU)  
Centro Interdisciplinare di Ricerca sulla Vittimologia e sulla Sicurezza (CIRViS) – University of Bologna  
(UNIBO)  
Department of Law - University of Gothenburg (UGOT)  
Department of Communication - University of Vienna (UNIVIE)

2021

Edited by:  
Anna Fejős, Violetta Zentai

With the contributions of:

Moa Bladini, Noelia Igareda González, Astrid Helmstad, Adrian Alberto Pascale,  
Andreas Schulz, Raffaella Sette, Sandra Sicurella, Eva-Maria Svensson, Claudia  
Wilhelm.

This report is the result of the European project titled “**Hate speech, gender, social networks and  
political parties**” (GENHA) (Reference: 875388)

[www.genha.eu](http://www.genha.eu)

*This report was funded by the **European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme** (2014-  
2020)*

**UAB**  
Universitat Autònoma  
de Barcelona

**CEU**  
Center for  
Policy Studies  
CENTRAL  
EUROPEAN  
UNIVERSITY

 universität  
wien

  
ALMA MATER STUDIORUM  
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA  
DIPARTIMENTO DI SOCIOLOGIA  
E DIRITTO DELL'ECONOMIA

  
UNIVERSITY OF  
GOTHENBURG



This work is provided under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivates 4.0 International. Full text available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.en>

Recommended citation: Fejős, Anna and Violetta Zentai, eds. (2021) *Anti-Gender Hate Speech in Populist Right-Wing Social Media Communication*. With the contribution of M. Bladini, N. Igareda, A. Helmstad, A. Pascale, A. Schulz, R. Sette, S. Sicurella, E-M. Svensson, C. Wilhelm. GENHA project. <http://genha.eu/publications-reports>

*The content of this report represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.*

**Consortium partners and researchers:**

**Antigona Research Group – Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)**

Noelia Igareda González  
Adrián Alberto Pascale

**Center for Policy Studies (CPS) – Central European University (CEU)**

Anna Fejós\*  
Violetta Zentai  
Ílkin Cankurt – social media advisor

**Centro Interdisciplinare di Ricerca sulla Vittimologia e sulla Sicurezza (CIRViS) – University of Bologna (UNIBO)**

Raffaella Sette  
Sandra Sicurella

**Department of Communication – University of Vienna (UNIVIE)**

Andreas Schulz  
Claudia Wilhelm

**Department of Law - University of Gothenburg (UGOT)**

Moa Bladini  
Astrid Helmstad  
Eva-Maria Svensson

The editors of this part are grateful to **Dalma Kulcsár** and **Róza Vajda** for their copyediting assistance, and to **Ifrah Hassan** for her help in technical editing. The editors take full responsibility for the quality of the text and the layout.

---

\* Also affiliated with the Center for Social Sciences, ELKH, Budapest.

## Index

.....	1
<b>ANTI-GENDER HATE SPEECH IN POPULIST RIGHT-WING SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTS, AGENDA, AND DATA</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1.1 RADICAL RIGHT-WING POLITICAL FORCES AND ONLINE MEDIA .....	6
1.2 POPULIST RIGHT-WING POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON GENDER .....	8
1.3 HATE SPEECH IN SOCIAL MEDIA .....	9
1.4 THE GENHA AGENDA .....	12
1.5. THE PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS .....	13
1.5.1. <i>Mapping political and social media landscape</i> .....	13
1.5.2. <i>Data collection through social media listening</i> .....	14
1.5.3. <i>Data analysis process: social accounts, posts, comments, conversations</i> .....	15
1.5.4. <i>Data reporting: actors, themes, and types of hate speech</i> .....	16
1.5.5. <i>Limitations, challenges, and future perspectives in social media research</i> .....	18
<b>2. MAPPING THE RADICAL RIGHT: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE</b> .....	<b>21</b>
2.1 POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AND SELECTED ACTORS.....	21
2.2. SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE .....	28
<b>3. THE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION OF RADICAL POPULIST RIGHT FORCES ON SOCIAL MEDIA</b> .....	<b>38</b>
3.1. GERMANY .....	38
3.1.1. <i>The Social Media Accounts of AfD and its Politicians</i> .....	38
3.1.2. <i>The communication of external actors: Influencers, Initiative Familienschutz [Initiative of Family Protection] and Junge Freiheit [Young Freedom]</i> .....	40
3.2. HUNGARY .....	41
3.2.1. <i>The Social Media Accounts of the Governing Parties</i> .....	41
3.2.2. <i>The Social Media Communication of Government Politicians</i> .....	43
3.2.3. <i>The New Far-right Player: Mi Hazánk [Our Homeland] and Their Politicians</i> .....	44
3.2.4. <i>The prolonged arms of the government: External actors' FB communication</i> .....	46
3.3. ITALY.....	48
3.3.1. <i>The social media communication of selected politicians</i> .....	48
3.3.2. <i>The Social Media Communication of External Actors: Influencers and the Pro Vita Vita &amp; Famiglia [Pro Life &amp; Family Association]</i> .....	49
3.4. SPAIN.....	51
3.4.1. THE SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION OF VOX.....	51
3.4.2. THE SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION OF VOX POLITICIANS.....	52
3.4.3. <i>The Communication of External Actors: HazteOir [Speak Up] and Individual Influencers</i> ..	55
3.5. SWEDEN .....	56
3.5.1 THE SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION OF THE PARTY AND ITS MEMBERS.....	57
3.5.2. THE SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION OF EXTERNAL ACTORS: MEDIA PLATFORM AND INFLUENCERS .....	58
<b>4. THREE TARGETS IN THE CROSSFIRE: RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE INQUIRY ON SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS</b> .....	<b>61</b>
4.1. SEXISM AND ANTI-WOMEN'S-RIGHTS SPEECH .....	61
4.1.1. GERMANY .....	61
4.1.2 HUNGARY .....	62
4.1.3. ITALY .....	64
4.1.4. SPAIN .....	65
4.1.5. SWEDEN.....	66

4.1.6 SUMMARY OF SEXIST SPEECH .....	67
4.2. HOMOPHOBIA AND ANTI-LGBTQI SPEECH.....	68
4.2.1 GERMANY .....	68
4.2.2 HUNGARY .....	69
4.2.3 ITALY .....	70
4.2.4 SPAIN .....	71
4.2.5 SWEDEN .....	72
4.2.6 SUMMARY ON HOMOPHOBIC SPEECH.....	73
4.3 ANTIGENDERISM.....	73
4.3.1 GERMANY .....	73
4.3.2 HUNGARY.....	74
4.3.3 ITALY .....	76
4.3.4 SPAIN .....	77
4.3.5 SWEDEN.....	78
4.3.6 SUMMARY ON ANTIGENDERISM .....	78
4.3.7 CROSS-REFERENCES.....	79
<b>5. MODES AND TOOLS OF HATE-SPEECH PRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>81</b>
5.1. THE OCCURRENCE AND TYPE OF HATE SPEECH IN DIFFERENT NATIONAL CONTEXTS.....	81
5.2. SOCIAL MEDIA SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND TECHNOLOGIES .....	84
5.3. MODES OF HATE SPEECH COMMUNICATION .....	87
<b>6. CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>92</b>
6.1 THE UNDERLYING LOGIC OF POPULIST RIGHT-WING POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN ANTI-GENDER TALKS.....	92
6.2 LEADING ACTORS AND DIVISION OF LABOR IN HATE SPEECH PRODUCTION.....	95
6.3 THE CONSEQUENCES OF HATE SPEECH.....	97
REFERENCES.....	99
<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>104</b>

## 1. Introduction: Concepts, Agenda, and Data

### 1.1 Radical right-wing political forces and online media

In this research, we investigated **social media communication of radical right-wing political forces that generates some forms of hate speech and/or stirs hatred in society**. In wider social debates and academic talks, these forces are often labelled ‘far-right’, ‘populist right-wing’, or occasionally ‘extreme-right’ forces. They are parties and other groups that formally accept the norms and procedures of electoral democracy and are seen to be operating within the rule of law. These forces, however, often question and instrumentalize the fundamental values of democratic politics, which can undermine the very foundations of the democratic political arena. When defining our subject, we relied on the definition proposed by Mudde, Wodak and others who characterize radical right-wing political forces by their commitment to the ideological convictions of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde, 2016; Wodak, 2015; Wodak, 2020). We acknowledge that populism and right-wing radicalism are often, but not always, intertwined, and in the last two decades, various forms of populism have emerged on the left as well. Furthermore, some right-wing conservative parties are not populist.<sup>1</sup>

Despite their diverse ideologies, different forms of right-wing populism in Europe and beyond have **common core values**. They usually promulgate the vision of a vertical split between people and elites, in which the former is betrayed by corrupt elites. Their political ideals embrace the values of nativism and nationalism as a source of inspiration for public affairs. Their political imaginaries are characterized by various forms of enemy-seeking in defense of the virtuous part of the population: they use some kind of ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities as scapegoats, and appeal to anti-intellectual common sense to craft an exclusionary agenda (Wodak, 2018, pp. 2-3). They prefer to rely on charismatic leaders, who are mandated to bypass the checks and balances of liberal democracy. These political forces are often portrayed as Eurosceptic but, in fact, they often advocate for replacing the EU and the current EU elites with an alternative Union of nations (Pytlas, 2021, p. 2). They define ‘the people’ as a homogeneous entity, but within that entity they often promulgate hierarchical relations. In general, they wish to keep the framework of electoral democracy, but with a minimum degree of pluralism under a majoritarian rule (Mudde, 2011). It is understood that in most of Europe, these forces do not hold a majority in the legislature, so they have not been able to encroach on public administration and state institutions except in Hungary and Poland, and for a shorter period, in Italy.

It was important for our research to acknowledge that right-wing populism is pursued and nurtured not only by political parties but also by social movements, civil society organizations, associations, and by different traditional and online media platforms, outlets, etc. Some of these are relatively or fully independent, but many are closely connected to political parties through financial and other links. Public intellectuals with their own websites, blog series, and social media pages can also be significant actors in this arena. Some suggest that the operation of a few **right-wing populist complexes** that have formed recently, deserves detailed and complex scholarly attention these days

---

<sup>1</sup> In this research, we use ‘populist’ and ‘radical’ as synonymous terms.

(Dietze & Roth, 2020, p. 8). Radical right-wing forces, especially those with strong populist inclinations, nurture intimate relations with online media. It is argued that interactive media helps populists bypass the rules and standards of traditional news media, allowing populists to connect to or claim to have direct connections with citizens, ask them to share their public opinions, and experiment with conversations that seem to have little interference with political power. These standards of online communication are portrayed by populist political actors as democratic, open-ended, and beyond the elite's control (Wodak, 2018).

General features of **online media** have been fundamentally influencing social and political communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among others, KhosraviNik and Unger (2016) emphasize that the building of political public takes place in interactive, multimodal, and circularly networked spaces as opposed to linear messages crafting a flow consistent with traditional media. The boundaries between online and offline communication are often blurred, top-down and bottom-up messaging merges. Selected voices appear to be dissentious, comments apply new connotations of words, and deliberations unfold among many. It is an opening up to participatory communication and the decentralization of power (Wodak, 2018). Others emphasize new effects of social media communication, such as information bubbles and 'echo chambers' (Sunstein, 2018) in which truth claims can be made and validated without any rational bases, creating what some call a 'post-truth society' (Verloo, 2018a, p. 23). These are particularly favorable conditions for political forces that strive to gather voters in the common arena by maintaining a shared belief system with little controversy. It is notable for our inquiry that radical right-wing forces have quickly learnt which properties of social media operations help routinize a highly effective style of political communication, i.e., condemning visible or invisible enemies, which will elicit cognitive and emotional reactions from the audience. It will also take advantage of and contributing to the production of media 'prosumers' (producer-consumers) and their new communicative sphere (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016; Pajnik & Sauer, 2018)

The political communication of right-wing radicals often focuses on articulating and explaining the dangers that people in general or the mainstream in society putatively face. The most pronounced tool of this strategy is to refer to a **multitude of fears** or directly generate such feelings. When it identifies danger, radical right-wing communication calls for alertness against those responsible for it and intensifies fears among those presumably threatened. In her influential book, Wodak talks about **politics of fear** as the overarching genre of right-wing populist imageries and discourses. Moreover, fear can be made the dominant public perspective because of these efficient discursive practices (Wodak, 2015, pp. 4-6).

The opportunities and the appeal of online media communication transform politics, or least part of it, into constant frontstage performances. Online media communication also invites political actors to learn into entertainment and to blur the boundaries between the real and the fictional. Several contemporary right-wing political leaders willingly immerse themselves in this mode of public presence. They participate in a celebrity culture frequently combining the mission and aura of the Savior and Robin Hood. Wodak points out that these role models resonate well with two outstanding instruments of scapegoating and seeking **danger, scandals and provocations** (Wodak, 2015, pp. 11-12). It is stunning but not surprising that in the era of media-based political communication, radical right-wing parties have become far more successful in reaching out the public and convincing the voters than their infrastructure and organizational capacity suggest.

## 1.2 Populist right-wing political communication on gender<sup>2</sup>

As explained above, right-wing populist forces promulgate a sharp distinction between the groups of ‘normal people’ and the ‘corrupt elite’. The latter is often represented or replaced by marked enemies of ‘normal’ people: feminists; people of LGBTQI identity and rights activists; racial minorities, migrants; and ultimately the major political opponents, i.e., liberal and leftist political ideas and groups (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2015; Norocel, 2017; Wodak, 2015). These enemy groups, however, are not simply variable parts of a puzzle or freely replaceable targets of communication. They represent different **imaginary threats to and actual debates on** racialized, heteronormative, and patriarchal social or political power practices. Therefore, critical thought and scholarship have ventured to explore the specific, the transversal, and common characteristics of exclusionary political communication that not only uses incitement to fears and enemy seeking against social goals but calls for a radical change in social order by **reversing various equality rights**, human rights, and the plurality-based norms that these enemy groups represent and speak for.

There is a rich and steadily growing scholarly knowledge on the connections of the political claims of right-wing radical ideology producers and the social debates on gender. These debates address gender as a social versus biological construction, assess social practices shaped by gender roles and hierarchies, and contribute to or critique the formations of equality norms and struggles. Gender also serves as a metalanguage for negotiating different axes and practices of social and political power, for shaping struggles around cultural and moral hegemony, and for conjuring up visions for making sense of various crisis experiences in contemporary economic and governance regimes (Dietze & Roth, 2020, p. 8; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Verloo, 2018b).

Several authors argue that the radical right-wing complex is moving away from conservative antifeminism, which opposes reproductive and sexual rights, to wider ideological packages undermining the core values of individualism, human rights, and gender equality (Kováts & Põim, 2015; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Others emphasize that the radical right constructs a **new universalism**, which replaces individual rights with rights of the family as a basic societal unit and depicts religious conservatives as an embattled minority across continents and polities (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). Gender is an obvious target when forging such a conceptual framework of the world. Today’s right-wing opposition to gender equality and feminism takes the form of a transnational political mobilization, an alternative civil society, based on an alliance between religious fundamentalists and illiberal populists. While Kováts and Põim (2015) unveil how efforts to delegitimize gender have become a ‘symbolic glue’ which liaises between far right and conservative parties in Europe, Korolczuk and Graff (2018) propose that it is an anticolonial frame that connects an otherwise loose coalition of religious and nationalist players in the anti-gender political arena worldwide.

The broader literature on contemporary right-wing political talks on gender identifies some crucial ideological components of these voices. First, their talks underscore that social and individual life should follow Christian dogmas which stand against social constructionism. This belief-based theorem is often supported by some scientific

---

<sup>2</sup> We use the notion of ‘gender’ in a broad sense to refer both to social hierarchies based on the set of roles and expectations that are assigned to biological sexes, as well as to refer to a person’s sense of identity and expression of identity.



reasoning to uncover that gender scholarship about sex, sexuality, and human relations is false and to reveal an alternative truth. Second, it is argued that the current Western norms of egalitarian gender roles and pluralism in gender identity, intimate relations, and family affairs will lead to a demographic crisis and decay. Third, antigenderists view themselves as the defenders of an oppressed majority, who strive for a local or authentic collective identity against universal and/or Western ideological constructs through conservative and heteronormative views on sexuality, reproduction, and family matters (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018).

The growing authoritarian version of right-wing conservatism, and the peculiar and powerful hybrids of radical and authoritarian ideologemes, often marketize themselves through a rigid and disciplinary interpretation of conventionally gendered social hierarchies (Norocel, 2017). They propose to define and regulate women and men for reproductive purposes and render the heteronormative nuclear family as a means of protection against decadence, pornography, polygamy, and homosexuality (Claus et al., 2017, p. 315). This understanding of gender and the family creates essential and unmediated relations between the nation, its political body, and the citizens' bodies. This reasoning and imagery ventures to present a healthy version of women's and family affairs that critical scholarship considers to be "pseudo-emancipatory gender policies" (Wodak, 2015, p. 22).

Right-wing populist talks can also be conceived of as a Gramscian struggle against a cultural hegemony by putting forward **counter-hegemonic possibilities**. To this end, distinctive ideas are crafted to induce changes in the entire perception of 'social reality'. Developments in gender equality and human rights have not only promised to undermine traditionalist cultural hegemony in gender and sexuality issues in recent decades but have (partially) transformed actual practices of social and political power and domination. Yet, new models making sense of the world at large do not only ensure cognitive comfort and emotional satisfaction in the case of crises and uncertainties even for those whose places in social hierarchies are not directly challenged by egalitarian and rights-based social visions and political discourses. If enemies are named, shamed, hated, and despised by shared meanings and assessments, the political camp of the radical right-wing can be strengthened. To set this process in motion, a meta-political communication is pursued which does not discuss political matters in a strict sense, but dwells on moral and cultural issues. The 'biological' difference between the sexes, the denial of pluralism in sexuality and partnership, and the cherished hierarchy between men and women appear as excellent candidates to offer counter-hegemonic meta-statements (Dietze & Roth, 2020, pp. 15-20).

### 1.3 Hate speech in social media

In a broad sense, hate speech acts and discourses denounce the characteristics, conditions, or status of selected members of society, thereby denying the fundamental value and social position of individuals who belong to a certain group or of whole groups in society (Delgado, 2018; Matsuda, 2018; Waldron, 2012). These speech acts also intend to influence a certain audience in the public sphere and beyond (Delgado, 2018; Maitra et al., 2012; Fumagalli, 2019, p. 3). Hate speech makes victims feel bad about themselves and endorses an environment in which its targets already live within a demeaning context. Hate speech inflicts harm that is "neither random nor isolated", so it induces direct and immediate effects on societal actors and relations (Fumagalli, 2019, p. 3).

The understandings of scholarly, legal, and social movement thinking converge in arguing that damaging the **dignity of the target group** and its members is the essential and first level harm that all forms of hate speech cause. Dignity of the individual and members of any societal group is part and parcel of basic human rights (Waldron, 2012). Hate speech is also harmful because it weakens generalized trust in society and undermines the idea of social equality (Sobieraj, 2020). Right-wing discourses intend to popularize and justify that establishing social equality is harmful, although usually they do not advocate a radically unequal society. Human-rights thinkers, equality-policy paradigms, and critical social thought cannot agree whether hate speech merely calls for subordination or it **does cause and constitute subordination**. The latter position is based on the speech act theory according to which, a speech act not only inspires action, but it is an act itself (Maitra, 2012). Speech acts generate subordination by rendering social reality in a hierarchical shape in which the target group deserves a lower status or even exclusion. Subordination or visions of subordination naturalize what counts as acceptable behavior towards members of the target group (Maitra, 2012; Young, 1990). All this entails that hate speech is **harmful to democracy** even if one cannot demonstrate a causal link between the speech act and its impacts on the behavior of social actors, and without examining the harm caused to individual members of the targeted group (European Parliament, 2020, pp. 55-56). This kind of speech is also referred to as identity-based attacks responding to the threat of equality (Sobieraj, 2020).

A professional network of the Council of Europe is political champion in fighting against hate speech, together with the European Union. They propose that hate crime and hate speech are ubiquitous terms that do not easily fit into legal orders and procedures. Although international law provides guidance, lack of clarity persists among governments, agencies, or academics on what exactly *is* included in these categories and what is *not*. The ordinary meaning of the term hate itself is ambiguous. Therefore, most jurisdictions do not require proof of hatred to define and prosecute hate crime and hate speech cases. A core puzzle and theoretical challenge to all jurisdictions is to assess how hate speech creates a suitable environment, gives inspirations, and invites people to commit hate crimes (Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals, 2015).<sup>3</sup>

A background report has been prepared recently to review the legislation in a polity (Scotland), which *de facto* has left the European Union but acts according to the highest ground of human rights and the rule of law (The Scottish Government, 2018). This report discusses all major problems of contemporary hate speech with exemplary sophistication and detail. The analysis contemplates not only hate speech but also the very social mechanisms of **stirring up hatred**, that is, the intention of the perpetrator to induce animosity against a group in other persons. It emphasizes that hate is not relevant as a motive for scapegoating and exclusion but as a possible effect of the perpetrator's conduct. Stirring up hatred can cause members of the targeted group to feel vulnerable and being excluded from the wider community. It may also lead to public disorder or violence. Even if not resulting in offences, it can contribute to a social atmosphere in which prejudice and discrimination are accepted as normal and silencing women and members of marginalized groups, i.e., preventing their participation in the public discourse (The Scottish Government, 2018, pp. 56-57).

One of the most recent authoritative European level policy reports argues that hate speech has been a growing concern since the beginning of the new millennium. Some of the crisis

---

<sup>3</sup> From the online course on hate crimes and hate speech by the Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/09000016809e2a3b> (Accessed on July 15, 2021)

experiences of Europe's handling the recent migration and refugee affairs, economic downturns, and the Covid-19 pandemic have generated feelings of insecurity (European Parliament 2020, p. 20). A substantial body of exclusionary or intolerant speech would not reach the threshold of criminal regulation. Notwithstanding, these political talks can polarize society, raise hostility between the majority and minorities, induce and naturalize subordination. Victims of hate speech face vulnerability, helplessness, and hopelessness (European Parliament, 2020, p. 30). These acts also have severe impacts on the wider community: hate speech may well erode societal cohesion. The report also acknowledges that social media has radically changed public communication. The attempts to regulate hate speech on social media have yielded modest results (European Parliament, 2020). Another thorough report, commissioned by the Council of Europe, discusses the most recent governance models in tackling online hate speech in Europe (Brown, 2020). This report stresses the potentials of victim-centered hate speech governance in spite of the mounting difficulties in regulating online communication.

The acknowledgement of the significance of **online media**, especially that of social media, in generating hate speech has urged decision makers and legislators of various European institutions to move to pro-active thinking. In May 2016, the European Commission agreed with major social media platform providers on signing a Code of Conduct on illegal online hate speech (European Commission, 2016). The above cited European Parliament report argues that it is the first instrument of its type as a result of the European Commission's political activism for encouraging 'self-regulation' among the concerned actors. The level of interference with the market is comparable to that of a directive, but without the legislative process of the EU or of the Member States. The voluntary mechanism entails less intrusive interference with freedom of expression, but it also lacks constitutional safeguards. The Commission also issued a Communication on tackling illegal content online, presenting guidelines and principles for online platforms<sup>4</sup>. This was followed by a Commission Recommendation on measures to effectively tackle illegal content online<sup>5</sup> and a Commission Communication on tackling online disinformation<sup>6</sup>. The Council of Europe, its European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), and the Fundamental Rights Agencies (FRA) have also intensively monitored and discussed the new forms of hate speech.

The report of the European Parliament acknowledges that hate speech in political communication rarely mounts to criminal hate speech. The narrow notion of criminal hate speech pertains mainly to social media and online comments, and sometimes to politicians' oral expressions. The most preferred targets are sexual and ethnic minorities. According to the fourth evaluation report on the Code of Conduct by the European Commission, xenophobia (including anti-migrant hatred) is the most reported ground of hate speech (17.0 %) followed by sexual orientation (15.6 %) and anti-Muslim hatred (13.0 %)<sup>7</sup>. In some states of tangible democratic backsliding, hate speech has become an accepted tool of governmental political communication (Hungary, Poland) (European

---

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, Communication on Tackling Illegal Content Online, COM/2017/555 final, 28.9.2017.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, Recommendation of 1.3.2018 on measures to effectively tackle illegal content online. C (2018) 1177 final

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, Communication on Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach, COM/2018/236 final, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2019) Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online: Fourth evaluation confirms self-regulation works, Factsheet, February.  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/code\\_of\\_conduct\\_factsheet\\_7\\_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/code_of_conduct_factsheet_7_web.pdf)

Parliament, 2020, p. 140). In these countries, governments generate exclusionary spirit and hatred through their policies related to asylum seekers, racial and ethnic minorities, and LGBTQI people. The political elite uses hate speech in other European polities as well, although in stable democracies it is largely the ‘extremist’ parties that do so. Political leaders tend to avoid speech acts that transgress the borders of criminal law.

Populist right-wing political forces make use of social media as a megaphone for their position, to promote their charismatic leaders and to disseminate their ‘othering’ ideologies and ‘politics of fear’ in ways substantially different from traditional and established parties (Sauer et al., 2018). In the 2010s, these parties and organizations professionalized their political communication by becoming creative and fast learners and occupying a significant space on Twitter, Facebook, and other large social media platforms. These channels also created venues for transnational learning and idea sharing even if the political agendas and historical roots of right-wing populist parties differ significantly.

#### 1.4 The GENHA agenda

The GENHA project stemmed from the understanding that radical right-wing social media communication has gained traction in the last decade and a half in all parts of Europe. These communication mechanisms are one of the main complexes that promote anti-gender ideological persuasion to fundamentally change societal relations and norms, as well as to hammer new political alliances and hegemonies. The GENHA agenda was also inspired by the assumption that social media communication is particularly suitable for hate speech generation due to the nature of these communication arenas and right-wing political inclinations to incite hatred against selected enemies and scapegoats.

The GENHA inquiry has also engaged with debates on political, cultural, and legal responses to hate speech in the understanding that radical right-wing complexes are not its only producers, however, these are more and more significant and influential actors. Tackling hate speech is a pressing challenge due to the versatile, multifaceted, elusive mutations of communication acts that stir various negative emotions and connotations, and due to the highly variable outcomes of purposive political communication. It is widely debated what intensity of animosity, denial, and harm is that makes certain communicative acts hate speech suspects or clear cases. Some still argue hate speech is an act performed intentionally and strategically. Other theorems propose that it is the outcome of communicative acts that matter, not the actors’ intention. It is also debated where to draw the line between different types of speech acts that evoke feelings of intolerance, question the legitimate presence and place of a group in society or public life or justify physical violence.

Discussions of politics and social movements in the academic literature acknowledge that the backlash against gender equality, democratizing, and inclusive potentials is articulated in **three distinctive and intersecting domains**: (1) anti-women’s-rights and sexism, (2) anti-LGBTQI and homophobia, and (3) antigenderism<sup>8</sup>. These three fields offer partly similar and partly different opportunities and realms to identify danger, point fingers at

---

<sup>8</sup> Hereinafter, we will refer to anti-women’s rights content and sexism as ‘sexism’; to anti-LGBTQI and homophobia as ‘homophobia’.

culprits that stand behind these dangers, sort out particular groups whose norms are poisonous, and ideas that are alien or false for ‘normal’ people in society. Discriminatory feelings and prejudice against emancipated women, non-heteronormative relationships and identities, anti-hierarchical views of man and women, and family relations are not new phenomena. Yet, contemporary radical right-wing forces associate their feelings and convictions to new social actors to make them responsible for various crises, or uncertainties and contradictions of the recent past. Homophobic hate speech has been on the radar of intergovernmental and human rights advocacy groups for a while. Sexism, especially verbal violence against female politicians and feminist activists, has also been noticed and discussed for more than two decades. The newest and equally robust form of anti-gender attacks and scapegoating is the denial of the legitimacy of the notion of gender, and most importantly, refusing gender equality and anti-patriarchal policy agendas and citizens’ practices. This is the underlying rationale of antigenderism.

A variety of players participate in anti-gender political and social communication, such as Catholics and Evangelicals, nationalist conservatives, some populist left forces, conservative parents, teachers, who sometimes compete (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). Moreover, right-wing populist complexes conduct strategic attacks against equality, human rights, and social justice advocacy for various groups and protected grounds in addition to gender. Notwithstanding, there is high stake in how impactful radical right-wing political forces may become in anti-gender political talks, and whether social media will let them spiral within their own bubbles or will enable them to build an ever-growing constituency ready to incite and practice hatred and exclusion.

## 1.5. The process of data collection and analysis

The GENHA research aimed to carry out qualitative and quantitative analysis of gendered political communication with potential hate speech content on major social media platforms in the countries participating in it. The primary sources of data were the Facebook and Twitter activity of chosen political actors, however, we complemented the research with the study of comments under selected posts and tweets to obtain information on users’ reactions. Data collection and analysis was a circular process, which took place from January to May 2021. Due to limitations of data availability, the research focused on episodes of social media activity of our actors within the period between 2018 and 2021.

### 1.5.1. Mapping political and social media landscape

The first step of the research encompassed **mapping the political arena** in the participating countries and identifying the public issues related to women, LGBTQI and gender. We overviewed gender-related public debates that were partly generated by, or steered reactions from populist right-wing parties. We considered policymaking in the field, as well as outstanding political events that caught public attention. These served as critical entry points to social media discussions.

In the second step, we determined the actors who participated in triggering the conversations around gender-related public discussions. We studied the official social media pages of **three types of actors** in each country. First, we selected the major right-

wing populist parties with parliamentary representation on the national or municipality level at the time of the research.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, we added individual politicians, who were either members of these parties, or were independent MPs. Thirdly, we included so-called ‘external’ actors, who were although not officially representing the studied right-wing populist parties but were strongly linked to them. This latter category included opinion-forming public figures, civil society organizations, and specific media outlets or public social media pages.

In the third step, we conducted desk research on the availability and usage of different **social media platforms** in each national context to be able to place the Facebook and Twitter presence of our actors in a broader context of social media usage. We obtained statistics, read news reports, and studied the social media pages of right-wing populist actors. As a result, we determined the most active players within and around the parties and composed a list of social media accounts to study. This included individuals and organizations that were important figures of the local populist right-wing forces and had an important standing on social media at the same time.

### 1.5.2. Data collection through social media listening

The goals of the GENHA project necessitated gathering a large amount of data that our consortium team decided to obtain through automated procedure offered by a social media listener company.<sup>10</sup> Social media listening is the process of identifying and collecting conversations on public internet sources on the content of interest (originally brand or product in the domain of marketing) automatically and at scale. Social listening enables researchers to collect large amounts of textual data, like social media posts with thousands of comments, and to process data efficiently. The platform allows users to connect various keywords via Boolean operators, such as ‘and’ / ‘or’, to search for more complex syntaxes and therefore have relevant textual content according to the research objectives on digital media. Listener companies collect every mention and relevant piece of content about chosen topics or profiles. The results are shown on simple but insightful charts and allow clients to export data in excel, pdf, or jpg format for the purpose of further scientific analysis.<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of the data collection, **we created channels** based on selected actors’ social media accounts. Then each country team identified the most important keywords potentially used by the actors. **We listed keywords** which are strongly connected to either general gender-related public discussions, or specific political events, scandals, debates in national contexts. We also added the names of outstanding female politicians, or

---

<sup>9</sup> The selected parties emerged within different national contexts and occupied different power positions in their countries at the time of the research. Despite some differences among their ideological position in the right-wing political continuum, these parties share a number of characteristics, such as cultural conservatism, nativism, and populist communication (see more on this in Section 1.1).

<sup>10</sup> SentiOne, <https://sentione.com/>

<sup>11</sup> Listener tools are neither ready-made ‘products’ nor ‘services’ in the conventional sense. The company provides an online platform, similar to a very advanced search engine, to which the client gets access after purchase. Several rounds of negotiations between the interested parties lead to the purchase agreement, during which the company tailors its product to the client’s specific needs. Negotiations involve customized access to a demo version of the product, a platform with limited search options, and no ability to export data. After the try-out, the company adjusts the tool to the needs of the customer.

relevant public policy documents as we expected that these would trigger reactions from political actors. Furthermore, we included some casual words in our lists that we considered explicitly or implicitly sexist or homophobic, including slang or swear words as well. At the end, we generated five country specific keyword lists in native languages, to which we inductively added terms based on an in-depth pretest phase.<sup>12</sup>

With the help of keywords, we **filtered relevant social media posts** and tagged them as indicators of potential hate speech content on the online platform. Before exporting data, we cleaned the dataset by deleting duplicates or off-topic posts. This was necessary because despite the various keyword-optimizing functions that the social media listening platform offered, many irrelevant posts were automatically collected with content that fell outside the scope of our research. We then exported each tagged post to excel files according to the name of actors and/or the possible themes<sup>13</sup> they represented. Based on the keyword dictionary, over a thousand posts could be extracted in each country. This dataset served as the basis of the first round of rough data analysis.

In a later step of the research, we returned to the platform to **access comments under specific posts**. This was a smaller pool of posts that we selected from the larger dataset, for the purpose of qualitative analysis, due to their topical relevance or their potential to trigger hate speech (see later in 1.5.4.). Since we were interested not only in single comments, but also in how conversations unfold under post entries, we did not use a keyword dictionary in this phase of data collection. Instead, we exported all comments under each individual post into separate files. This dataset served as the basis of a refined analysis of users' reactions to specific, potentially hate speech-related posts.

### 1.5.3. Data analysis process: social accounts, posts, comments, conversations

The analysis of social media data happened in two larger, and several smaller steps, as we gradually moved from general observations on the political communication of actors towards a more refined content analysis of speech acts. During this process, we revisited the social media listener platform several times to collect additional data or refine the keyword search.<sup>14</sup> The more nuanced understanding of the data we achieved, the more refined data collection and sampling became possible. Additionally, we conducted several rounds of consortium meetings to gradually update the data gathering know-how on the selected listener through cross-country and cross-team conversations. Ultimately, we had

---

<sup>12</sup> We hereby would like to thank Ilkin Cankurt for his generous help in explaining the data collection methods on the social media listening platform. Without his tireless efforts to hold group trainings and individual tutoring to the whole consortium, we would have got lost under the pile of data the software produced.

<sup>13</sup> We use the term 'themes' when we refer to the three distinctive domains of gendered political communication with hate speech potential (anti-women's rights content and sexism; anti-LGBTQI and homophobia; and antigenderism), while we use the term 'topic' when we refer to a specific subject of political communication, such as 'abortion'; 'sexual education' or 'same-sex marriage'.

<sup>14</sup> The social listening tool also provides an automatic analysis section, including different metrics and statistics. However, it did not help much in our processing of the data, due to its shortcomings on scientific analytical standards. For instance, the tool distinguished between positive, neutral, and negative sentiments, but since it could not classify elements such as emojis according to the content and did not recognize stylistic devices such as irony, we could not rely on it without further analysis.

to craft a project-specific user's guide, selectively relying on the capabilities of the multipurpose social media monitoring tool we purchased.

The first larger step of the analysis was to produce a **dataset for the purpose of descriptive analysis**. In composing the pool of data, we first considered the engagement rate that posts had and selected the most engaging ones. For this, we relied on the calculation of the social media listener, which generated an automated Influence Score (IS) based on reach and interactions, that is the number of 'shares', 'comments', and 'like' the individual posts attracted.<sup>15</sup> This method was suitable for finding the most popular posts and largely identified the most influential actors. However, a sole reliance on this would have kept other, thematically relevant posts, out of the sample. Therefore, we supplemented sampling by including relatively popular posts of less popular actors in less salient themes and added posts with high potential for hate speech.<sup>16</sup> Despite some variations in the exact sampling process, the datasets generally covered about a hundred posts per country. The first national reports provided a general overview of the entire data, and a descriptive analysis of the posts in the dataset.

In the second larger step, a **smaller pool of posts** was selected for qualitative analysis. The selection of posts was based on theoretical sampling. Posts were selected for the qualitative analysis if they included at least one implicit hate speech element, displayed dense enough information and high enough engagement rate for analysis. Besides, we aimed to create a relatively equal division of the three themes, and the largest possible variety of actors. Eventually, the qualitative analysis reflected a refined view of around thirty posts.

In the case of the fifteen most salient posts, we also analyzed the comment thread under them. In cases where the number of comments exceeded hundreds or even thousands, we generally considered the 100 most relevant textual comments for the analysis, according to their ISs calculated by the social media listener. In addition, we ran keyword searches in the entire comment thread to examine reactions to certain gender-based phrases used by the author of the post, or the phrases of the loudest users. In the analysis, we separated 'consenting' voices that primarily shared the message of the post; and 'dissenting' voices that primarily opposed it, and analyzed the arguments presented by both sides. Finally, we paid attention to any clash between commentators.<sup>17</sup>

#### 1.5.4. Data reporting: actors, themes, and types of hate speech

The results of our research were reported in two steps. First, we produced a descriptive analysis based on the larger dataset, then we carried out a report on the refined analysis

---

<sup>15</sup> Although these numbers are not always accurate, they show the relative popularity of certain posts, compared to others. The scale ranges between IS1-10. The most engaging posts are of IS8+ (8 or above), but if a post was relevant topic-wise, we included posts with IS7 as well. Comments ranged between IS1-IS7.

<sup>16</sup> An example for country-specific variation is that the Swedish team gradually lowered IS-s until it resulted in a relative diversity of actors and themes, while the German team multiplied the sample to achieve the same goal. Furthermore, the Italian team included posts of low IS, but high potential of hate speech content. For some groups (Spanish, Hungarian), the sampling process already reflected a closer study of the posts at this stage, while others (Germans) preferred to compile the dataset first and then carry out a quantitative analysis.

<sup>17</sup> Some country teams used coded posts and comments with a qualitative data analysis program (e.g.: The German team used MAXQDA).



on the smaller dataset (see above, 1.5.2.). In both cases, the reporting of findings followed the main thematic interest of the inquiry, which later became building blocks of this study.

We described and characterized our findings, according to selected actors, themes, and types/intensity of hate speech content. In the beginning, we aimed to identify the most frequently posting **actors or types of actors (parties, politicians, and externals)**. We then singled out the most prominent topics in the material and analyzed reactions, in terms of ‘likes’, ‘shares’ and ‘comments’. We interpreted the number of ‘shares’ as an indicator of how effectively an actor is able multiply their message, while the number of ‘comments’ as an indicator of how many people feel inclined to engage in the conversation. Besides, we explored the most prevalent posting styles, e.g., divided posts with long texts, versus short commentaries or extra short reaction to a shared news article, picture or video and matched them to different actors. Next, we described and characterized each of the **three themes: anti-feminism and sexism; anti-LGBTQI and homophobia; and antigenderism**. We explored differences, commonalities, and cross-references between the themes in the observed social media communication and tried to match (types of) actors and particular themes. We noted any distinctive tool of reasoning or pattern of communication that developed in the three themes through the selected posts.

In the final step, we described our results related to the **types and/or intensity of hate speech content**, using a simple typology. Hate speech in a ‘narrow sense’ (HSN) is used to refer to a call for physical violence, e.g.: beating, punching, raping women or LGBTQI persons. Hate speech in a ‘broad sense’ (HSB) was used to mean degrading speech that intends to deny social membership, destroy dignity, or erase one from the political community. Finally, ‘hate speech potential’ (HSP) is used to describe speech acts targeting a variety of topics, including women, gender, family, etc., which involve essentialized and hierarchical gender roles and deny intimate partnership beyond conservative heterosexual relationships. Following a proposal from the German team, categories of agitation/mobilization, defamation, rumor/conspiracy and implicit hate speech were occasionally used to further specify speech acts in the reports, as the following table indicates:

**Table 1.1** Categorization of hate speech

<b>HS types</b>	<b>Type of norm violation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Hate speech narrow (HSN)	Call for violence	Statements that mention violent acts or incite violence
Hate speech broad (HSB)	Agitation	Provocative statements on political or social problems to steer public interest, often adopting a discriminatory and prejudiced perspective in the process. This also includes trivializations such as "Don't we have other problems in this country?".
	Defamation	Statements that contain insults and slurs or are worded in a derogatory manner.
Hate speech potential (HSP)	Rumor	Unconfirmed allegation directed against social, cultural, or ethnic groups or their members. In the broadest sense, we also understand conspiracy theories as rumors, i.e., unverified claims targeting social groups and political elites.
	Implicit hate speech	Indirect, subtle statements that counter and discriminate social groups (e.g., women, homosexuals, trans persons) and alternative forms of living, also “camouflaged” incitements.

No hate speech (NHS)	-	Statements of political communication that are non-violent (compare hate speech narrow sense) and not socially excluding (compare hate speech broad sense) in its expression.
----------------------	---	---

Source: partially adapted from Wilhelm, Jöckel, and Ziegler (2020).

As a working hypothesis, we assumed that most posts would qualify either as HSB or as HSP, or on the verge of these two categories. In the meantime, HSN would most likely be found among user comments because posts with less explicit hate content are able to trigger hate speech reactions depending on the relevance of a topic in a political context.

As the analysis became more refined, we were able to depict the targets of potential hate content, namely, who are posited to be threats, risks, or dangers to ‘normal’ values of society in the posts and how they do so. We distinguished whether normal values are pronounced or only assumed in posts and determined whether these values are based on secular, religious, rational/scientific or everyday logic. We discussed the legitimizing argumentation presented in the posts if there were any to be found. We aimed to identify patterns concerning which theme or (type of) actor dominates among potentially hate-speech-driven posts, as well as patterns concerning the form of potential hate-speech-references in textual or visual content. We described identifiable strategies and technologies related to the HS content of the most active political figures, like ‘combining strong/soft messages’, ‘visual/textual language’ or ‘explicit/implicit references’. Finally, we discussed differences between **findings on Facebook and Twitter** in countries where both platforms provide rich and relevant data (Italy, Spain, Sweden).<sup>18</sup>

### 1.5.5. Limitations, challenges, and future perspectives in social media research

Before moving on to the presentation of our research results, a few words must be said about the major challenges and limitations of the GENHA project. The most significant challenge in social media research is **the availability of historical data**. Although Twitter is publicly accessible, Facebook does not only apply various data protection protocols, but the regulation of accessing data is constantly evolving. The rules of accessing historical data on the platform were made stricter just before GENHA data collection began. This required the Consortium to adapt quickly and conduct various background consultations with social media experts and listening companies. Due to the limited time available for data collection for the GENHA project and the differences in the level of intensity of anti-gender political communication in the participating countries, we had to collect data of the recent past in this project. However, future research may follow (or ‘listen to’) present day social media activity as well. It is a fruitful method in cases where data collection may take more time and/or where political communication is continuously present on selected research issues.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The Swedish data has been anonymized due to recent changes in the national regulation on research ethics, i.e., the ethical research codex and ethical research laws. This was part of a general process of strengthening the protection of personal integrity of research subjects, even if the research concerns the public appearances of persons acting in their public capacities. The decision to remove all names from the Swedish parts serves to guarantee that the GENHA project is following these new rules.

<sup>19</sup> This is the case in Hungary at the time of writing this report, as the government has intensified its efforts to make issues around gender a defining topic of its general policy. In the meantime, gender seems to be a

Collaborating with **social listener companies** has provided a new avenue for data collection, however, it was not without challenges to fit our academic purposes into their practice. These companies primarily serve private sector clients and support marketing research. However, lately, they have come to be contracted by social scientists, as academic research on social media has blossomed in recent years. According to external consultations and our own experiences, these companies are eager to expand to the academic field, but as of now there is no standard practice of how they might accommodate the needs and limitations of academic research projects. This resulted in several rounds of negotiations and extended try-out sessions of different products, until we contracted the company that best suited the objectives of GENHA. Nevertheless, data collection for academic purposes still had some blind spots that we had to handle creatively. An example of this was access to comments, since the platform did not export all the nested comments under selected posts, and the comment sequence was also disrupted during data export. In these cases, teams simultaneously worked with the exported data and the comments under the original posts on the platforms of Facebook or Twitter.

The above described two issues lead to a third one, namely the possibilities and limitations of finding **hate speech related content**. On the one hand, listener companies do not store or access hidden data on social media platforms, they only collect information that is publicly accessible. Should a tech company restrict access to certain posts or comments, the listener will be unable to track down their content. This is particularly an issue with Facebook, where new data restriction policies largely apply to hate speech content. While we were able to access some suspended pages and some removed posts, we have no information on how the amount and type of this content relates to the overall social media activity of the actors over time, or in what way it affects content currently available on the platforms. Additionally, the listener tool cannot display data that moderators of public social media accounts delete. This may have resulted in the loss of certain (potentially offensive, or, conversely, dissenting) comments under the posts.

On the other hand, social listener companies find data based on a keyword search, thus the more text a post contains, the better the chances are that it gets identified. In turn, should a post consist of little or no text, we were unable to find it. Posts, which only display images, infographics, or external links without further commentary, have likely fallen out of our search. After a careful study of actors' websites, we have manually added some of these types of posts to the dataset to reduce the risk of overlooking much of this important data. Yet, data collected in GENHA remained primary limited to textual data and we only refer to visual tools where we found them to be very connected to the actors' social media communication strategy. In future research, such posts may be selected as a distinct category of posting style for qualitative analysis. Lastly, we must note that keyword search was only possible on public social media pages, while we have noted that some of the actors have changed their settings from public into private accounts during data collection probably in order to avoid possible suspension due to a detected breach of community standards.

Finally, it must be noted that the **diversity of national contexts** also posed several challenges to the research. Not only because the scope of social media space varies in the five participating countries, Germany representing the largest country with over 80 million citizens, while Hungary and Sweden are the smallest with populations of around

---

less salient topic for radical populist right in Sweden, so at present, data collection would not have led to the collection of rich data in that country.

10 million, but the availability and popularity of social media platforms also show some differences (see Chapter 2 on that). Furthermore, while we selected political actors similar in many aspects, they also display differences in terms of their origins, goals, visions, ideologies, and most importantly, their place in the political context of the country. Hungary and Sweden represent the two endpoints of the scale for the parties involved from an almost completely isolated power position to a full-fledged one. The former country has been ruled by a gradually radicalizing populist right party for over ten years, which has resulted in increasing divergence from democratic norms and values and an almost full control of (offline) media. By contrast, radical populist right-wing forces in the latter country are relatively weak, scattered, and mostly building their own alternative media spaces.

Because of the above points, the following chapters are not intended to provide exact numbers on the scope and extent of hate speech, neither do they try to be representative in terms of different actors, themes, and various national contexts. We rather focus on the presentation of observed commonalities and differences among actors, proportions, saliences, and the very mechanisms of producing a hate-driven context related to gender across Europe.

## 2. Mapping the Radical Right: Political and Social Media Landscape

This chapter of the report provides a mapping of the political arena and the social media landscape in the participating countries. First, we introduce the most important radical populist right-wing forces in each country and present the actors selected for the GENHA research. The chosen actors (1) are central to the radical populist right-wing sphere on the national level (see Chapter 1 on parties, politicians, external individuals and organizations), (2) have an active account and intensively use Facebook and/or Twitter (3) make statements relevant to the study of anti-gender political communication, and finally (4) generate content accessible through the social media listening search-tool. Secondly, we briefly present statistics or proxies on trends concerning the use of different social media platforms, including the number of users and their demographic characteristics, and reveal differences between Facebook and Twitter in the participating countries. In this chapter, we also touch upon the use of social media of selected political actors and their popularity indicated with the number of their followers.

### 2.1 Political Landscape and Selected Actors

According to the political landscape in **GERMANY**, we decided to focus on *Alternative für Deutschland* [AfD, Alternative for Germany]); influential AfD-politicians that are regularly referring to gender mainstreaming, family policy, and LGBTQI issues; and some networks and activists associated with AfD. We analyzed the content of four different actor types: the political party (AfD), AfD politicians, non-parliamentary organizations and media outlets (*Initiative Familienschutz* [Family Protection Initiative], *Junge Freiheit* [Young Freedom]), and external public figures (see Table 2.1).

*Alternative für Deutschland* [AfD, Alternative for Germany] is a right-wing to far-right political party in Germany. Founded in April 2013, AfD is the first party to have succeeded in positioning and establishing itself to the right of CDU [Christian Democratic Union of Germany] in the German party structure. In the 2017 federal elections AfD became the third-largest party in Germany after winning 94 seats in the *Bundestag* [House of Representatives] as well as the largest opposition party in the German Parliament<sup>20</sup>. The party is chaired by Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla; its leading candidates in the 2017 elections were AfD Co-Vice Chairman Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel, who now serve as party group leaders in the *Bundestag* (AfD, 2021).<sup>21</sup> Together with the *Legia* in Italy, the AfD is affiliated with the *Identity and Democracy Party* the on the European level.

In addition to the Twitter and Facebook accounts of federal AfD, we selected the accounts of **two leading politicians of AfD** with considerable activity on these platforms, namely,

---

<sup>20</sup> See the Federal Agency for Civic Education: <https://www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/parteien-in-deutschland/afd/273131/wahlergebnisse-und-waehlerschaft> (in German).

<sup>21</sup> In addition to the official party accounts and those of opinionated politicians, we had initially intended to include more actors in the analysis the youth organization of AfD, *Junge Alternative* (JA) as a special interest group for homosexual persons in the party, and *Alternative Homosexuellen* (AHO). However, their traffic is very little on both social media channels having no relevant content for the scope of our analysis, so finally we did not consider them in the research.

**Alice Weidel**, leader of the parliamentary group in the German *Bundestag*, and her deputy, **Beatrix von Storch**. Both express themselves prominently and stand against women's quotas, sexual education, and gender mainstreaming<sup>22</sup>. Further representatives of the party are **Martin Reichardt** and **Mariana Harder-Kühnel** were selected because of their function as speakers for family politics of AfD in the German *Bundestag*, as well as their activity and reach on the relevant social media channels. Further **politicians** we chose are **Uwe Junge**, known for his homophobic statements in the military and state parliament of Rhineland Palatinata<sup>23</sup>, and **Björn Höcke**, known for his "folkish family ideal" [*Völkisches Familienbild*] traditional understanding of gender roles, and especially for his ideals of masculinity.<sup>24</sup>

We chose *Initiative Familienschutz* [Family Protection Initiative] as a **non-parliamentary organization** that can be described as a social movement which intends to protect traditional family based on heterosexual relationship and strengthening it in all areas of society<sup>25</sup>. One of their initiatives, called '**Demo für alle**' movement [Demonstration for all] has joined an alliance of various anti-feminist associations and has been holding protests annually in various cities since 2014, to speak up against alleged 'early sexualization' in schools, 'Marriage for all', and so-called 'gender ideology'<sup>26</sup>. They are organized mainly by Hedwig von Beverfoerde who also co-founded the *Initiative Familienschutz* in 2009 and was initially its spokesperson together with Beatrix von Storch (AfD)<sup>27</sup>. Today, von Storch's husband Sven von Storch is the spokesperson and media owner of the website of *Initiative Familienschutz*, which mainly uses its social media appearances to circulate petitions against abortion restrictions and so-called 'gender speak', and flyers against 'gender', 'early sexualisation', or family- and childcare policies.<sup>28</sup>

We also included *Junge Freiheit* [Young Freedom] founded in 1986, a **right-wing alternative media outlet**, closely connected to AfD that is also known to spread fake news and conspiracy theories (Boberg et al., 2020). *Junge Freiheit* is the sixth most widely circulated weekly magazine in Germany. Despite publishing discriminatory content, it positions itself ambiguously on gender politics blending conservative and right-wing extremist perspectives (Fritzsche & Lang, 2020). As **external individual actors** we selected two social media **influencers** in the right-wing spectrum that spread antifeminist views. **Reinhild "Amandina" Boßdorf** stands out in particular here, as she plays an important connecting role on several social media platforms like Instagram (a photo-sharing network), YouTube and Twitter<sup>29</sup>, used to be a committed activist for AfD, and currently prominently disseminates anti-feminist positions with her association

---

<sup>22</sup> See the following Diskursatlas.de entries. Beatrix von Storch:

[http://www.diskursatlas.de/index.php?title=Beatrix\\_von\\_Storch](http://www.diskursatlas.de/index.php?title=Beatrix_von_Storch); *Frühsexualisierung* [Early sexualization]: <http://www.diskursatlas.de/index.php?title=Fr%C3%BChsexualisierung>

<sup>23</sup> See the article from 2019 in queer.de: [https://www.queer.de/detail.php?article\\_id=33507](https://www.queer.de/detail.php?article_id=33507)

<sup>24</sup> See the article *Das Frauenbild des Björn Höcke* [Björn Höcke's image of women]: <https://www.fr.de/meinung/frauenbild-bjoern-hoecke-10961568.html>

<sup>25</sup> See Diskursatlas.de, 2020. Initiative Familienschutz [Family Protection Initiative]: [http://www.diskursatlas.de/index.php?title=Initiative\\_Familien-Schutz](http://www.diskursatlas.de/index.php?title=Initiative_Familien-Schutz)

<sup>26</sup> See Diskursatlas.de, 2020. *Demo für alle* [Demonstration for all]: [http://www.diskursatlas.de/index.php?title=Demo\\_f%C3%BCr\\_alle](http://www.diskursatlas.de/index.php?title=Demo_f%C3%BCr_alle)

<sup>27</sup> See Diskursatlas.de, 2020. Hedwig von Beverfoerde: [http://www.diskursatlas.de/index.php?title=Hedwig\\_von\\_Beverfoerde#Initiative\\_Familienschutz](http://www.diskursatlas.de/index.php?title=Hedwig_von_Beverfoerde#Initiative_Familienschutz)

<sup>28</sup> See more in Aktionen [Actions]: <https://www.familien-schutz.de/aktionen/>

<sup>29</sup> Amazon, eBay, and Spotify are not considered social networks according to this study.

*Lukreta*<sup>30</sup>. **Anabel Schunke** is retweeted by leading AfD politicians and is considered an influencer and journalist of the New Right<sup>31</sup>.

In **HUNGARY**, the research followed the social media pages of the government coalition and a new far right party in the years of 2019-2021, **Fidesz** (former *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége* [Alliance of Young Democrats], today *Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Párt* [Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Alliance], is a nationalist-conservative, right-wing party. Founded in 1989 as a liberal democratic youth party, *Fidesz* transformed to a center-right party in the mid-90s and became increasingly populist from the mid-2000's. *Fidesz* has been the ruling party since 2010, most of the time with an extraordinary superiority of two-thirds. Since 2010 it has been gradually undermining the rule of law and since 2015 it has been adopting far-right rhetoric in its communication.<sup>32</sup> **Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt** [KDNP, Christian Democratic People's Party] – is a right-wing, conservative Christian democratic party, officially the minor coalition-partner of *Fidesz*, but in reality, a satellite party. It has not participated in elections on its own since 2006, and without *Fidesz*, its electoral support cannot be measured. However, it represents some of the most conservative ideologies in the government and is specifically active in anti-gender campaigns, thus we included it in the research as a separate actor. After a long-lasting conflict with its center-right European party family, *Fidesz* has left the European People's Party (EPP) and currently has 12 independent members in the European Parliament. Despite its nearly complete fusion with *Fidesz*, KDNP remained with one seat in the EPP.

**Mi Hazánk Movement** [MHM, Our Homeland Movement,] is a far-right party founded in June 2018, three months after the latest national elections. Its members are dissidents of *Jobbik* [For Better], who left when the former far-right party's leadership began to move away from its radical roots in 2013 and by 2018 gradually re-established itself as a center-right people's party.<sup>33</sup> Three of *Mi Hazánk's* members were elected to parliament in 2018 as representatives of *Jobbik*, but they soon became independent MP's. There is a general suspicion that *Fidesz* is taking advantage of this party because, unlike other opposition parties, *Mi Hazánk* launched an outstandingly well-founded campaign for the 2019 EP election, it is frequently given voice in pro-government media, and there has been an operative collaboration between *Mi Hazánk* and *Fidesz* on the local level.<sup>34</sup> According to most surveys, their support is well below the parliamentary threshold, but since the party is very vocal on anti-gender topics, thus is the decision to involve them in the GENHA research. *Mi Hazánk* has no representative in the European Parliament.

We included six influential politicians in the GENHA research: four from *Fidesz* and two from *Mi Hazánk*. **Viktor Orbán** has been the leader of *Fidesz* since 1993, and he is currently serving his fourth term as Prime Minister of Hungary (2018-2022). Orbán was a young advocate of liberal democracy at the end of the 1980s, however, he gradually

---

<sup>30</sup>See the articles from 2020: *No filter for the right. How the right-wing scene uses Instagram to recruit young people*: <https://correctiv.org/top-stories/2020/10/06/kein-filter-fuer-rechts-instagram-rechtsextremismus-frauen-der-rechten-szene/#wie-tausende-rechte> (in German); and *Mobile advisory service against right-wing extremism in the Cologne administrative district*: <https://www.mbr-koeln.de/vor-ort/bonn/> (in German)

<sup>31</sup> See Focus, 2019: [https://www.focus.de/panorama/welt/panorama-anabel-schunke-ist-eine-der-wichtigsten-figuren-der-neurechten-szene-wir-waren-mit-ih-fern\\_id\\_10281656.html](https://www.focus.de/panorama/welt/panorama-anabel-schunke-ist-eine-der-wichtigsten-figuren-der-neurechten-szene-wir-waren-mit-ih-fern_id_10281656.html)

<sup>32</sup> See the most recent country analysis of the European Commission on the state of the rule of law in 2021 at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2021\\_rorl\\_country\\_chapter\\_hungary\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2021_rorl_country_chapter_hungary_en.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> See more on the emergence of *Mi Hazánk* at <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/07/a-new-political-movement-emerges-on-hungarys-far-right/>

<sup>34</sup> See more on the connection between *Mi Hazánk* and *Fidesz* at [https://index.hu/belfold/2020/04/02/mi\\_hazank\\_mozgalom\\_nemzeti\\_radikalis\\_fidesz/](https://index.hu/belfold/2020/04/02/mi_hazank_mozgalom_nemzeti_radikalis_fidesz/) (in Hungarian).

shifted his political position to the right during the 1990s and early 2000s. Since his elections as Prime Minister in 2010, he has been building what he calls “illiberal democracy”.<sup>35</sup> Compared to Orbán, **Zsolt Semjén**, the leader of KDNP since 2003, is a less well-known figure, but we involved him to the research because of his position as Deputy Prime Minister and for his ultra-conservative views on gender. Semjén is also Minister without portfolio for National Politics, Church Affairs and Nationalities. Further, we selected for the study the two female ministers of the fourth Orbán-cabinet. **Judit Varga** serves as Minister of Justice, while **Katalin Novák** is Vice President of *Fidesz* and Minister without portfolio for Family Affairs. Besides governmental politicians, we selected the most well-known members of *Mi Hazánk*. **Dóra Dúró** is spokeswoman of *Mi Hazánk* and independent MP. Her husband, **Előd Novák** is the vice-president of *Mi Hazánk*, he is well-known for his homophobic attitude.

The broad category of external actors in Hungary includes voices that seem to be independent, but in fact are directly or indirectly advocating the government’s political agenda. The most impactful actor seems to be *Alapjogokért Központ* [Center for Fundamental Rights], a government organized conservative think-tank with several *Fidesz*-loyal public figures in its leadership. *Alapjogokért* is particularly active in echoing the government’s identity politics and fueling its ‘cultural war’. **Zsolt Bayer** is a childhood friend of Mr. Orbán’s and founder of *Fidesz*. A prominent public figure for decades, Bayer has a long record of fueling hatred against minorities, such as Jews, Roma, and migrants/refugees. Despite several lawsuits against him, Bayer was given a prestigious state award in 2016.<sup>36</sup> He is currently writing in pro-government papers and runs a late-night show on a pro-government TV-channel that often invites prominent government officials and *Fidesz* members to their shows.

Further, we have included some media outlets in the study. *Vasarnap.hu* [Sunday.hu] is an ultra-conservative online magazine. It claims to advocate Christian values and community-building among young people, but in real it echoes the ideological stance of the government and is particularly viral in gender-related content. It was founded in 2018 but became active in 2019, when it received 37M HUF (over 100k EUR) public funding. Sponsors include the Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister and the party foundation of KDNP<sup>37</sup>. Finally, **fan-pages or ‘propaganda sites’** (e.g., *Milliók Orbán Viktor és kormánya mellett* [Millions for OV and his government]; *Összhangban a Fidesszel* [In harmony with Fidesz])<sup>38</sup> are labelled as news and media or political community on Facebook. They are the ‘grey zones’ of politics because it is not known who stands behind them, but they appear as collectives of ‘fans’ despite their very intense level of content.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> See Viktor Orbán’s full speech at the XXV. Bálványos Free Summer University and Youth Camp, 26th July, 2014., Băile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő) at <https://budapestbeacon.com/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/>

<sup>36</sup> See more on Bayer at <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2019/04/23/whats-wrong-with-the-west-everything/>

<sup>37</sup> See more at <https://444.hu/2021/02/03/kozpenzbol-szallitja-nagyuzemben-a-meleg-es-az-abortuszellenesseget-a-kereszteny-portal> (in Hungarian).

<sup>38</sup> The most well-known of these pages, ELÉG [Enough], had been found directly connected *Fidesz*. [https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20210126\\_Fideszes-e-mailcim-all-az-azonnali-videojat-ellopo-memoldal-mogott-allapította-meg-a-nav-majd-felfuggesztette-a-nyomozast](https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20210126_Fideszes-e-mailcim-all-az-azonnali-videojat-ellopo-memoldal-mogott-allapította-meg-a-nav-majd-felfuggesztette-a-nyomozast) (in Hungarian) However, we did not study this site, as during the period of our research it exclusively posted images and infographics, without text.

<sup>39</sup> See <https://telex.hu/belfold/2021/01/03/most-eloszor-verték-meg-a-Fideszt-a-lajkbajnoksagban> in Hungarian. Note that there exist a number of government-critical ‘fan pages’ of this sort as well.



These ‘fan pages’ either express unconditional celebration of government politics, or directly attack oppositional politicians.

In **ITALY**, we chose to analyze the following two radical populist right-wing political parties with parliamentary representation and their leading politicians: *Lega* [League] (former *Lega Nord* [Northern League]) and *Fratelli d’Italia* [Brothers of Italy] (See Table 2.3).

*Lega* [The League] was founded under the name *Lega Nord* in 1989 as a federation of six regional parties of northern and north-central Italy. Later, it took on a national role through a sister party named *Lega per Salvini Premier*. In the runup to the national elections in 2018, the party renamed itself *Lega*. Since 2013, the party leader is **Matteo Salvini**, who managed to boost the popularity of *Lega* so high that it became the third-most-popular party by the 2018 elections (nearly 18% of votes). The *Lega* thus won a place in the coalition government of Giuseppe Conte, and Salvini became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior in the cabinet. Since then, it has been regularly measured as the country’s largest party with a peak at the 2019 European Parliament elections, when it won the most seats with 34,3% of votes.<sup>40</sup> However, after growing tensions, the *Lega* left the coalition in August 2019 and remained in opposition until February 2021, when it re-entered government under the leadership of Mario Draghi. In terms of ideology, the *Lega* is a populist, far-right, Eurosceptic, and xenophobic party. One of the slogans commonly used by the *Lega* is “*Prima gli italiani*” [Italians First]. In its rhetoric, the *Lega* combines messages of “love, friendship, and family” with harsh attacks on allegedly criminal immigrants, mainstream journalists, financial and cultural elites, and “faceless EU bureaucrats”.<sup>41</sup> On the European level, the party belonged to the political group of *Europe of Nations and Freedom* (ENF) in the period of 2014-2019. Then, after the European elections in 2019, this group dissolved, and a new one was born, namely, *Identity and Democracy* (ID). This group is composed of seventy-four European parliamentarians, of which 27 belong to the *Lega*.

*Fratelli d’Italia* [**FdI**, Brothers of Italy] is a national-conservative political party “born from the ashes of the post-fascist Socialist Movement” (Nadeau 2018:15). The party was created in 2012 as a split from Silvio Berlusconi’s right-wing party, *Il Popolo della Libertà*, [PdL, The People of Freedom] and the conservative wing of the *Alleanza Nazionale* [National Alliance]. Section ‘About us’ of *FdI*’s website highlights that the movement is inspired by a spiritual vision of life and the values of national, liberal, and popular traditions.<sup>42</sup> The party leader is **Giorgia Meloni**, who is currently a member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, but earlier served as minister in Berlusconi’s fourth cabinet. As opposed to the other populist right party, the *Lega*, Meloni decided that the *FdI* stays out from the unity government of Mario Draghi formed in February 2021 and instead remains in opposition. Perhaps not independently from this decision, *Fratelli d’Italia* became the fastest-growing political force in Italy, currently second in popularity to the *Lega* and before the center-left party. In the 2018 elections, the party scored 4% of the votes, while in 2021, their popularity was already over 19%.<sup>43</sup> *FdI* promotes cultural

<sup>40</sup> See more on Italian elections at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/>

<sup>41</sup> See more in the Guardian article on Salvini at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right>

<sup>42</sup> See <https://www.fratelli-italia.it/>

<sup>43</sup> See, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/31/the-guardian-view-on-italian-post-fascists-headed-for-the-mainstream>

Christianity with loud anti-migrant rhetoric, while it also stands against abortion rights and gay marriage. Two of the slogans commonly used by this party are “*Un’Italia più forte*” [A stronger Italy], and “*Difendiamo i nostri confini*” [Protect Italian Borders]. Together with the Spanish *Vox* and a *Swedish party*, the FDI belongs to the *European Conservatives and Reformists Party* on the European level.

Besides the two political parties and their leaders, we also included several external actors – two civil society organizations and four well-known opinionated individuals – who sustain strong links with the aforementioned political parties and identify with their ideas. ***Pro Vita e Famiglia onlus*** [Pro Life & Family] is a non-profit, non-governmental organization working for children, mothers, and fathers. It aims to defend the right to life from conception to natural death, and it promotes family based on the marriage of a man and a woman. The organization also stands for the priority of parents regarding the education of their children. ***Casa Pound*** [Pound’s Home] is a civil society movement established in the second half of the ’90s as a radical right community center. Its name refers to Ezra Pound, an American writer and propagandist of fascism. Some keywords of their ideology are ‘neo-fascism, ultranationalism, hard Euroscepticism, sovereignty, anti-capitalism, anti-immigration, and ‘against Islam.’

Selected individuals include Filippo Facci, Vittorio Feltri, Nicola Porro and Alessandro Meluzzi. **Filippo Facci** is a journalist and a writer, a special correspondent of *Liberio*, a right-wing newspaper. **Nicola Porro** is a journalist, blogger, anchor, and vice-director of the conservative newspaper *Il Giornale*. **Vittorio Feltri** is also a journalist, known for having resigned from the Association of Journalists as a form of protest in June 2020 against the many disciplinary proceedings taken against him because of his offensive opinions and headlines of the newspaper he directed. Finally, **Alessandro Meluzzi** is a psychiatrist, criminologist, writer, and former MP. He was a member of Freemasonry of the ‘*Grand Orient of Italy*,’ and since 2019, has been a member of the *Fratelli d’Italia*.

In **SPAIN**, the scope of the study focuses on the political party *Vox* [Voice] because currently, the party has fifty-two seats in the Parliament, being the third biggest political party in Spain.<sup>44</sup> The party was formed in 2013 as a split from the central-right conservative *Partido Popular* [PP, People’s Party]. Founder **Santiago Abascal** and like-minded politicians were members of the PP at the time but were dissatisfied with former president Mariano Rajoy’s administration.<sup>45</sup> Abascal and other *Vox* founders held a more radical stance on several key issues, such as the status of the Basque regions, the Catalan secessionist movement, migration matters, and most important to our research on women’s rights and LGBTQI issues (Ferreira, 2019). Since the beginning, the objective of *Vox* has been to gather the votes of the most conservative side of the right-wing political spectrum in Spain. Santiago Abascal and secretary-general Javier Ortega Smith are the leaders of the party. On 22nd January of 2017, *Vox* attended the meeting of far-right political parties in Europe together with Marine Le Pen (France), Frauke Petry (Germany), and Geert Wilders (Netherlands), which can be understood as *Vox*’s declaration of far-right politics. *Vox* entered the Spanish parliament for the first time in the April 2019 general election when it reached 10% of votes and increased its popularity to 15% (52 seats in the Chamber of Deputies) at the repeated election in November

---

<sup>44</sup> See, <https://www.congreso.es/web/guest/grupos/composicion-en-la-legislatura> (in Spanish).

<sup>45</sup> <https://ctxt.es/es/20181129/Politica/23127/vox-aznar-eta-esperanza-aguirre-sergio-sangiao.htm> (in Spanish).

2019.<sup>46</sup> On the regional level, *Vox* gained parliamentary representation for the first time in 2018 in Andalusia, then scored outstandingly well in Murcia (2019) and most recently in Madrid (2021). In the 2019 European elections, *Vox* gained three seats in the European Parliament and joined the *European Conservatives and Reformists Party* (ECR).

For the current research, we chose seven of *Vox*'s politicians and two of its regional pages during the period 2019-2021. The two most prominent politicians of *Vox* are Santiago Abascal and Javier Ortega Smith. **Santiago Abascal** is the founder and president of *Vox*, currently MP and parliamentary deputy, and the third most influential politician of Spain.<sup>47</sup> **Javier Ortega Smith** is an attorney, MP and general Secretary of *Vox*. Ortega is most known for playing a key role in blocking measures against gender-based violence.<sup>48</sup> The two most prominent female politicians of the party are Carla Toscano de Balbín and Rocío Monasterio. **Carla Toscano** is *Vox* MP and official gender violence spokeswoman. She is known for her anti-feminist stance. **Rocío Monasterio** is president of *Vox Madrid*, candidate for President of the Autonomous community of Madrid in the 2021 regional elections and is currently *Vox*'s Spokeswoman in Madrid Parliament. Further prominent politicians include Iván **Espinosa** de los Monteros y de Simón, *Vox* spokesman and MP; Macarena Olona **Choclán**, *Vox* MP; and **Hermann Tertsch**, *Vox*'s deputy in the European Parliament, former conservative journalist. The two regional accounts are *Vox Madrid* and *Vox Barcelona*.

Important external opinion-makers strongly linked to the above actors include four public figures and a civil society organization. The two female influencers are Cristina Seguí and Marina de la Torre. **Cristina Seguí** is a former panelist of various TV programs on *Channel 4*, today, she is an influencer on Twitter and working at the conservative online news portal *Okdiario.com*. She is the author of the book *Como defenderte de una feminiazi* [How to defend yourself against a feminazi]<sup>49</sup>. **Marina de la Torre**, is a blogger and a Twitter influencer under the name @Anima\_red. She is known for her anti-feminist views and for being vocal in antigenderism. The two male influencers are Roma Gallardo and Un tío blanco hetero. **Roma Gallardo** is one of the most popular critics of gender and most prominent anti-feminist voice on YouTube in Spain. He uses many platforms to show self-made video interviews with people to reveal what he calls “fake feminist speech.” **Un tío blanco hetero** [a white hetero dude] is a blogger and Youtuber known for anti-feminist and homophobic views. He was banned on Twitter for inciting violence but still posts under the account @UTBH\_loudspeaker. Finally, **HazteOir** [Speak Up] is a civil society organization of ultra-conservative roots and far-right political position. Their President, Ignacio Arsuaga, is directly linked to *Vox*. In 2013, HazteOir founded the international ultra-conservative and anti-abortionist advocacy group CitizenGO, which has branches all over Europe

---

<sup>46</sup> See more on Spanish national elections at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/spain/>

<sup>47</sup> See, <https://www.moncloa.com/2021/01/04/politicos-influyentes-espana/> (In Spanish).

<sup>48</sup> See, [https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2019/11/25/inenglish/1574673576\\_576207.html](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2019/11/25/inenglish/1574673576_576207.html) for details.

<sup>49</sup> Cristina Seguí: *Como defenderte de una feminiazi*. 2019 Sevilla: Samarcanda.

In **SWEDEN**, the included actors can be divided into three groups: a political party represented on national or municipal level [*the Party*], some of their most influential politicians and the youth organization [*The Youth Party*], external actors connected to the party, such as individual public figures, and right-wing media platforms (See Table 5.5)

50

*The Party* is a nationalist, populist far-right party founded decades ago. It has its roots in Swedish fascism and extreme right-wing, national socialist, and xenophobic movements and parties. The party got its first representatives in municipalities in the late 20's century. However, it has begun to distance itself from the explicitly far-right ideology and expelled the most radical members. Today it describes itself as a conservative nationalist party. It entered the *Riksdag* [Parliament] in early 21'st century and has grown rapidly. The *Party* has also representatives in the European Parliament, where it joined the *European Conservatives and Reformists* (ECR).<sup>51</sup>

Besides the party's official social media, we also selected the accounts of some of its representatives for our study. **Member A**, **Member B** and **Member C** are all some of the most influential party members. Two of them has a long history in the party, as engaged in the Youth party. Member A and B are men, Member C is a woman.

Furthermore, we decided to study influential persons who have current or historical connections to the Party. **External actor 1** is closely linked to the party through engagement the media landscape around the Party. **External actor 2** has been active in the party previously, and **External actor 3** and **4** both have a history as central members of the Party, but has now left for other political parties. Finally, we also included in our research the Facebook and Twitter accounts of far-right media outlet The Media Platform.

## 2.2. Social Media Landscape

In **GERMANY**, most of the social media communication takes place on Facebook, whereas Twitter remains more of a niche phenomenon. An online survey of German public broadcasting services indicates that in 2020, 26 percent of the German adults (14 years and older) use Facebook at least once a week compared to 5 percent for Twitter (Beisch et al., 2020). Among 44 percent of age group 14-29 are Facebook users (Twitter 8%).

During the election campaign in 2017, the AfD as a party was often the focus of attention for a large proportion of users on Twitter and Facebook. Data analysis highlights the importance of Facebook and Twitter for their political communication (König et al., 2018). In our research, political communication on the accounts of the federal AfD party is more prevalent on Facebook, but individual AfD politicians are more active on Twitter. In general, a larger share of the anti-gender political social media communication takes place on Facebook, nevertheless, Twitter is becoming increasingly important, especially for external actors, who are only active on that platform. Regarding the distribution ratios by platform, the dissemination of research themes and outstanding topics is roughly balanced, except for homophobic statements, which have a larger share on Facebook.

---

<sup>50</sup> Due to current regulation of research ethnics, we decided not to display any names in the Swedish part of the study. Information on actors is kept in a safe place together with a Code Key.

<sup>51</sup> See more on Swedish elections at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/sweden/>

This is mainly due to the Facebook posts of the *Initiative Familienschutz*, which communicates exclusively via Facebook in the years 2018 to 2021.

**Table 2.1** The number of followers of actors selected for the analysis in Germany.<sup>52</sup>

Actor type	Actor	N° of FB followers	N° of Twitter followers	Function
<b>Political party</b>	AfD	539.013	168.701	The party's Federal Account
<b>Politicians</b>	Alice Weidel	347.781	115.069	Parliamentary group leader of AfD in the <i>Bundestag</i> and Deputy Spokeswoman of Federal AfD
	Beatrix von Storch	107.395	61.343	Deputy parliamentary group chair of AfD in the <i>Bundestag</i> , Deputy Federal Chairwoman of AfD
	Martin Reichardt	22.493	6999	Member of the <i>Bundestag</i> , Family policy Spokesman of AfD
	Mariana Harder-Kühnel	15.706	10.676	Member of the <i>Bundestag</i> ; Chairwoman for Family, Women, Seniors & Youth; and Women's Policy Spokeswoman
	Björn Höcke	79652	44.035	State spokesman and leader of parliamentary party AfD Thuringia
	Uwe Junge	15.416	12.782	AfD Group Chairman in the Rhineland-Palatinate State Parliament
<b>External individuals</b>	Reinhild "Amandina" Boßdorf	-	2.039	Right-wing activist, member of <i>Lukreta</i> (mbr, 2020)
	Anabel Schunke	-	36.690	Right-wing Journalist and influencer
<b>Non-parliamentary organizations</b>	<i>Initiative Familienschutz</i>	5.190*	245*	An association, part of the German anti-feminist network <i>Zivile Allianz</i> .
	<i>Junge Freiheit</i>	131.959	49.729	A weekly newspaper

In **HUNGARY**, both the number of registrations on social media sites and the density of social media activity in political topics exceeds the average of the European Union

<sup>52</sup> Note. Numbers of Facebook subscribers and Twitter followers, 13.04.2021. \*16.04.2021.

according to EUROSTAT (84% of accounts are active in Hungary compared to 65% in the EU).<sup>53</sup> **Facebook is the most used** social media platform in Hungary with 90-92% of the population using it, and 70% of users checking their accounts on daily basis.<sup>54</sup> The most active age group is that of 25-34, which constitutes almost the quarter of all users, followed by age group 35-44 with 21.1% of share<sup>55</sup>. However, the age group of 45-65+ also has a share of 34.3% on Facebook, which shows that in Hungary a significant number of Facebook users are mid aged or senior<sup>56</sup>. Female users between 25-34 years (12.5%) are slightly more dominant than male voices (11.5%) of the same age group, whereas the number of male users (11%) is higher than females in the age group of 35-44<sup>57</sup>. **Twitter has the lowest user base** among social media platforms in Hungary compared to visual oriented platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest. The platform has a market share of 2.36% that encompasses only 0.6 million users.<sup>58</sup> Consequently, politicians and political actors make much less effort to improve their Twitter pages if they have an account at all. Although we collected data of all existing sites in this research, as a consequence of the very low activity detected on Twitter, we will not focus on political actors' presence on this platform in the analysis of our findings, will only consider their activities on Facebook.

An important feature of Hungarian political communication on social media is that despite having been in government for nearly twelve years, *Fidesz* and its politicians are not always and not necessarily the leading voices in the country's social media arena neither in terms of the number of followers, nor in terms of generating interactions.<sup>59</sup> This is not to say that *Fidesz* has no strong presence on social media, only that unlike most media that are controlled by the government in Hungary<sup>60</sup> online channels, especially Facebook is still the scene of democratic media. This relative disadvantage has likely contributed to the opposition taking over several large cities, including the capital, in the 2019 regional elections.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, the following year the government launched several initiatives to strengthen its voice on social media. Among them *Megafon Center* is a seemingly independent non-profit organization that offers four-month training to young people to amplify pro-governmental voices, while *Axióma [Axiom] Foundation* publishes short, animated videos to promote conservative worldview. In government interpretation, they are needed because "Facebook suppresses conservative voices" and because "real rebelling is to be conservative" these days.<sup>62</sup> As these organizations were still in an emerging stage at the time of our data collection, further research is needed to

---

<sup>53</sup> See the Eurostat 2018 Digital Economy and Society Database: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/digital-economy-and-society/data/database>

<sup>54</sup> See this compilation of data on Social Media Usage in Hungary from 2021:

[https://www.statista.com/topics/6592/social-media-usage-in-hungary/#dossierSummary\\_\\_chapter2](https://www.statista.com/topics/6592/social-media-usage-in-hungary/#dossierSummary__chapter2)

<sup>55</sup> See the source on Social Media Usage in Hungary cited above.

<sup>56</sup> See Dataportal 2020, Digital 2020: Hungary: <https://dataportal.com/reports/digital-2020-hungary>

<sup>57</sup> See Dataportal: <https://dataportal.com/reports/digital-2020-hungary>

<sup>58</sup> See data on Social Media Usage in Hungary: [https://www.statista.com/topics/6592/social-media-usage-in-hungary/#dossierSummary\\_\\_chapter2](https://www.statista.com/topics/6592/social-media-usage-in-hungary/#dossierSummary__chapter2); and Media Landscapes: Hungary <https://medialandscapes.org/country/hungary/media/social-networks>

<sup>59</sup> See for instance the weekly report on the social media activity of parties on independent news outlet, Telex at <https://telex.hu/cimke/lajkbajnoksag> in Hungarian.

<sup>60</sup> See for instance the 2021 EC Report on the rule of law in Hungary, cited above.

<sup>61</sup> See <https://24.hu/belfold/2021/01/11/kozossegi-media-social-media-big-data/#> (in Hungarian)

<sup>62</sup> See: *Fidesz and the Youth* <https://telex.hu/belfold/2020/09/29/Fidesz-es-a-fiatalok> (in Hungarian); and *Hungary's Fidesz Party Seeks to Conquer Social Media* <https://www.dw.com/en/hungarys-fidesz-party-seeks-to-conquer-social-media/a-56479198> (in English).

reveal their specific gender-based communication. However, the founder of *Megafon* is member of the team behind the pro-governmental think tank *Alapjogokért*, which is included in our research. Finally, it is worth noting that parallel to *Fidesz*'s expansion on social media, early 2021 the government announced a possible restriction on tech companies.<sup>63</sup> The aim of this future measure seems to be to avoid banning certain sites or restricting access to government officials' posts, as has happened several times recently. While these moves have been supported by the small far-right party, *Mi Hazánk* [Our Homeland], the latter has been rather promoting its *Hundub* page, which they have set up recently following their suspension on Facebook.

**Table 2.2** The number of followers of actors selected for the analysis in Hungary.<sup>64</sup>

Actor type	Actor	N° of FB followers	N° of Twitter followers	Function
Political party	<i>Fidesz</i>	321 881	4 499	Right-wing, populist national-conservative ruling party of Hungary
	KDNP	135 304	-	Christian rightist coalition partner of <i>Fidesz</i>
	<i>Mi Hazánk</i>	80 000 <sup>65</sup>	1 793	Far-right non-parliamentary party
Politicians	Viktor Orbán	1 129 896	5 536	Prime Minister
	Judit Varga	124 694	7 910	Minister of Justice
	Katalin Novák	90 920	10 700	Minister for Families
	Dóra Dúró	182 100	-	Independent MP, <i>Mi Hazánk</i> Spokesperson
	Előd Novák	142 799 <sup>1</sup>	-	Independent MP, <i>Mi Hazánk</i> vice-president
	Zsolt Semjén	52 352	-	Leader of KDNP, Deputy Prime Minister
External actors <i>Individuals</i>	Zsolt Bayer	37 819	-	Right-wing media figure

<sup>63</sup> See for instance <https://www.reuters.com/article/hungary-social-media-restrictions-idUSL8N2K13PY>

<sup>64</sup> Note. Numbers of Facebook subscribers and Twitter followers, 20.06.2021.

<sup>65</sup> Figure refers to their old page. They now operate a Hundub account mainly.

<i>Media</i>	<i>Összhangban a Fideszszel</i>	15 544	-	News and media site “fan” page
	<i>Milliók Orbán Viktor és kormánya mellett</i>	33 188	-	News and media site, “fan” page
	<i>Vasarnap.hu</i>	31 311		News and media website
<i>Civil Society Organizations</i>	<i>Alapjogokért Központ</i>	33 627	574	Conservative (government-backed) think tank

In **ITALY**, Facebook is the principal point of reference for any form of communication because it is the most popular social network. In 2019 **Facebook was the most used social network** followed by Instagram and Twitter.<sup>66</sup> More than half of the Facebook users are aged 35+ and the number of users aged 45-55+ is increasing. Regarding gender, more men use social platforms than women (52% vs 48%). However, over time the **use of Twitter has also been growing** because it is better suited to politician’s needs, being a microblogging platform based on text messages (tweets). It is no coincidence that the most popular tweets in 2020 in Italy were those of politicians.

Social media has largely contributed to the rise of the radical populist right-wing forces in Italy. Matteo Salvini can be considered the winner of the new media. In the wake of the refugee crisis in 2015, Salvini gained 400.000 new followers within half a year, tripling his follower base.<sup>67</sup> Today, he is the most liked European leader on Facebook, with more than 4 million followers. Between March 2019 and March 2020, the *Lega* spent 253,440 Euros on advertising on Matteo Salvini’s Facebook and Instagram profiles, but *Fratelli d’Italia* also spent a large sum, 42,085 Euros, on Giorgia Meloni’s Facebook and Instagram profiles.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, our research shows that the two leaders, but especially Salvini, have been increasingly using Twitter. Salvini has 1.3 million followers on Twitter, and he is the most active politician on this platform with an average of 20 tweets per day.<sup>69</sup>

**Table 2.3** The number of followers of actors selected for the analysis in Italy.<sup>70</sup>

<b>Actor type</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>N° of FB followers</b>	<b>N° of Twitter followers</b>	<b>Function</b>

<sup>66</sup> See the I. Stat database: dati.istat.it

<sup>67</sup> See a detailed analysis on Salvini’s rise in: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right>

<sup>68</sup> See a report *Social Media in Italian Political Communication* at <https://www.orizzontipolitici.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/I-social-media-nella-comunicazione-italiana-Orizzonti-Politici-L.pdf> (in Italian).

<sup>69</sup> See this blogpost on Twitter and the new political communication: <https://www.accademiaticivicaigitale.org/twitter-politica/>

<sup>70</sup> Note. Numbers of Facebook subscribers and Twitter followers, 26.03.2021.



Political party	<i>Noi con Salvini (Lega party)</i>	324 582	54 486	Populist, anti-migration party
	<i>Lega Salvini Premier</i>	1 040 313	171 109	Right-wing, federalist, populist and conservative party
	<i>Fratelli d'Italia</i>	399,798	134.300	National-conservative, populist party
Politicians	Matteo Salvini	4 865 024	1.3 million	Senator, former Deputy Prime Minister of Italy, leader of <i>Lega</i>
	Giorgia Meloni	2 143 642	1 million	Leader of populist, conservative <i>Fratelli</i> party
External actors <i>Individuals</i>	Filippo Facci	-	79 357	Journalist
	Vittorio Feltri	93 505	492 089	Journalist, Editor-in-chief of daily <i>Libero</i>
	Alessandro Meluzzi	156 004	74 537	TV personality
	Nicola Porro	753 914	408 816	Journalist
<i>Civil Society Organizations</i>	<i>Casa Pound</i>	-	47 066	Neo-Fascist movement
	<i>Pro Vita &amp; Famiglia onlus</i>	113 862	13 869	NGO; conservative nonprofit

**In SPAIN**, people use the Internet 5 hours and 41 minutes per day, and social media 1 hour and 51 minutes per day, according to research made by ‘We Are Social ES’ in 2021<sup>71</sup>. After WhatsApp and YouTube, **Facebook is the third most popular** social media platform and has more active users in Spain than Instagram and Twitter, the fifth in the line.<sup>72</sup> More than half of Facebook users are women, and a quarter of them is aged

<sup>71</sup> See We Are Social’s Digital 2021 report on Spain: <https://wearesocial.com/es/digital-2021-espana>

<sup>72</sup> See Statista, *Redes sociales con mayor porcentaje de usuarios en España* [Social networks with the highest percentage of users in Spain] in 2020: <https://es.statista.com/estadisticas/489153/porcentaje-de-internautas-en-las-redes-sociales-en-espana/>; and the We Are Social report: <https://wearesocial.com/es/digital-2021-espana> in Spanish.

25-44.<sup>73</sup> However, Facebook is used primarily for leisure activities and keeping in touch with family and friends, and people are more likely to search for news and opinions on Twitter. While ‘virtual’ political discussion has been taking place on Facebook and Twitter, Instagram has also gained ground in recent years in Spain. As for YouTube, it is also an important social network, both for official party channels and external actors.<sup>74</sup> As more people use Facebook than Twitter in Spain, conversations on the former platform are lengthier and denser than on the latter. Furthermore, our research confirmed what Trilling et al. (2017), found in relation to the use of social media platforms for political communication. The popular topics in mainstream media received more shares on Facebook than on Twitter, suggesting that “sharing on Facebook focuses more on a few dominant topics, while Twitter has more variety” (Trilling et al., 2016, p. 53).

*Vox* is an active user of both Facebook and Twitter. Most *Vox* politicians have an account on both platforms too, but they are more active on Twitter. In the meantime, external actors are either using Twitter or Facebook. One of the most surprising findings of our research is the increase in the number of followers of *Vox* politicians between the beginning of the GENHA data collection until the end of the reporting period. Especially Olona Macarena, Rocío Monasterio, and Santiago Abascal managed to significantly increase their popularity with more than 60k followers on average in just one month. In the case of Rocío Monasterio, the explanation could be her political campaign in the Autonomous Community of Madrid on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021<sup>75</sup>. The average monthly growth of politicians’ followers has far exceeded the average monthly rise of official *Vox* accounts and external actors accounts.<sup>76</sup>

**Table 2.4** The number of followers of actors in Spain in May 2021.

Actor type	Actor	Nº of FB followers	Nº of Twitter followers	Function
Political party	<i>Vox</i>	460 000	424 100	Far-right, conservative, populist party
	<i>Vox Madrid</i>	85 200	85 500	Madrid wing of <i>Vox</i>
	<i>Vox Barcelona</i>	18 200	21 300	Barcelona wing of <i>Vox</i>
Politicians	Iván Espinosa de los	28 000	274 500	Member of Congress

<sup>73</sup> See Statista, *Facebook: frequency of use in Spain in 2020* <https://es.statista.com/estadisticas/1017708/frecuencia-de-uso-de-facebook-por-los-usuarios-de-redes-sociales-en-espana/> (in Spanish).

<sup>74</sup> See the We Are Social report; <https://wearesocial.com/es/digital-2021-espana> (in Spanish).

<sup>75</sup> See El País, 2021, *Popular Party takes victory in bitterly fought Madrid regional election*. <https://english.elpais.com/politics/2021-05-04/popular-party-takes-victory-in-bitterly-fought-madrid-regional-election-falling-just-short-of-majority.html>

<sup>76</sup> For details, see the national report of Spain.

	Monteros y de Simón			
	Macarena Olona Choclán	-	224 200	Politician, state attorney
	Francisco Javier Ortega Smith-Molina	83 000	182 800	Secretary General of Vox
	Hermann Tertsch	-	234 600	Member of European Parliament
	Rocío Monasterio	72 000	205 000	Leader of Vox Madrid
	Carla Toscano de Balbín		76 900	Member of the Congress of Deputies of Spain
External actors <i>Individuals</i>	Cristina Seguí	-	177 000	Journalist and writer, Former co-founder Vox
	Marina de la Torre	-	30 700	Blogger and anti-feminist influencer
	Roma Gallardo	1.8 million	127 400	YouTuber
	@Unaalienada	-	31 400	Blogger, YouTuber
<i>Civil Society Organization</i>	<i>HazteOir</i>	95 000	55 900	Ultra-conservative movement

**In SWEDEN**, both major social platforms are suitable for conducting research on social media. From 2017 to 2019 **Facebook** had 71-76-74 % of annual users respectively and **Twitter** 25-22-24 %. Whereas slightly more women use Facebook than men, on Twitter, men have a slight majority. Among both Facebook and Twitter users, students are among the largest group whereas the smallest group is pensioners, especially on Twitter. The largest group of users on Facebook are 36-55 years old. People living in cities use some of the largest social media platforms to a slightly larger extent than people living in rural areas. When it comes to Twitter, there is a bigger difference between cities and the countryside. The largest group of Twitter users are men, living in cities and are between 16-25 years old (largest raise during the pandemic). During the last few years (2017-

2019), activities have been generally decreasing on Facebook, except for sharing news and articles. Although this trend slightly changed with the pandemic.<sup>77</sup>

*The Party* and other far-right actors in Sweden use mainstream social media platforms such as **Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter**. The most important communication platform of instant messaging is Telegram. Furthermore, *the Party* has recently started to distribute their messages on the youth platform TikTok, along with entertaining movies for children and youngsters, which we consider to be using both explicit and covered methods for gaining supporters. The position of TikTok in the political landscape has been discussed and the form of this media platform seems particularly suitable for polarization.<sup>78</sup>

**Table 2.5** The number of followers of actors selected for the analysis in Sweden.<sup>79</sup>

Actor type	Actor	N° of FB followers	N° of Twitter followers	Function
<b>Political party</b>	[ <i>The Party</i> ]	>300 000	100 000	Far-right party with representation on national, regional, or municipal level
	[ <i>The Youth Party</i> ]	>10 000	>5 000	Youth organization of [ <i>The Party</i> ]
<b>Politicians of the Party</b>	[Member A]	<200 000	>100 000	Influential party member
	[Member B]		20 000	Influential party member
	[Member C]		10 000	Influential party member
<b>External actors <i>Individuals</i></b>	[External Actor 1]	-	10 000	Engaged in the media landscape around the Party
	[External Actor 2]	<5 000	<10 000	Former party member
	[External Actor 3]	-	>15 000	Former party member, now engaged in another far-right party
	[External Actor 4]	-	<10 000	Former party member, now engaged in another far-right party
<b><i>Media</i></b>	[Media Platform]	10 000	2 500	Far right media outlet

<sup>77</sup> See Internetstiftelsen, Svenskarna och Internet [The Internet Foundation, the Swedes and the Internet] 2019, part of a larger study: World Internet Project. <https://svenskarnaochinternet.se/app/uploads/2020/12/internetstiftelsen-svenskarna-och-internet-2020.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> See a detailed analysis on the role of TikTok in the New York Times article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/28/style/tiktok-teen-politics-gen-z.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Note. Numbers of Facebook-subscribers and Twitter-followers, 27.06.2021.

As mainstream social media platforms have been increasingly shifting their community policies, far right actors in Sweden are adapting to community regulations. However, there seems to be a number of ways to hedge these regulations. First, some actors have recently changed their account settings from public to private, where they are concealing violent messages by using irony, memes and other forms of jokes and entertainment. Secondly, there has been a large move from mainstream social media platforms (FB and Twitter) to Gab and VK among far-right users. The **US-based Gab.com** advertises itself as a ‘politically incorrect’ alternative to Twitter, as their interfaces are very similar. The **Russian based VK** (*Vkontakte*) is rather an alternative to Facebook, as its interface and the design of its logotype are very similar to those of FB. Thirdly, far right movements also use their own alternative media. Examples are YouTube channels, and web-based news-sites used as alternative news media platforms.

### 3. The Political Communication of Radical Populist Right Forces on Social Media

This chapter of the report presents the findings of the research by discussing the analyses of **the main actors in anti-gender political communication** that provoke hate speech. We studied the official social media pages of three types of actors in each country: the major right-wing populist parties with parliamentary representation on the national or municipality level at the time of the research, individual politicians, who were either members of these parties, or were independent Members of Parliaments, and so-called ‘external’ actors, who were although not officially representing the studied right-wing populist parties but were strongly linked to them. This latter category included opinion-forming public figures, civil society organizations, specific media outlets or public social media pages, and in some cases politicians of other radical populist parties without parliamentary representation. The presentation centers on findings supported by a larger number of posts and of selected posts together with the comments in all target countries. (See Chapter 1 for a description of the research methodology, sampling, and analytical framework). In this chapter we highlight the similarities and differences among the ways different (types of) actors communicate their political positions and participate in hate speech production on social media.

#### 3.1. GERMANY

##### 3.1.1. The Social Media Accounts of AfD and its Politicians

Almost all Facebook posts of **AfD** have over 100 shares and over 100 comments. In contrast, on Twitter only about every second tweet has been retweeted more than 100 times. More than half of all posts have IS9+ (an influence score of nine or above). Interestingly, almost half of all AfD posts is no longer viewable. The reach of **politicians’** posts is significantly lower than that of AfD’s federal account, which is partly because most of the investigated individual politicians’ accounts have fewer followers than the party’s account. Only 17% of their posts have an IS9+. About two-thirds of their Facebook posts have been shared more than 100 times and over half have received more than 100 comments. Only one in four tweets has been retweeted more than 100 times. Seven posts and tweets have been deleted. In contrast to other groups of actors, many politicians use hashtags for their communication.

The posts of AfD are closely related to the news, i.e., half of them refer to news on media outlets that report national or international events. To a lesser extent, but AfD politicians also include **references to media articles**. About half of their posts offered a link to current events in Germany or around the world. Apart from some party media, such as *AfD-Kompakt* website, a party-political news medium, or video clips from parliamentary speeches, it is primarily external journalistic media that are referred to. These media references serve as argumentative evidence even when the sometimes-lengthy comments go beyond the news content of the media and propagate the respective party agenda. The descriptive media analysis in the first part of the report shows that conservative to right-

wing conservative and even right-wing extremist media are increasingly used as reference. This means that right-wing and right-wing populist analyses and reports, some of which have a wide reach, can find their way into the discourse of society through AfD.

Regarding the **modes of communication** of AfD, nearly half of the posts express agitation or mobilization, and we found implicit defamatory speech in about one-fifth of them. AfD politicians express themselves mostly on themes that we classify as sexism (two thirds of all posts), mainly against women's quota and abortion. More than one-quarter of all politicians' posts and tweets contain subtopics of antigenderism. Only a few posts and tweets contain homophobic themes. One-fifth of all posts contain implicit forms of hate speech, and four posts have conspiratorial elements. Negative language predominates in most of the posts, that is to say, negative sentiments can be found in three-quarters of all AfD posts. Additionally, nearly fourteen percent of them allude to racist content, which can be traced back primarily to the prevalence of the topic of racialized victimization of German women in politicians' posts.

The qualitative analysis of the posts related to AfD and its politicians was conducted on the issues of antigenderism and sexism as the most prevalent themes. Most visibly, these actors agitate against or trivialize certain gender mainstreaming measures. In *sexism*, the quota for women in leadership positions is the most prevalent topic. In *antigenderism*, posts are related to gender-equitable language, gender studies, paradigmatic discourses on the 'third gender' and transsexual persons. Unlike in the case of non-parliamentary actors, there are no wide-coverage posts on *homophobia* in the posts of AfD and its politicians. Same-sex marriage, which was introduced in Germany in 2017, is also not referred to either in the AfD posts we analyzed, or in the comments on them. However, an AfD member of the Bundestag, Beatrix von Storch has published a thematic interview with a controversial evolutionary biologist, Kutschera in favor of the *Initiative Familienschutz* Initiative on her page (see analysis later).

The key feature of the analyzed posts, regardless of whether they are short comments or longer messages, is that they are mainly attacks against political opponents and intersectional discrimination. The latter can be seen especially in thematic posts that we classified as sexism. AfD and its politicians use **culturalist or racist frameworks when attacking their political opponents**. They claim that first and foremost Social Democrats, Leftists and Greens have established a "leftist" **politically correct discourse** that poses a danger to society. Christian Democrats are primarily attacked for neglecting their conservative agenda by implementing gender mainstreaming measures. Certain (female) politicians, such as Angela Merkel, are particularly often attacked and blamed for destroying Germany's prestige, so the country's position is allegedly "shrinking in the world". Angela Merkel is blamed in particular for restricting free speech and she is often mentioned as a reason for "creeping Islamization", claiming that she has deprived Germans of their national rights. In one post, the author claims that for Merkel "it would not be a problem if women were wearing burkas".

Franziska Giffey, the former Minister of Family Affairs (SPD) is also a frequent target in the posts of AfD and its politicians, mainly for promoting what they call 'early sexualization'. In the context of the implementation of gender-equitable language, posts agitate against the Minister of Justice, Christine Lambrecht (SPD). Further targets are feminists, so-called 'gender fundamentalists' or 'gender gagaists'. The term 'gender gaga' is also adopted by commentators. We have hardly found any counter-speech in the

studied material of antigenderism or sexist character, regardless of their topic, the choice of rhetorical and visual means, or the type of hate speech.

### 3.1.2. The communication of external actors: Influencers, *Initiative Familienschutz* [Initiative of Family Protection] and *Junge Freiheit* [Young Freedom]

In the context of our research, the **influencers** under investigation communicate exclusively via Twitter. None of the posts in this category of actors has an influence score of 9 or above (IS9+) and only one tweet has been retweeted more than 100 times. Influencers are much less connecting their message to news and public events, less than 15% of their posts contains news reference and hashtags can only be found in about every second tweet.

Interestingly, three quarter of these posts are related to sexism, in which female influencers seem to be key actors. Further, one fifth of the posts are related to antigenderism and only 2 tweets can be considered homophobic. Influencers' most common mode of communication is defamation, about 42% of posts contain defamatory elements. More than a third of the posts use implicit hate speech. Only a few tweets do not include any hate speech elements. Racist elements can be found in 10% of the posts, referring to alleged violence against women committed by migrants, like in the case of posts published by AfD and its politicians.

*Initiative Familienschutz* is using both Twitter and Facebook, but only the respective Facebook account was active during the survey period. In about two thirds of the posts there is a reference to current affairs reported in the media. Regarding social media reach, only 6 posts have been shared more than 100 times and 7 have been commented on more than 100 times.

Over half of the posts in our sample relate to sexism, and here the topic of abortion stands out in particular. About one-third of all posts involve antigenderism content, which is primarily directed against gender-sensitive language, gender studies, and transsexuality. The issue of homophobia is much more prevalent than on AfD channels and is mainly due to defamation of LGBTQI people, same-sex marriage, and overemphasis on the concept of 'traditional family'. Most of the posts of this actor we examined include implicit hate speech. It is striking that *Initiative Familienschutz* has an above-average number of posts with conspiratorial elements or rumor character. Further, 13% of posts include agitative or mobilizing elements and defamatory elements are present in 16%. Negative language predominates and racist elements can be identified in 7 posts.

*Junge Freiheit* almost exclusively distributes new articles every week on the two studied platforms. In addition, they refer to video interviews uploaded to their YouTube channel or to initiatives such as their petition against gender-equitable language. They distribute most of their content on both Facebook and Twitter. As a news medium, they also have a high share of news with a focus on domestic politics. Their influence score is low as compared to how high the level of their media reach is. This is also reflected in web metrics: only 16% of their posts have been shared more than 100 times and 31 have been commented on more than 100 times. On Twitter, only 12 posts have been retweeted more than 100 times. There is only a slight difference in the wording of their posts and tweets, but it can be observed that the language used on Facebook is sometimes more negative than the respective tweets about the articles in newspapers that they refer to.



As with other actor groups, the issue of sexism dominates, followed by posts on antigenderism. In 85 posts homophobic content can be found, which mainly refers to LGBTQI actions or same-sex marriage. Over 80% of all their posts make use of implicit hate speech. The most frequent type of explicit hate speech is defamation, followed by agitation, which mainly occurs in connection to their actions and petitions against gender mainstreaming. Negative sentiment can be identified especially in the case of the promotion of opinion articles in newspapers.

Both *Initiative Familienschutz* and the weekly *Junge Freiheit* serve all three issues, however, as opposed to *AfD* and its politicians, it appears that these two external actors apply *homophobic* subjects in their posts much more often. Unlike in the case of *AfD*, the comments on these posts are characterized by a greater diversity of opinion, which is also evident in the frequency of counter speech. The topics of same-sex marriage or same-sex parenthood are defended by several users here, contrary to the agitating content posted. The same applies to dissemination of discrediting statements that associate homosexual persons with pedophilia. Regardless of the medium, it is clear that homosexuality is socially more accepted than, for example, transgender persons or non-binary gender.

There is also widespread approval in the comments under external actors' posts when it comes to the topic of the alleged 'early sexualization' of children. Likewise, the density of conspiratorial comments under external actors' posts is higher than under *AfD* posts. In addition to that, defamation of social groups, like feminists, religious minorities, above all Muslims are also prevalent among comments under external actors' posts. Many users attack gender studies and social sciences are often put in contrast to natural sciences. Last but not least, political opponents, especially Social Democrats, Greens and Leftists are also targeted by users.

## 3.2. HUNGARY

### 3.2.1. The Social Media Accounts of the Governing Parties

The Facebook communication of *Fidesz* is highly professional. Their posts score very high in terms of engagement (IS9-10) which, however, is made up mostly of likes, to a lesser extent of shares and comments. The party's communication is based on short texts, usually quotes that are further echoed by large, colorful infographics with the exact same texts as the ones in the posts. These are accompanied by images of high-level politicians – most often the prime minister – in confident, authoritative postures. In the meantime, the communication of *Fidesz*'s minor satellite party, **KDNP** is less professional and more varied than *Fidesz*'s. Most frequently the party simply shares a post written by one of its prominent politicians, or a video which represents them speaking in Parliament or on a TV program. Importantly, this party shares articles of government-loyal portals (including *Vasárnap.hu*). KDNP has a lot of posts, however, their posts score much lower than *Fidesz*'s usually ranging around IS7-8 with a few examples that reach higher (IS9-10).

In terms of gender related communication, *Fidesz* mostly restricts itself to promoting positive values, such as the beauty of (traditional, white, heterosexual, large, able-bodied, full) family, and the various family-policies of the party. Images of happy, smiling

couples and pregnant women are frequent. Rhetorically, the posts build on words like ‘protection’ and ‘support’. The latter is frequently put in contrast with “encouraging migration”, while the former (among others) is evoked by “growing foreign interests”, and “unnatural tendencies”. Yet, ‘gender-ideology’ as a threat is not formulated explicitly in the party’s posts. Further potentially gender-related posts manifest very harsh reactions to female politicians’ criticism on the governmental actions, policies, or rhetoric. Politicians are accused of spreading lies or fake news, thus betraying the country, or attacking “Hungarian people” when they raise criticism on the government. They are depicted as incompetent, corrupt, and devilish.

**KDNP** posts more on women and gender than other actors and in a harsher tone yet avoiding explicit hate speech. The ‘traditional family’ is often celebrated *in contrast* to family models and lifestyles depicted as ‘unhealthy’. While *Fidesz* propagates the motherly role but expresses support for working mothers, KDNP only praises women’s motherly role. Furthermore, KDNP is a champion in spreading messages on the alleged danger of ‘gender-ideology’ and is also vocal in spreading potentially homophobic content that partially overlaps with their anti-gender communication vaguely targeting the so-called ‘gay-lobby’ and LGBTQI-activists. Yet, the target of these posts remains unspecified. This actor uses a wider topical repertoire than *Fidesz*, including a post on decriminalization of Irish abortion law which resembles the tone of Christian fundamentalist language, and one in which the equal treatment case of a trans-sexual person is interpreted as a direct attack on Christian faith.

The qualitative analysis further underpins the relatively strong weight of KDNP in the production of content with potential hate speech. Our example of the defamation of a Tímea Szabó, opposition MP, shows that the two parties portray the same situation - a video on how government MPs are suppressing the speech of a female opposition MP by clapping loudly - with slight differences and triggering different reactions. Both posts contain distorted information on what the MP said and refer to her lack of patriotism, as the basis of considering the act of silencing her legitimate. But KDNP uses offensive language (“the unwashed mouthed”) and direct allegations (“denies help from Hungarians”). Consequently, while the comments on both posts reflect very high emotional reactions and a nearly complete appraisal of the intention to silence the politician, the comments on the KDNP-post show much more aggression and an intention to exclude the disobeying politician from the nation. The most violent comments combine the intention of excluding her with using sexist language and claiming that *she* used hate speech. Alarmingly, comments on the KDNP post wish Szabó to get kicked, beaten, and raped by migrants.

We included two posts of *Fidesz*’s, which consist of an image and a short quote from PM Viktor Orbán on issues related to homophobia directly and another one in which he refers more abstractly to as he says, “the gender problem”. The posts present the words of an authoritarian ruler (merging the voice of a police chief, a prosecutor, and a caring father) who wants to protect the vulnerable. They are like master banners leading a political march or gathering. Orbán speaks through an assumed moral high ground without referring to any particular source, claiming to be communicating the ultimate truth. The posts target the “aggressive LGBTQI advocacy” that allegedly want to influence

Hungarian children in the first case and want to create chaos in society in the second case. But grammatically a general subject is used to avoid blaming or directly targeting anyone.

In terms of reactions, the first post, which is directly connected to homosexuality, has attracted thousands of comments, while the more indirect one has led only to marginal attention. At the beginning, dissenting voices seem to have been commenting on the first conversation due to their quick reaction to the post and the strong messages offered. Then the exchange of opinions became more fluctuating in which the pendulum quickly swung back and forth between dissenting and the supporting accounts. In the case of the second post, no dissenting voice was to be found. The two conversations are relatively decent and articulated. There is no need to overcome or strengthen the message of the posts, or perhaps the authority of the PM disciplines his followers. Some HSN comments have been found, but the endorsement and normalization of the anti-equality agenda seems to be more alarming.

### 3.2.2. The Social Media Communication of Government Politicians

*Fidesz*-KDNP politicians are using a more varied communication than their parties. Their social media activity is very professional, and they produce contents of a very high impact (IS9-10) along with many comments. Orbán and Varga post both in English and Hungarian. Novák has a rather moderate number of followers on Facebook, however, she is the only one among the studied actors, who has a relative standing on Twitter. Topic-wise, the beauty of traditional family is recurring, and so is the heroic fight against liberal/Western powers. The ‘dangers’ are always formulated vaguely, indirectly and lacking an actual target. Politicians stay away from both direct and indirect forms of hate speech (oftentimes even endorsing ‘respect’ for women and LGBTQI-rights). The style of communication is defensive – any critical voice on *Fidesz*’s politics is interpreted as an imminent danger to Hungarian people.

**PM Viktor Orbán** has been increasingly active in using the FB platform for sharing public information, e.g., lately he has streamed the announcement of governmental lockdown measures.<sup>80</sup> He generally uses very short texts and images or videos as he gives his weekly statements on a public radio channel. We only found a few posts relevant to our study but even these are not directly about women or gender but links to his writings full of visionary statements. Instead of direct attacks, he uses indirect, broad, and symbolic language usually embedded in the narrative of the necessity to protect the homeland and family. By contrast, **KDNP-leader Zsolt Semjén** is almost invisible compared to Orbán and other top *Fidesz* politicians. Semjén’s posts usually refer to church- and nationality affairs with pictures of religious events. We only selected two of his posts in which he backs the recent amendment of the constitution and the modification of the adoption law.

The two female ministers of *Fidesz* we involved in the research fulfill somewhat different roles. **Katalin Novák** (Minister for Families) often posts images about her motherly role,

---

<sup>80</sup> See for instance the video <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2700893873509302> (In Hungarian).

which attract a lot of likes. She is most active in announcing the latest advancement of family policies. Her relevant posts usually discuss women's roles in society, in which she is advocating for women's motherly role and for traditional family values, but occasionally endorses the achievement and professional standing of women and supports the elimination of domestic violence. Her communication is positive and stays away from any direct or indirect hate speech, thus we selected only a few of her posts. In the meantime, **Judit Varga** (Minister of Justice), is the champion of antigenderism posted in medium-long texts accompanied with images of herself in confident postures. These texts are always about her heroic fight to protect Hungarian people and women in particular, from the Western-liberal attack on 'conservative values'. Her posts reach IS9-10 and some of them have generated over two thousand comments.

Four of the qualitatively analyzed posts are related to the two female Ministers, one posted by Novák and the other three by Varga. Novák's video on the role of women in society is seen as potentially carrying sexist speech, while Varga's posts represent antigenderism with a potential to provoke sexist, homophobic, but above all transphobic and generally anti-equality reactions. All four posts have triggered wide attention and several thousands of comments. Varga is characterized by a distinct style of rhetoric, namely, the extensive use of irony or even sarcasm (e.g., on women's day, she greeted "all women who still dare to be women" at times when "one can choose among hundreds of genders"). She uses the term 'gender' to refer to 'gender identity' and loudly claims that "there are no genders, only biological sexes".

Contrary to our initial expectations, the analysis of *Fidesz* politicians' posts has revealed strong and multi-layered criticism from commentators. In two of the studied cases, dissenting voices are in the absolute majority, while Varga's post on her policy proposals against domestic violence has generated a balanced conversation. While supporting comments rarely make use of complex argumentation (for the most part, they simply express their gratitude to the ministers), dissenting commentators mobilize a large variety of counter arguments on a range of problems women (and in some cases LGBTQI persons) encounter. The dynamic seems to be that criticism gradually moves towards more general comments that no longer speak in the name of particular social groups, but highlight the overwhelmingly hateful tone of the post and the exclusionary politics of the government. Comment-makers do not use sexist language, but sometimes criticize the ministers on private grounds pointing out that both fail to represent the kind of female roles they are advocating.

### 2.2.3. The New Far-right Player: *Mi Hazánk* [Our Homeland] and Their Politicians

The main characteristic of *Mi Hazánk's* and their two prominent politicians' social media communication is that although they use many different channels and platforms, they usually post the exact same content everywhere.<sup>81</sup> As the party's and Előd Novák's FB accounts have been suspended and several of Dóra Dúró's posts removed, not many of

---

<sup>81</sup> For this reason, we only included Dúró's and Novák's posts in the qualitative analysis.

their posts were involved in the analysis. But a look at their general posting style reveals that they use a variety of tools: infographics, shared posts, videos on their public appearances and links to news portals and magazines. Linked portals include pro-government, oppositional and their own party's media (*Magyar Jelen* [Hungarian Present]). The impact of their posts varies between very low (IS4-5) and very high (IS9-10). The most well-known politician of the party is spokesperson Dúró, whose posts occasionally generate more than a thousand comments.

A distinct feature of the party's communication is that as opposed to *Fidesz's* short messages, there are many long texts that discuss the worldview of the party, fusing a variety of topics. Most often, however, they try to position themselves as distinct both from the government and its opposition. In terms of gender-related posts, this means a full support to *Fidesz's* conservative views on the role of traditional family and the sovereign nation-state and the promotion of an even more conservative agenda, namely tightening abortion-law, banning Pride and eradicating sexual education. Regarding women's role in society, *Mi Hazánk* is 'permissive' when it comes to women's career under the condition that they fulfill their motherly duties. The couple (Novák and Dúró) frequently use their children's photos to advance their political messages<sup>82</sup>, however, Dúró's appearance (extra-short skirt, tight dresses, bikini, harsh make-up) stands in sharp contrast with the ultra-conservative views she is advocating.

*Mi Hazánk* and especially Novák is a champion in generating homophobic content, mostly in the form of indirectly targeting 'LGBT-lobby/propaganda/brainwashing' and attacking actors that promote tolerance. One of Novák's posts is a self-congratulating report on the performative act of stealing the rainbow flag from the city hall of Budapest, in another one he misinterprets social deviance of young homosexuals as biological determinism, and several of the party's posts attack private sector companies for allegedly "promoting homosexuality" in their product marketing. In the meantime, they also criticize *Fidesz* for not preventing LGBTQI communities from using public funds and for not banning a (recently published) book that they call "gender storybook" definitively. Finally, a recurring component of *Mi Hazánk's* communication, is the letter P added to LGBTQI indicating a direct link between homosexuality and pedophilia.

In the case of Dúró's qualitatively analyzed post, dissenting voices were the first to comment on it. However, the paradoxical feature of the conversation is that hate speech spiral was actively promoted by both dissenting and supporting voices. The original post is reminiscent of Nazi practices: a video of her burning the "gender storybook". But hate speech, sexist and denigrating communication have been intensive on both sides. The commentators themselves have been attacking and mocking each other all along. In the case of Novák's posts, we were unable to analyze comments, as both were removed, and his page was suspended during the time of our research.

---

<sup>82</sup> One of Ms. Dúró's most popular posts in 2021, displays a photo with her children. Source: <https://telex.hu/belfold/2021/04/01/politikus-gyerek-facebook-foto-lajk-kep-kampany>

### 3.2.4. The prolonged arms of the government: External actors' FB communication

The category of external actors includes a number of different platforms that are directly or indirectly linked to the government. The common feature of these sites is that they harshly advocate the government's ideology and policies, while campaigning against and smearing oppositional voices – mostly, but not exclusively oppositional parties and politicians, public intellectuals and anyone expressing different views from those of the government. They are all using a harsher tone and more offensive language than the official sites of government parties and their politicians. They make use of a lot of different styles of posting that range from pure images or videos to long essays and links.

Considering all the qualitatively analyzed posts, we can see that themes in external actors' posts do not diverge so clearly from each other. Especially gender is often mentioned ad hoc, as a swearword or as a 'symbolic glue' (Grzebalska & Petó, 2018) and in a much broader sense in external actors' communication than in that of the government. Their aim is to demean and ridicule women's or LGBTQI empowerment, to attack practically any human-rights and social justice advocates, and to condemn the 'West' or the 'Left' for attacking national sovereignty. These attacks are no longer aimed at a single social group, but rather at the concept and practice of equality. The main rhetorical tool used in these cases is irony, trying to ridicule social movements. References to anti-gender scholarship enact scientific legitimation to their political struggles.

The most impactful actor seems to be *Alapjogokért Központ* [Center for Fundamental Rights], a government-organized conservative think-tank with several *Fidesz*-loyal public figures in its leadership. They often use short texts and simplified infographics or seemingly funny 'memes' but also posts longer explanatory texts, with which they reach IS8-9 or even IS10. *Alapjogokért* has been active in all themes, however, they are the strongest in tarnishing feminism and feminists which they also connected to anti-gender speech. Relevant posts of this type include a story of a 'Swedish feminist', who allegedly called Volvo a "male-chauvinist brand"; attacking a female writer, who expressed critical views on a nationalist classic for their portrayal of women; and a flyer-style post, in which the five highly anti-feminist points were simply entitled "stop gender / feminism". The posts are downplaying and ridiculing the claims and tools of the feminist movement, exaggerating certain claims and generalizing those. By spreading highly distorted messages, these posts are suitable to generate a hateful environment and lead to prejudiced views about what feminism really is about, but they do not incite violence.

Two of *Alapjogokért*'s posts indicate typically defamatory content: their attack on a female writer (mentioned above) and the attack on psychologists, who signed a petition to speak up against the unprofessional stance on homosexuality, promoted by an elderly conservative psychologist. While the former post has a definite target (writer Krisztina Tóth), the latter one has an indirect target: anyone, especially intellectuals, who revolt against the exclusionary rhetoric of the government. 'Gender' is used in both posts as an aggravation, the posts are in fact not about gender, but about stigmatizing particular people, who express dissenting opinions. These posts advocate the societal majority as if they and not a minority needed protection. Dissenting voices and personal opinions are misinterpreted as an attack on normality.

*Vasarnap.hu* [Sunday] moves along the same lines of presupposing a worldwide conspiracy against conservative values as *Alapjogokért*, however, it not only uses the vocabulary of human rights in a twisted way but copies religious fundamentalists as well. Compared to *Alapjogokért*, *Vasarnap.hu* reaches a much lower impact, but its posts are often shared by KDNP and governmental politicians and is regularly reviewed by pro-government portals. It has published a number of very offensive articles e.g.: ridiculing violence against women, comparing homosexuality to leprosy; defaming a football player who expressed his solidarity with same-sex parenthood, attacking a female oppositional MP, who criticized one of PM Orbán's speeches for its sexist language and presenting a presumed 'expert of child protection' against advocacy for rainbow families' rights. 'Gender ideology' and 'homosexual propaganda' are most often used interchangeably, thus *Vasarnap.hu* can be regarded as a champion of homophobic content too.

The posts of **Zsolt Bayer** we have been exclusively categorized as sexist and defamatory, however, they all contain slight reference to subtle homophobia and anti-gender speech as well. Bayer's posts are long, intellectually worded, and well-structured essays with many external references and quotes. They are complex verbal attacks that operate on several levels by means of belittling, ridiculing, irony, and mocking. One of his posts is explicitly sexist, describing female oppositional MP's as: 'liars', 'mean', 'trash', 'dirty mouthed'. In other posts the elements of hate speech unfold not so much in relation to their primary targets but on secondary layers. Examples for this are the defamatory posts against an actor and a media personnel respectively – who expressed their views about violence against women and backed the 'me too' movement respectively. Besides personal insults, the two posts are also ridiculing those who revolt against gender-based violence, like academics, the independent media, the criminal justice system, 'Liberals' and the 'West', as if dealing with violence against women was completely irrelevant in the Hungarian context. Finally, the ends of the posts allude to anti-migrant and anti-gender speech as well by claiming that VAW is as much a "fake problem" as that of "73 genders".

Finally, **fan-pages or "propaganda" pages** primarily operate with 'memes' and infographics, while their posts often have no introductory text at all. Their textual contents have rather low engagement levels, compared to other actors. This is the reason why posts on these sites are underrepresented in our sample, even though we suspect that they frequently operate with hate speech content. Content on these pages almost always reflects actual political happenings and lacks visionary statements, nor does it express any worldviews. Instead, posts are constantly bashing on opposition and EU politicians, including women, illustrated with ridiculing pictures. Some posts share links to pro-governmental tabloid papers or pro-governmental YouTube channels, such as the one called "the life of the chicken matters" which is an ironic presentation the BLM and of social movements. The term gender is dropped often as a slur-word in an incomprehensive and inconsistent way.

**The analysis of comments on external actors' posts** reveals a very diverse picture. Firstly, some posts attract overall support from users, while in other cases opposing views dominate the conversation. Secondly, differences among conversations are to be captured in how (or what) commentators perceive as the main message of the post. Commenting on one of Bayer's sexist, defamatory posts, its virtual public got stuck with whether they

agreed or disagreed with the claims on the attacked public figure, whereas in another case, commentators overwhelmingly criticized both the language used in the post and its intention to downplay violence against women. Thirdly, comments under the posts that attack women in public roles carry a strong nationalistic and self-victimizing undertone. Not only do these comments relativize victims and perpetrators, but also use the same arguments to call for the exclusion of attacked women from politics and public life. Some commentators call them straightforwardly stupid, uneducated, or mean. Critical opinions are enlarged, and users are claiming that ‘normality’ is threatened. Finally, while in some conversations, people simply are offending each other because of their opinions, in other cases, although voices are polarized, they are not radicalized, and the conversation evolves smoothly despite some highly provocative posts.

### 3.3. ITALY

#### 3.3.1. The social media communication of selected politicians

**Matteo Salvini**, the leader of *Lega* [League] is the actor who writes the most in Italy, especially on Twitter, and he is also the actor who triggers the most reactions. Regarding his public profiles, potentially sexist, hate speech-related posts are prevalent in his communication. In fact, 90% of his posts can be included in the wide category of sexist themes even if they are not sexist posts per se, can trigger such sentiments among followers. Only the rest of Salvini’s posts (10%) are linked equally to homophobic speech or antigenderism.

A great number of Salvini’s posts are directed against Carola Rackett, captain of the vessel Sea-Watch3, owned by a German NGO, which saves migrants in distress on the Mediterranean Sea. In these posts Rackett is notoriously called “Miss Carola”, “a little spoilt”, “communist”, or “the Idol of Italian TV”. In the ironic and negative context of the posts, the word ‘Signorina’ - a traditional courtesy title for an unmarried woman - has also a negative connotation, so it manifests benevolent sexism. Moreover, using her first name, ‘Carola’ instead of her surname, ‘Rackett,’ shows a lack of respect. One of Salvini’s tweets (“From Berlinguer to Carola, how the Italian Left collapsed ... What is the right place for a rich German woman? Jail.”) aims to demonstrate the failure of Italian left parties. At the same time, its latent function is to diminish the captain of the vessel Sea-Watch 3 because she is a woman who should go to jail rather than be celebrated. However, the qualitative analysis of the conversation reveals that only a few comments have sexist content and are not followed by further sexist observations of other users. All in all, comments on this post point out that the ideological clash between Salvini and Rackett is especially difficult for Salvini to manage because Carola Rackett is a woman.

Salvini’s objective is often to ridicule his opponents. Another post we analyzed is a video of a girl tearing off a *Lega* poster, which accuses feminists and left-wing people of using a double standard when it comes to expressing opinion (by tearing off a flag). The post uses irony, negative connotation of words, and makes a contrast between in-group and out-group. It subtly suggests that *Lega* followers are the real victims because they are accused of being undemocratic, whereas the flag tearing incident shows the contrary that in fact, left-wing activists may often act in an undemocratic way. Quotation marks are



used in the post to further emphasize the dual nature of feminists and democrats. The post triggers only a few comments from users, which, however, target a variety of groups, including communists, leftists, Jews, and feminists. In some cases, users, reading the post or watching the video, react using expressions of incitement to hatred in the strict sense, referring to physical violence and suggesting a response that is appropriate in their opinion. Moreover, some comments contain explicit sexism, such as a picture with myogenic reference.

**Giorgia Meloni**, the leader of *Fratelli d'Italia* [Brothers of Italy] is the second most frequently posting actor in our analysis. Her posts, unlike Salvini's, deal with the three themes in a more balanced way, although the frequency of her homophobia related posts is significantly higher (42.1%) than the frequency of her posting on antigenderism and is almost the double of her sexist posts (26.3%).

Similarly to Salvini, Meloni frequently launches attacks on left-wing political parties and feminist movements. Illegal immigration and NGO's that rescue people at sea are her favorite topics. In one of her posts, Meloni provides a link to a local page of a national newspaper about trafficking Nigerian women, which merges sexism with anti-migration speech. The post targets several groups, like feminists, left-wing politicians, and pro-migrant activists. The text makes some controversial references to feminism (e.g., "They are the ones who want us to accept immigrants"), ironic and derogatory expressions, and a rhetorical question. The aim of the post is to delegitimize feminist battles and to make people understand/believe that they are traitors. This post triggers varied conversations among followers, however, among the first 100 comments, we cannot find messages inciting hatred. Despite the rhetorical question and the numerous reactions (2,138), most users are against migrants rather than feminists.

Another remarkable post of Meloni's is a video of American journalist Alan Friedman calling Melania Trump an "escort girl" with the following question in its subtitles: "Are feminists going to keep silent?" The targets are the journalist himself and feminist movements, along with left-wing voters. The rhetorical tools used in this post are the following: controversial and political reference to feminism, aposiopesis, and delegitimization of feminist battles to provoke disgust and disapproval. 'Escort girl' is a derogatory term used by Alan Friedman as a synonym of 'wife', when referring to Melania Trump, so the post refers to the alleged double-standard that the feminist movement upholds. Therefore, it is only seemingly against the journalist himself; it is also directed against feminists and feminist movements. This post attracted 7,436 comments. These reactions often contain verbal violence with insults of any nature against the American journalist, but feminists are repeatedly insulted too. Hence, the objective of attacking feminists and feminism has been achieved.

In sum, Salvini and Meloni often revolve around the same topics, such as illegal immigration and criticizing left-wing parties and feminist movements. Their sexist and homophobic positions are less visible than the ones against other actors: their communicative strategy is tailored to launch a controversial topic and then let the discussion unfold among users, generating all kinds of reactions.

### **3.3.2. The Social Media Communication of External Actors: Influencers and the Pro Vita Vita & Famiglia [Pro Life & Family Association]**

We have involved two types of external actors in the analysis of actors: an organization, *Pro Vita e Famiglia onlus* and some opinion-forming public figures, such as Filippo Facci, Vittorio Feltri, Alessandro Meluzzi, and Nicola Porro. We applied a single category to the latter (external individuals) and counted their posts in an aggregate way, but we focused on Alessandro Meluzzi's posts separately in the qualitative analysis.

Together with Meloni, the *Pro Vita & Famiglia* posts the second most frequently among the Italian actors involved in the research. The organization's posts mainly focus on topics related to defending traditional family values. For this reason, it is not surprising that 60% of their posts deal with antigenderism and one third are related to homophobia. Only few of their posts are related to sexist discourses, these mainly focus on anti-abortion positions that inevitably involve the role of women in society and, as the case may be, can be considered also close to sexist positions.

The *Pro Vita & Famiglia* targets single-issue objectives to influence public opinion and make people oppose all societal changes that represent, in their opinion, a threat to the concept of traditional family. They also oppose the modifications to the Italian Criminal Code addressing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. In some posts the verb "indoctrinate" is used to imply that the rules that would be imposed by the new law would indoctrinate children about gender ideology even though the proposal itself does not use this verb. The word "indoctrination" might arouse disgust/indignation in followers on their Facebook page. In fact, the ultimate goal of these posts is to encourage the disapproval of LGBTQI community and to make readers worry about the 'normal'/'traditional'/'natural' psycho-sexual development of their children. The comment analysis showed that users uncritically accept the message of the post without exploring the real content of the proposed legal measure.

Another example is a post, in which the organization linked their official website where a press release with an image of handcuffed wrists had been published. This image represents *Pro Vita & Famiglia*'s view of the proposed law, which they defined as a very dangerous measure, restricting their freedom. The threat to democracy and freedom of thought is symbolized by handcuffs. The organization's president defined this draft as a juridical, ethical, and psychological monstrosity. Capital letters are used in the post with the aim of emphasizing the message and attracting attention, double quotation marks indicate the ambiguity of the word, provoke negative opinions, while referring to indoctrination evokes fear and anxiety in readers. The aim of the post is clearly to arouse alarm and concern.

The analysis of the conversation shows that some readers accept the message without seeking further information on its subject. Users' opinion is that the real objective of this draft is "to misinform, spread gender theory and, above all, legalize the shame of surrogate mothers, child trafficking, and pedophilia." Furthermore, there are also homophobic insults. Commentators that give voice to defend the natural family and 'Christian' values are particularly hostile toward gays. Many comments invoke divine justice and think that the only solution to stop "this horrible cruelty" would be to take refuge in prayers, as follows: "religion is 2000 years old and is optional, while depravation is compulsory in our schools. For non-religious people this is normal, for religious people this is the creation of the devil. The only weapon that will defeat the devil is prayer." Finally, some comments explicitly refer to an alleged 'gay lobby'. Using capital letters and disregarding netiquette demonstrate their will to scream and to impose their views on their public through their messages.

**External individuals** are mainly dedicated to antigenderism, but about a quarter are homophobic 10% are sexist. Among the influencers, Alessandro **Meluzzi** stands out because his communicative style is very direct. His arguments demand that borders should safeguard traditional family and he also attacks feminist movements and posts sexist commentaries. He does not refrain from direct accusations and hate speech without undue nuances. The most likely reason for Meluzzi's style being more direct and less suggestive is that he does not have any political responsibilities as he is not a political party leader. So, he is not accountable to anyone.

In fact, one of the tweets we analyzed shows in an exemplary way that the author is able to release user violence. In a post that has since been removed, Meluzzi links an article of *Liberio* (right-wing, liberal) newspaper quoting Matteo Salvini's words that an Italian woman was allegedly raped by a man with (illegal) migration background. The post combines sexism, racism, and migration issues. The target groups are respectively feminists, anti-racists, and (illegal) migrants. Feminists are not only delegitimized and accused of having a double-standard but are also accused of favoring immigration. Meluzzi uses more violent language here because the post evokes the need to punish feminists and anti-racists, not the man (referred to as an 'illegal migrant' and not 'a man') who raped a woman ("una italiana" also not called a 'woman'). There are very few comments to this tweet, but they trigger violent and intolerant messages, which deserve consideration. In this case too, targets are mainly (illegal) migrants, but followers do not miss any opportunity to include feminists and anti-racists in their invectives, like e.g., "feminists and anti-racists keep silent now. They make us laugh and that's all". Undoubtedly, the most violent comment is: "I completely agree with severe punishment and chemical castration for left-wing feminists and some anti-racists. I had better not say what I really think, but it is certain that I feel more disgust than sorrow."

**In summary**, the analyzed actors use different ways to communicate about the same topics but with the common intent of making the public choose a side and of arousing anger, disapproval and frustration against some people considered as hostile, for example feminists, the LGBTQI community, migrants or left-wing opponents. On the one hand, political leaders use evocative language in their posts, without (or hardly ever) directly expressing their opinions. The aim of this way of writing is to encourage clear reactions from their voters. Meloni and Salvini try to be impartial, but they use adequate rhetorical tools to show their contempt by all means (see the posts on Carola Rackete written by Salvini and the ones on a "gay lobby" written by Giorgia Meloni). On the other hand, other actors, such as Alessandro Meluzzi and *Pro Vita & Famiglia*, metaphorically speaking, get green light and can deliberately post more direct and rude opinions.

### 3.4. SPAIN

#### 3.4.1. The Social Media Communication of Vox

The most interactions and highest influence scores are to be found on **Vox's official account**, which is still on the rise at the time of writing this report on Facebook and Twitter, gaining more and more followers. Theirs is the 5th most popular account on Twitter and second on Facebook. In terms of engagement levels, *Vox* has a higher

percentage than all other political parties. The essential function of these accounts seems to be to act as loudspeakers through retweets and post shared by their principal politicians across Spain. As these accounts have the highest impact score in the research, one post or tweet reproduced on these accounts has significant power to influence users — more than a politician or any other actor outside the party. Based on that, posts on these social media create emotions and debates, increasing interaction among users, amplifying their messages that produce debates in society and generating a more profound impact with their statements.

This is the case with *Vox Madrid* as it retweets and shares opinions and discourses, mostly on antigenderism, and also frequently retweets Clara Toscano de Balbín and Rocio Monasterio. Every post and tweet is followed by a video or an interview. *Vox Barcelona*'s posts are similarly followed by a video or a link, but this account deals more with the alleged dangers of 'gender ideology'. For the sake of the qualitative analysis, we have selected three posts from official *Vox* accounts, one from *Vox Madrid*, one from *Vox Spain* on Facebook, and one from *Vox Spain* on Twitter. Two posts are reproductions of interviews with members of the political party, and the third one is a video made by the party about one of its members.

Another characteristic is that official party accounts are responsible for the most hateful messages. Among the posts analyzed, the most salient might be the one which attacks the feminist movement and calls Irene Montero, Minister of Equality, a "Feminazi" – a word that mixes feminism and Nazism. Yet, most of the content produced on *Vox*'s social media can hardly be considered hate speech in the narrow sense, as the texts usually operate with irony or humor and do not call for direct violence. This content falls out of the scope of the Spanish Criminal Code.

### 3.4.2. The Social Media Communication of *Vox* Politicians

The largest number of posts analyzed in the present research come from individual politicians. Just like *Vox* party, their politicians are extremely careful with their words and comments. None of them, except Hermann Terstch, have produced hate speech in the narrow sense, but we qualified some posts as hate speech in the broad sense. Some of them make jokes about gender-related public policies, for instance say that Parental Control Device [PIN] is an instrument to "prevent heteropatriarchy"; call the Ministry of Equality a "party of pyjamas" that promotes the alcohol consumption of women; or mock the Minister of Equality personally. Furthermore, several posts are directed against the LGBTQI movement, or the so-called 'transgender lobby'. However, we did not observe substantial differences in the type or intensity of the language they use, as most of them are to be classified as agitative or defamatory.

The content found on the page of **Hermann Terstch** stands out, since he is the politician with the most aggressive and harsh speech in the entire party, so we categorized several of his posts as hate speech in the narrow sense. Although he does not have the biggest number of followers among his party colleagues, he is at the top of the list of *Vox* politicians with 113k tweets. Terstch is against any equality law that allegedly goes against the values of conservative family structures. For instance, in one of his posts, he

compares the government's current public policies to the operations of ETA (a Basque terrorist group). In another post, he criticizes the criminal charges of female victims of gender violence and indirectly accuses women in general of taking advantage of and abusing current legislation on gender violence. In a sarcastic post, he criticizes sex education, suggesting that it might lead to rapes among siblings due to confusions of gender identity and sexual orientation, indirectly putting LGBTQI community on equal footing with pedophiles and pederastic.

Notably, Terstch is also producing defamatory texts, like the ones that call LGBTQI movement a “kiosk of ghosts”, stealing public money to do nothing, or refer to feminists as “the poison” of society. The most notable of this type of his texts is one that mocks Irene Montero's married status. He does not call her by her surname, only uses ‘Irene’ and a photo of her, declaring: "A Minister by the grace of the pillow", which is a reference to the relationship between her and Pablo Iglesias, former Vice President of the Government. Comments under this post ridicule the relationship and affirm that Montero has probably become Minister because of her relationship with Iglesias.

Another notable person is **Santiago Abascal**, Member of Parliament, and President of *Vox*. Concerning interactions (likes and retweets), in November 2019 Santiago Abascal lead this ranking with 1.021K of likes and 436K of retweets<sup>83</sup> of his entries e.g., against *Unidas Podemos*, a party which has more followers on Twitter. One of Abascal's speeches criticizes the current left-wing government (a coalition of *Socialist Party* and *Unidas Podemos*) pointing out that Spain's economic problems are allegedly generated by the migration crisis. His posts and tweets focus on illegal migration and the idea of “Spain for the Spaniards.” To a lesser extent, he has posts that may spread anti-gender speech.

The refined analysis revealed that Abascal often jokes about the alleged stupidity of the public policies conducted by the Ministry of Equality. He uses harsh words, but his attacks are not directed against a person but against an idea, like the feminist movement. Thus, he does not directly provoke hate speech, even when his message humiliates an idea shared by a large part of society. In one of his posts, Abascal provides a link to the campaign of the Minister of Equality, in which she promotes women's security to walk alone at night. The author refers to this campaign with words, like ‘comical’ and ‘aberrant’ and reframes the campaign from being a security issue to one that allegedly promotes women's drinking and nihilism. We found that this and other similar posts represent different manifestations of counterculture. They maintain a constant non-conformism against claims (e.g., of feminism) that has been dominant in public debate. Santiago Abascal is an example of a politician speaking loudly to outsiders and his comments show that he connects with people who have doubts or are reluctant to believe in current public policies. He uses simplistic or colloquial language to make his discourse more captivating to these people.

**Ivan Espinosa de los Monteros**, Spokesman for *Vox* in Parliament is the third member of the party who has the most followers. He was actively involved in social networks, which include conservative platforms like *Parler* and *Gab*. Although he is more active on Twitter, he has an unofficial account on Facebook that also has 28k followers. His entries are equally divided among the three themes. Like the above politicians he attacks

---

<sup>83</sup> Source: <https://www.cambio16.com/santiago-abascal-es-el-candidato-con-mas-interacciones-en-redes-sociales/> (in Spanish)

LGBTQI groups, left-wing parties and feminism. One of his tweets represents an example of the new struggle to discredit feminism in society, dwelling on the current debate between the feminist movement and Transgender persons. He says that the aim of the latter is to **make women male, turn mothers into fathers and thus erase biological gender boundaries**. The tweet contains a link to another tweet where some members of feminist and LGBTQI groups discuss Spain's draft law on transgender rights.

**Rocio Monasterio** is active both on Facebook and Twitter. An outstanding strategy of hers is to polarize the debate on good and bad. Feminists belong to the latter group and Monasterio claims they are not 'normal' women. Good women represent woman who is a mother, devoting herself to the household in the traditional way. Monasterio talks about feminists as a group of extremists and is fighting against gender education at school, calling it 'gender indoctrination.'

In the tweet we looked at more closely, she also attacks LGBTQI associations, calling them "mob business" for receiving government funding. It is a short comment to Ana Camins, General Secretary of Partido Popular (a right-wing party in Spain) followed by a link to an article of *El País*, a digital newspaper. According to Monasterio, the government, with the support of LGBTQI associations, intends to indoctrinate children at school. In addition, she mentions that two NGOs, *Caritas* and *Save the Children*, also receive public subsidies and calls them "mob business" without referring to any source of information. She is echoing the political stance of *Vox* to discredit any idea that challenges or questions the traditional role of the family. In short, Rocío Monasterio highlights that granting more political participation i.e., more rights to LGBTQI groups will challenge traditional family. However, the analysis of the conversation that evolves under this post reveals that Monasterio's views are rejected by users to a large extent. A prominent voice claims that there is no such thing as 'LGBTQI indoctrination' at school. In addition, other users respond that NGOs are audited by the government.

**Carla Toscano de Balbín** posts on Twitter are also telling. Being the spokeswoman on gender issues of *Vox*, her posts promote conservative values about the place of women in families. She is against feminists whom she calls "a bunch of extremist women." Besides, she is an activist for the denial of gender violence and a critic of 'gender ideology'. Notably, Carla Toscano is known for wearing alternative clothing, such as T-shirts with controversial political messages. This indicates that far-right in Spain is trying to come closer to a counter-cultural movement, like ones that used to be linked to the left in the past.

In one of her tweets, Toscano invents a conversation, ironizing the relationship between Irene Montero and Pablo Iglesias. She claims that in the linked video, Iglesias supposedly covers Montero's mouth when she wants to say something to demonstrate 'lack of feminism' in that situation. However, watching the video in slow motion it becomes clear that Iglesias does not put his hand on his wife's mouth to shut her up. This supposedly funny tweet has an excellent impact: 4,412 retweets, 297 quote tweets, and 7,967 likes amounting to a tally of 76.9k at the time of reporting. Although the tweet does not display direct hate speech, comments on it show direct incitement against Pablo Iglesias and they are mocking his wife to undermine the dignity of the couple and their voices on gender and equality issues respectively.

Finally, two active politicians must be mentioned, who are particularly active in re-framing gender-based violence. **Macarena Olona Choclán** has invented the phrase (that

later become a hashtag) “Violence hasn’t got gender”, to convince women that the problem is not the violence of men, but that of strangers, rapists, thieves, and immigrants. She created a false monster to avoid talking about domestic violence which occurs only in alien circles but not in average Spaniard families. **Francisco Javier Ortega Smith**, Secretary of *Vox* is an attorney. His social media strategy focuses on showing that ‘gender ideology’ harms men because gender equality laws put men at a disadvantage.

### 3.4.3. The Communication of External Actors: *HazteOir* [Speak Up] and Individual Influencers

*HazteOir* is a civil society organization with ultra-conservative roots and a far-right political position. Their President, Ignacio Arsuaga, is directly linked to *Vox*, as most of the posts of this organization on Twitter and Facebook support *Vox*'s work in the political arena. On the international level, they are part of *CitizenGo*, an international conservative organization founded in Madrid having an anti-abortion and anti-transgender stance and promoting the concept of traditional family.

One of *HazteOir*'s posts we analyzed qualitatively is a mockery of the feminist movement. The attack is not directed against feminism but the current president of the Spanish government, Pedro Sánchez. The post attacks the viral song *El violador eres tú* [You are the rapist] that has become almost an anthem to the Latin American and Spanish feminist movement, exposing the victims of rape and the complicity of institutions, police, and governments. The analysis of the conversation revealed that the post incites hatred against the left-wing government and its head, the president, calling him an irresponsible and incompetent traitor. However, commentators also mock the feminist movement and ridicule the viral hashtag *#NoMeansNo*.

Another post of *HazteOir* is about a bus that circulated on the streets of Madrid with the sentence "Boys have penises, girls have vulvas, don't be fooled." The Mayor's Office in Madrid stopped the bus, arguing that it was expressing hate against LGBTQI groups. At first sight, the tweet expresses a political point of view on the matter of transsexuality, however, we found that it carries serious potential to arouse transphobic sentiments as well, which is indeed the case when we look at comments. Approving comments appeal to a pseudo-scientific explanation about gender and sex or praise (religious) human nature, arguing that it is impossible to change gender. However, the conversation also manifested a lot of counter-speech, which illuminates that the original post might polarize positions. Some further research is necessary to examine whether this dynamic was the result of *HazteOir*'s conscious strategy.

**Individual influencers** most frequently post videos, sharing them from their YouTube channels. The most important finding related to these actors concerns their role in creating and maintaining so-called ‘echo chambers’. These are circles of people that share the same ideas on the Internet. By legitimizing each other and not contrasting their statements with people who think differently, they maximize and reaffirm their discourse (Feezell, 2018).

**Cristina Seguí** is a Twitter influencer and former panelist of various TV programs on *Channel 4* and a writer on online right-wing newspaper *Okdiario.com*. Her tweets are harsh attacks on feminism, gender politics, and the LGBTQI movement. She uses a variety of tools, including streaming, publishing her tweets with an image, a video, or a journalistic article. We have classified some of her tweets as hate speech in the narrow sense. In one of them her tweets she directly attacks Pablo Iglesias, and Ione Bellara (Minister of Social Rights), and Natalia Vera (State Secretary of Equality) insulting them. Her other tweet displays an apparent mockery of LGBTQI community. She accompanies her tweet with a video of a transgender person, talking about the inclusiveness of International Women's Day.

**Roma Gallardo** is one of the most popular 'anti-gender' YouTubers in Spain. He moves around many platforms using interviews and videos to attack what he calls "fake feminist speech." He is not a member of *Vox*, but echoes many of the party's ideas on gender and feminism in his posts. He affirms that women do not need any more rights, they are well protected. He says that if women are granted special rights, they will be privileged, while inequality is unfair. He almost always justifies his ideas in the same way: He usually goes to a feminist march and asks some of the participants for an interview. He starts asking questions, and in the middle of the interview, he makes (unproven) assertions to challenge the interviewee, putting them in an uncomfortable situation, demonstrating how uninformed women who go to these kinds of marches are, incapable of communicating any content. He often posts short videos of these incidents. Furthermore, Gallardo also attacks the Ministry of Equality, calling it in one of his posts the "most useless ministry in history." Instead of attacking the minister as an individual (as it is often the case with Abascal's posts) Gallardo's posts delegitimize gender policies initiated by the ministry.

**Un tío blanco hetero's** name [A white hetero dude] is a direct and ironic reference to heteropatriarchy. He was banned from Twitter, but on his unofficial account, he frequently expresses himself against feminism, gender theories, and LGBTQI groups. In one of his tweets, he makes fun of the self-perception of gender, by ridiculing Gender Diversity Act and a German piece of legislation, the so-called 'third gender'. He includes videos from his YouTube channel as well, for instance one that he made on the latest feminist march on International Women's Day, ridiculing heteropatriarchy.

Finally, **Marina de la Torre** [@Anima\_red] and **@Unaalienada** [An alienated woman/girl] are Twitter influencers. They are active in producing anti-gender discourses and speak out against feminists. They focus on reactions to feminist policies because their starting point is that feminist approaches should only take care of women in violence in extreme cases (rapes, sexual aggression, etc.) but should not talk about structural problems, such as domestic violence or the violence in the patriarchal system.

### 3.5. SWEDEN

Based on the selected posts that have an influence score of seven or above (7+), **the Media Platform, External Actor 3 and the Party** published the largest share of posts. Thereafter comes External Actor 4, the *Youth Party*, and Party member A. Two of the



actors have only one post each: Party member B and Party member C.<sup>84</sup> When it comes to the larger bulk of posts that were initially selected (before the refined selection of the 84 posts with an influence score 7 or above), the frequency and share of posts looked quite different. When speaking of posts with relevant content irrespective of the level of their influence score, the right-wing media platform stands out. On this platform, there were about 300 posts that we filtered out with the chosen keywords and most of these posts are directly anti-gender related (either sexist, homophobic or antigenderism) in content. *The Party*, the Party Member A and the Media Platform are actors that have posts with the highest influence score. All the posts of *the Party* have IS8, while only a few of the Media Platforms have IS8 (the rest and vast majority of their posts have IS7). The posts of the Marty Member A have the highest influence score. One of his posts has IS9 and the other one IS10. Both are related to Pride March.

### 3.5.1 The Social Media Communication of *The Party* and its Members

*The Party* most often provides links to news or debate articles. It is also common that they post words in combination with an image and a text. This might be a way of increasing the possible number of signs in a post or simply emphasizing a quote or other parts of a text in a more visually appealing way. Since the *Youth Party*'s share of the posts we selected is very low, it is not possible to draw general and secure conclusions about its typical way of posting by looking at this sample only, but based on the five posts we observed, the *Youth Party* produces fairly long texts compared to other actors.

The majority of *the Party*'s posts are related to antigenderism, but they simultaneously speak out in relation to pro-gender messages. The anti-gender aspect of their messages is either framed as a theoretical argument for 'gender indoctrination' or criticism against what is perceived as 'failing feminism' or against a 'failing feminist' government. We have looked more closely during the qualitative analysis into three posts that the Party has posted on their official account. They all seem to be neutral and factual at first glance, but, as for neutral factuality, they might potentially either trigger hate speech or spell out dehumanizing and degrading messages. They usually contain some additional media, such as an image with some text, a link to a news article or a video of a parliamentary speech. Hence, the tools used represent facts and adherence to 'truth'. They all target different topics: one discusses supporting a possible motion of censure against a female minister at the time, triggering mainly sexist but also anti-gender comments. Another post deals with the issue of transgender and sports, triggering homo- and transphobic comments and implicitly attacks activists as it mentions the struggle for the acceptance and inclusion of transgender persons. The last one discusses the issue of (too lenient) criminal responsibility for sexual crimes against children, framed around a homosexual politician and his ex-partner. This post primarily targets the LGBTQI movement trying to link it to pedophilia to delegitimize and dehumanize homosexuality and transgenderism.

---

<sup>84</sup> Note that at the end of the data collection period, the privacy settings for the Party member A, *the Youth Party* and the right-wing media platform's Facebook pages were changed from being public to private. These changes occurred after we had made a first round of filtering by keywords and a first selection of posts and exported the data. By then, we had already exported comments associated to at least some of these posts, posts that we found especially interesting at the first glance. It would have been preferable to be able to go back and double check these Facebook pages, but the new privacy settings kept us from doing so. Since these pages used to be public when we exported data from them, we found it ethical to use this data as material for our research.

The comments following the first post (targeting a female minister) are sexist and reflect antigenderism. Some describe a country in deep crisis, triggering strong emotions. One comment on it is deeply violent, and as such, it is classified as hate speech in the narrow sense. It should be mentioned that there is one person who opposes almost every single one of the supportive comments. Transgender and sports commentators use fairness and equality as arguments (and biology should prevail over identity) to shut out transgender persons from women's sports.

The three **party members** published six of the analyzed posts in total. Four of them display screenshots of other posts, of headlines to news articles and commentaries to them. We assume that this 'screenshot-instant-way-of-posting' is more common among individuals than organizations that presumably have a more formalized processes for posting. The majority of the posts of the party members touches upon Pride and LGBTQI issues.

Only one post from **Party Member A** is included in the qualitative analysis. It targets the Pride and a female politician as she took part in the event making a political statement on social media in which she spoke up for tolerance. Party Member A describes himself as an underdog, a victim of the establishment. The female politician targeted, together with her party (part of the liberal/conservative political block), had previously taken a clear stance against the *Party*. The post could be read as potentially triggering homophobic hate speech as Pride was at the core of the discussion. Comments on it are rather sexist and attack the female politician, while some of them are homophobic and reflect antigenderism. One comment bears the character of hate speech in the narrow sense.

A general conclusion about the very few Members of the *Party* is that they frame their posts as neutral and factual, ending up (potentially) triggering anti-gender, homophobic and sexist hate speech. Furthermore, they direct their followers'/supporters' hatred in specific directions (tails of hate), but they are careful to keep the posts themselves seemingly neutral.

### 3.5.2. The Social Media Communication of External Actors: Media Platform and Influencers

The analyzed **Media Platform** typically uses short introductions and a link to a news or debate article. The majority of these articles were originally published on two different right-wing media platforms. In terms of themes, the Media Platform follows the same pattern as the two external politicians in our research (see below), but two topics stand out in their communication: reactions to family policy and abortion.

We included three posts of this actor in the refined analysis. Two of them are homophobic while one is antigenderism and sexism related with a racist undertone. The latter could be read as neutral because at first sight it appears to be describing facts. This post brings up a news report about a member of the feminist party (*Feministiskt Initiativ*), which discusses an event of reported assault, sexism and racism. The analyzed homophobia related posts, on the other hand, explicitly aggressive and homophobic and display emotions of aversion, disgust, mistrust, anger, fear, and hatred. Comments under these posts are strongly sexist and racist, a few of them are also exhibiting antigenderism.

**External Actor 3** uses short texts in combination with linked news articles. Most of the news articles were originally published on well-established media platforms like the webpage of Swedish public service television company, and two newspapers. This politician links two articles from a right-wing online newspaper, and one from Christian magazine/newspaper. We included six posts made by External Actor 3 in the refined qualitative analysis. Five of them display antigenderism, while one can be classified as homophobic. They are explicit in their critical message in relation to gender equality discussing various topics, such as abortion, mandatory kindergarten, gender equality through equal representation, feminist policy and #metoo. They are mainly framed around an issue or event and one of them puts a female individual at the center of the discussion.

One of the posts speaks about an article that a right-wing politician of the *Party* wrote. In this case, External Actor 3 criticizes the party he used to be a member of, for having changed their official standpoint in the issues of same-sex adoptions (now being positive about it). External Actor 3 says that he and the far-right party he is now part of will never change their minds. They will always “say ‘yes’ to the nuclear family” and “no ‘to homo adoptions’”. In another post, this actor comments on a highly acclaimed event that involved grave accusations about sexual preferences and criminal behavior (see the analysis in the next chapter). One of External Actor 3’s posts on this issue is clearly framed in a homophobic way connecting homosexuals to pedophilia and using expressions that belong to the jargon of ‘gender indoctrination’ theory in a broad sense. Furthermore, this actor brings up quota arguments and expresses criticism of feminism. Finally, the post that discusses gender equal representation on rock festivals is ironic. The linked investigative news report shows statistics about female representation on six specific music festivals in Sweden, which the author calls ‘madhouses’. Comments are mostly sexist alluding to antigenderism, while a few of them are also xenophobic.

Some other issues are discussed in a more straightforward, critical, or aggressive way. The homophobic nature of these discourses is particularly alarming, as they connect homosexuality to pedophilia. The latter is also mentioned in a discussion on mandatory kindergarten as a risk. The post argues that a Social Democrats proposal on mandatory kindergarten is a sign of ‘gender indoctrination’. Comments to this post connect pedophilia to Social Democrats and state control of kindergartens.

We have chosen to label several of the posts as hate speech in the broad sense and locate some further ones on the border of hate speech potential and hate speech in the broad sense. Comments express hatred, contempt, aversion, and disgust; they often mention a public person, furthermore, they are sexist and opt for antigenderism in relation to the issue of abortion. The post on kindergarten triggers comments of mistrust and fear of social democratic policymaking and institutions, using words like ‘brainwash’, ‘programs’, ‘shapes’, ‘robots’ and ‘obeying blindly’. In total, comments mainly target left-wing liberals and feminists, and a few of them could be considered hate speech in the narrow sense.

**External Actor 4**’s share of the selected posts is very low, but he uses the Twitter hashtag #svpol in all of his posts included in the analysis. #svpol refers to a non-profit organization, offering a complementary digital platform for politicians and politically interested people to expand on thoughts. In other words, this is an alternative forum for publicity and political debate, which states that “it does not favor either the right or the left”. However, External Actor 4’s posts touch upon the same themes as External Actor 3’s. As regards the antigenderism, External Actor 4’s angle is what one may describe as

criticism against what he perceives as ‘failing feminism’ or against a failing feminist government.

His post that we looked at more closely during the qualitative analysis has several targets. External Actor 4 is attacking a homosexual politician personally, Pride and the LGBTQI movement, calling them “the Pride lobby”, and finally Liberals, who are referred to as “pedophile apologetics”. The latter term is used to refer to people supporting or taking part in Pride events and endorse the LGBTQI movement (e.g.: “Pedophile apologetics are giving inauguration speeches at Pride”). Thus, the attack is not only directed to a person (a homosexual politician) but also to the LGBTQI movement and its supporters, by connecting homosexuality to pedophilia. The post itself is aggressive and degrading, especially along with the accompanying image. Comments express contempt, violence, and racism targeting anti-racists, liberals, and homosexuals alike.

**In summary**, the following pattern can be discerned in the Swedish case. When a post is more neutral or factual in its nature, comments get more hostile and possibly the other way around: a rather aggressive post generates less emotional/aggressive comments. The *Party* and its representatives are more careful, trying not to use explicitly aggressive or hateful language, than the external actors, that do not need to legitimize themselves as part of the establishment. Although explicit racist hate speech and triggering hate speech seem to be more legitimate. In addition, the posts included in the study, made by the *Party*, some of their representatives and the *Youth Party*, mainly relate to the antigenderism theme. Homophobic rhetoric seems to be more explicit than sexist or anti-gender. External actors are more explicitly hostile and disrespectful.

## 4. Three targets in the crossfire: results of the qualitative inquiry on social media conversations

This chapter of the report presents the findings of the research by discussing the analyses of **the three main subareas of anti-gender political communication** that provoke hate speech: sexism, homophobia, and antigenderism. The presentation centers on findings supported by a larger number of posts and of selected posts together with the comments in all target countries. (See Chapter 1 for a description of the research methodology, sampling, and analytical framework)<sup>85</sup>. We highlight the construction of the main targets, the explanation for the selected failures, wrongdoings, or deviance of these targets, and the legitimation for the rejection, denial, and exclusionary proposals put forward in the observed social media communications.

### 4.1. Sexism and Anti-women's-rights Speech

#### 4.1.1. Germany

A major debate related to sexism has evolved in recent years **in parliaments and company boards** around the implementation of a new law on **gender quota**, adopted in 2016 on federal level. Constitutional courts in the German states of Thuringia and Brandenburg rejected the law in 2020 after AfD and far-right NPD [National Democratic Party of Germany] filed a lawsuit against it (Locke, 2020). The decision had an impact on the whole country because many other federal states wanted to pass equivalent laws. Another recurring topic is the issue of **abortion**, as part of body politics that have been debated in public due to legislative amendments in the last three years (Krolzik-Matthei, 2019). AfD and the actors of the New Right label abortion as murder and claim that its information campaigns are 'wrong' family policies (Brünig, 2020).

Sexism related posts were the most intensive in terms of frequency; more than half of all posts and tweets in the sample can be assigned to this theme. Of these, over 10% have an IS9+ (IS9 or higher). Although the majority of sexism-related posts are authored by external actors, the widest-reaching posts come primarily from AfD and AfD politicians. Regarding the type of hate speech, about one-third of the posts are implicit hate speech, 17% contain mobilizing or agitational elements, and 15% contain defamations, especially against feminists and women's quota. This latter topic partly intersects with anti-gender speech. Racist content can be found in 6% of posts, especially in connection with racialized violence and traditional Islamic gender roles. Two-thirds of the posts/tweets are news-related, and hashtags are used in every fourth one.

The refined analysis revealed that the topic of sexism encompasses a range of sub-discourses, most importantly, abortion, women's quota, and racialized violence. The material is dominated by discourse on **abortion, especially on over-politicized 'paragraph 219a'**, which forbids doctors to 'advertise' abortion. Its critics say it breaches women's rights to receive information about abortion. This sub-discourse is directed against a number of groups. On the one hand, parties are attacked and certain Social Democratic, leftist, and green politicians, on the other hand, the right of abortion is denied to women themselves. In particular, the 'murderer narrative' is used, which is also taken

---

<sup>85</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.5.4), we use the following acronyms: hate speech in the narrow sense (HSN), hate speech in the broad sense (HSB), and hate speech potential (HSP).

up by users in the comments. The link to Christian values is also emphasized here. Comments under these posts vary in intensity, but there is hardly any rebuttal; on the contrary, racializing sub-discourses proliferate, e.g., a conspiratorial ‘population exchange’ is envisioned in the comments. This means that on one hand, abortion is presented as a danger to German society, on the other hand, its alleged proponents are thought to endanger life and society. AfD adopted this argumentation relatively early for its family policy agenda and has been forging alliances with certain actors of the Catholic Church and civic ‘family protection’ initiatives, such as the *March for life* and *Demo for all*.

The second most frequently discussed topic is the introduction of a **women's quota** into politics and business. It is conveyed in a rather trivializing and defamatory manner by AfD and its members. The hate speech character of these entries varies between HSP (hate speech potential) and HSB (HS in the broad sense) and calls up resonances in the same spectrum. Posts convey the “performance is more important than justice through quota” framework which users frequently cite. Attempts are made to label the quota itself as a sexist instrument claiming that it is disadvantageous to men. Certain female politicians – Christian Democrats and Social Democrats alike – are defamed in the comments. A common tool to discredit these political opponents is to reduce them to their appearance (also known as ‘lookism’) and to respond by bringing up some off-topic issue, like e.g., migration (also known as ‘whataboutism’).

The topic of **racialized violence against women** is also a recurring theme. It refers to the alleged violence of non-German perpetrators against German women. With the ongoing migration of refugees to Europe, the discourse of domestic violence evokes the narrative of the so-called ‘imported Muslim violence’ against women. Commenters use women against migrants through agitative means (Berg, 2019). Related posts have an above average reach, but trigger mainly xenophobic and racist comments, while sexist comments are not so frequent. Most comments are on the border of HSP and HSB, with the rare exception of some calling for violence. Almost all comments amplify the content of the post, but there is some minor counter-speech too. In addition to calling Muslims criminals and terrorists, consenting voices also primarily attack political opponents, above all left-wing parties, and blame them for violence against women. The few dissenting voices call AfD racist.

#### 4.1.2 Hungary

Sexism related posts in the Hungarian sample represent three intersecting subtopics: the defamation of female politicians, the contrasting of women’s emancipation with conservative family values, and the downplaying of violence against women. Female politicians are the key actors practicing the first type of speech but are absent from conversations of the other two types. Political parties’ social media outlets, especially KDNP’s, are the most vocal in the second subtopic. The third type of speech is only of specific external actors. The most recurrent targets are female opposition politicians, feminists, and women in public roles. Hate speech generating techniques are manifold,

ranging from distorted interpretation of public statements of target actors, through presenting false evidence, up to visioning a vicious attack on conservative norms.

The most typical potentially sexist theme is the **defamation of female politicians**. The influence scores of related posts are always high. The most disparaging statements are made during women politicians' speeches or following a sharp, critical statement they make. Actors of the political opposition criticize the ruling regime and its democratizing measures. Criticism is posited by (pro-)government forces as attacking the Hungarian people and the nation. The hate speech potential/environment is triggered by political communication targeting the "wrongdoings" of oppositional female politicians without denigrating them. Sometimes MPs are not the primary target of hatred but symbolize 'opposition'; 'opposition voters'; or even more generally 'Leftists' or 'Liberals'. Criticism is magnified and presented as an imminent threat to the nation, which has found overwhelming support among commenters under all analyzed posts. Conversations show examples of sexist speech. For example, the confident tone of female politicians is interpreted in a very gendered way; repeatedly calling these women by their first names, or even paternalizing nicknames. The most often used adjectives to dismiss their arguments are 'hysteric', 'stupid' and 'mean'. However, the most alarming outcome of the qualitative analysis is the normalization of the idea that a politician, who criticizes the government for any reason has no place in Hungarian public life or Parliament. Sexist attacks have been incorporated into the discrediting campaigns of critical voices.

Much fewer, but highly engaging posts reflect the objective of **contrasting women's emancipation with conservative family values**. They seem to be innocent monologues on women's roles in society but use highly agitating and indoctrinating tone on what women should (and should not) do to find self-fulfillment. Hate speech potential is induced by political communication dwelling on gender-related topics, idealizing conservative norms, while demonizing disruptive feminism. Although none of the posts advocate the well-known sexist trope of 'the place of women is in the kitchen', they present women's caretaker roles in a sophisticated way, as a twisted revolt against an imagined expectation of 'emancipation'. By so doing, they create a false dichotomy between work and family ('emancipation' vs. the 'privilege to give birth'). Besides, they oversimplify emancipation ("women have to compete with men"; compare themselves to men; "feminism's aim is to turn women against men"). 'Emancipated' female members of parliament are particularly active in performing such speech acts. However, the analysis of the conversations consistently express disagreement with and nuanced criticism of *Fidesz's* policies and treatment of women. Commenters often point to a discrepancy between conservative women's personal trajectories of being highly educated 'career-moms' and the overly conservative female roles they are advocating in their posts. Criticism is stronger under posts where the studied politicians pose as caring mothers and good housewives to increase their authenticity. The words 'emancipate(d)' and 'gender' are used in a positive way by comment-makers under the studied posts.

Posts reflecting the objective of **downplaying violence against women** are less frequent and less diverse within the sexism theme. They include posts from Zsolt Bayer and *Alapjogokért* often with reference to the Istanbul Convention. However, while government communication offers alternative routes to tackle gender-based violence (outside of the Istanbul Convention [IC]) and promotes a 'tough on crime' attitude

towards domestic violence, external actors ridicule the problem, hinting that violence is purely the invention of men-hating ‘me too’ activists. The posts connect general misogynistic statements with references to the alleged dangers of ‘gender’ to show that promoters of ‘me too’ stand behind crazy things like the uncountable number of genders, connecting to anti-gender speech. However, the term ‘gender’ is used only to make an even stronger argument against women’s rights to claim and report sexual harassment. Yet the two analyzed conversations under Bayer’s posts show that users only partially approve of his views, style, and language. Critical commenters perceive the posts as sexist and recognize the intention of downplaying violence against women, and the offensive language provokes criticism from some of the supporters as well.

#### 4.1.3. Italy

We focused on several public discussions for their potential to provoke sexist and women’s rights related hate speech in the Italian case. On the one hand, we examined cases where well-known women received above-average attention and political criticism from populist right-wing actors. The two women we followed are Carola Rackete, the **captain of Sea-Watch 3, the ship** of a German NGO that saves migrants in the Mediterranean Sea, and Silvia Romano, an Italian NGO-worker, who converted to Islam after her release from custody in Kenya. On the other hand, we also focused on the reception of newly proposed or adopted laws and public policies. Above all, we followed discussions on the social media account of our actors around the new regulation of **easing the use of abortion pills**, and the *Lega*’s controversial proposal on **joint custody of children** in order to preserve “family unity” after divorce.

Our social media research revealed that sexist posts are more frequent on Twitter than on FB and potentially hate speech related tweets are written by politicians. It is especially Matteo Salvini’s Twitter profile that carries potentially sexist messages. The issue of **women in political and public life is often related to the topic of immigration** in his posts, finding their pinnacle in the case of the Sea-Watch 3 vessel. The immigration-security nexus is the prime issue on Salvini’s timeline, he often suggests strong liaisons between immigration and criminality. These messages mobilize primordial emotions (e.g., fear from invasion). His posts on Carola Rackete demonstrate that he wants to attack a specific group of people (i.e., women) by using an apparently neutral style of language. The expression of ‘young woman’ (in a text in italics) suggests a negative and pejorative connotation. The analysis of the conversations unveiled that Matteo Salvini’s indirectly hostile posts against emancipated women frequently trigger hate-driven comments from his followers. We found similar, potentially hate speech related tweets riding on the same topics from Alessandro Meluzzi, one of the external actors, but these tweets do not seem to attract many reactions and sexist comments seem to be rare.

Sexism is differently practiced by **Giorgia Meloni** assuming that women cannot be sexist. She turns more openly against political opponents, especially feminists. In contrast to Salvini’s posts, Meloni’s mostly target **feminists and feminism**, not female public figures or political opponents. Her followers are keen to sharpen Meloni’s messages in their comments. It is also worth noting that sexist insults (such as “bullshitters”, “brain-damaged idiots”) on her official page do not seem to be moderated or deleted. So,



conversations reveal a very offensive language directed to Meloni's political opponents or feminists.

Finally, several posts engage with the topic of 'abortion pills' and condemn women who have had an **abortion**. The comments to these posts are particularly noteworthy. They articulate deeply conservative positions on abortion, appealing to God and underlining the specific role of women who have been created to be mothers and not "murderers of their own children". Some propose that "...we have ended up having more beasts and murderers than human beings". "Bodies are properties of God and not of people. You are worse than beasts". Users consider that abortion pills are like poison and abortion is like homicide. It is noteworthy that some comments articulating **critical opinions** against the original anti-abortion posts are also **verbally extreme**. For example, they characterize a conservative priest acting as a public figure in the abortion debate as "brainless" and "Evil's follower".

#### 4.1.4. Spain

As for potentially sexist speech, we followed two types of discussions. The first one concerns feminism and the feminist movement in Spain. Most recently, **Women's Day in 2020** has provoked intense discussions on this topic in the country. On the one hand, *Vox* organized its own protest, in which General Secretary, Javier Ortega Smith identified feminism with communism. On the other hand, after the pandemic hit, the party accused women's march arguing that this was the main reason for the spread of the Covid virus. This assertion, repeated in the media and reproduced in their social networks, claimed that feminists were the cause of Covid in Spain. The second issue concerns violence against women as *Vox* has several times spoken up against the gendered nature of domestic violence. Critics of the **Gender Violence Law** (*Ley de Violencia de Género* 1/2004) claim that it discriminates men and encourages false reporting by women against men. *Vox* and several far-right public figures embrace this debate and demand the withdrawal of the law.

Most posts **promulgate gender stereotypes** when they declare what women should be like or how they should behave. These posts propose that radical right-wing political forces are the real defenders of Spanish women, although they highly indoctrinate the 'proper' societal roles of women. The analysis of conversations reveals that sexism in the narrow sense is not present in the comments, however, mockery and denigration of women who participate in and defend gender politics continues to be a trend. The label 'feminazis' is occasionally used to refer to 'extreme feminists' or in talks about feminism in general. This labelling occurs in some posts or tweets but is particularly pertinent in the comments. It is also stated that contemporary feminism is conducive to hatred of heterosexual white males, which is incitement to hate committed by feminists.

The toughest messages are to be found in the attacks **against female politicians of left-wing political parties**, especially female ministers, and general secretaries of state of *Unidas Podemos*. These politicians are constantly ridiculed and delegitimized with sexualized or indirectly misogynistic vocabulary. An (in)famous feminist post by Minister Montero ("*Alone and drunk at night, I want to go home safe*".) triggered the noisiest and ugliest reactions. The reactions do not only criticize the policies pursued by Montero but mock the professional capabilities of the Minister of Equality and call her

‘feminazi’ or Minister of "Equal Whatever" (in Spanish: *Igual-dá*). Some comments label her ‘a slut’, ‘incompetent’, ‘a slum’, ‘*menestra*’ (a type of Spanish salad, making a pun on ‘female minister-*ministra*’) or simply ‘dumb’. *Vox* uses her case to blame women for being responsible for sexual aggression against themselves, when they are drunk and walking alone on the street. They add the idea that **violence is only perpetrated by outsiders**, not by Spaniards.

The sharpest attacks on women in high political positions are launched by radical right-wing female politicians and external actors. The female members of *Vox* take the lead by making the public believe that women cannot be sexist. Interestingly, the most active and visible female members of *Vox* on social platforms share some physical characteristics: they are all attractive, with long dark hair, well-kept bodies and nicely dressed, incarnating the ideal Spanish female beauty.

Overall, the posts in the field revealed that *Vox* and external actors produce sexist discourses only implicitly, but female politicians of *Vox* are vehemently bashing leftwing-female politicians. These attacks on female politicians form a common strategy of populist right-wing parties to discipline women who dare to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Pedraza, 2019). It is also a tool to eliminate female left-wing politicians from political competition and weaken them (Di Meco & Brechenmacher, 2019).

#### 4.1.5. Sweden

Hubs of public discussion carrying potentially sexist undertones in the Swedish context are related to **women in public roles**. Women who take part in public debates (bloggers, journalists, politicians, artists, etc.) often receive insults, and so do feminists, foreigners, immigrants, leftists, or simply those who are part of the ‘establishment’. In the research, we followed two politicians who are often subjects to the constant assault of populist right-wing parties. One of them is taking an active stance against the *Party*, while another one used to be in a leading position of the feminist party, raising her voice against sexism and racism. In addition, women influencers get a lot of attacks. A female blogger was also added to the study, as she receives massive attacks for her transparency concerning her private life. Another female feminist public debater has joined the ‘*me too*’ movement.

**The defamation of women in public roles** occurs in various ways. Just like in anti-gender messages, some sexist messages are **describing the attacked persons as rule violators** and portray the denounced ideas and social acts as rule violations. These actors are portrayed as violators of certain social norms and thus as carriers of ‘dangerous’ ideas that can have a negative influence on society. So, people that violate moral norms are described as morally reprehensible. In these cases, it is the protection of a social system of norms that legitimizes sexist attacks. Not only are the morally reprehensible actions described, but in the case of the Female Blogger’s post, for example, comments also state what the morally acceptable course of action is.

One other way of defamation (partly related to the rule-breaking argumentation) is to **state that some women are given too much space in relation to their importance or status in society**. This can be done by referring to them as “less intelligent, stupid, less capable, incompetent, irresponsible or bad role models”. Stereotypes of differences between the sexes grounded in biological arguments may be the legitimizers of such terms

but are never explicit. Yet another way of describing these actors as threats to society is to give the impression that they have low worth in society. Condescending comments concern their bodies, appearances, sex appeals etc., rendering biology as the legitimizer for sexist attacks.

Finally, another form of sexist attacks is to **describe the attacked actors as “less credible” or “liars”, “haters”, and “power-hungry”**. Just like in the case of anti-gender voices, sexist voices sometimes focus on attacking written or oral statements from a logical or rhetorical perspective. Their purpose is to delegitimize speakers by trying to show that their statements or actions are false, illogical, or contradictory. On other occasions, personal attacks assume hatred on the side of the attacked. The depiction of the antagonist as power-hungry can be linked to ideas about political correctness, ideas about the so-called ‘establishment’ and the alleged ‘gender indoctrination’ theory. Moreover, as the example of the representative of the feminist party shows, previously voiced sexism seems to legitimize more sexism. She received a massive amount of sexist and racist comments after she pointed to an event, when she was already subject to such attacks.

#### 4.1.6 Summary of sexist speech

Right-wing posts and conversations on social media platforms and venues mostly target **publicly active feminist and women politicians in all countries** concerned. Attacking emancipated or feminist women of high political rank is often combined with or transformed into denigrating political forces and organizations on the left (Hungary, Spain). The contestation of abortion rights may also turn into an attack on female politicians (Germany). The claims for political participation, voice, and gender quota trigger speech acts against “too much power” of women, and the “power hunger” of politically active women (Germany, Sweden).

**Violence against women** is also a favorite subject and pretext of sexist talks. It is downplayed and belittled by identifying the problem with exaggerations about the feminist ‘me too’ movement or a presumed feminist conspiracy (Spain, Hungary). In migration destination countries, the radical right-wing induced social media conversations frequently conclude that violence against women is committed by foreigners, refugees, and migrants, or that the risk of such crimes is limited to them (Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden).

In several countries, a **special division of labor** has been developed among political actors: It is the high rank right-wing women politicians who direct the harshest sexist attacks against the female political leaders of other political forces and circles (Italy, Spain). In other cases, exemplary conservative women politicians stand against the feminist agenda in almost all instances, although they have highly emancipated careers (Hungary).

## 4.2. Homophobia and Anti-LGBTQI Speech

### 4.2.1 Germany

Compared to the other two topics, homophobia has been less prevalent in public debates in Germany in the last few years. However, the law that legalized **same-sex marriage** (“*Ehe für alle*”: marriage for all) in 2017 has been strongly debated in the media, which has partly aroused homophobic reactions (e.g., dw, 2017). Moreover, AfD and related organizations (e.g., *Initiative Familienschutz*) oppose same-sex marriage (Lang, 2017). AfD calls for the protection of the traditional family based on heterosexual relationships (e.g., Ahrbeck et al., 2020). Furthermore, conservative and right-wing actors publicly denounce **sexual education** claiming that it leads to “early sexualization” and the dissemination of transgender propaganda in education and care institutions. The latter overlaps with anti-genderism and we discuss most of the relevant findings there.

Relatively few, 14% of the posts and tweets in our sample are related to homophobia. Furthermore, these posts have comparatively small reach and generate little response. The majority of posts and tweets were shared almost exclusively by external actors, especially by *Initiative Familienschutz* or *Junge Freiheit*, a right-wing media outlet, while the proportion of homophobic content in posts of AfD and AfD politicians is relatively low compared to the other issues. Regarding the type of hate speech, nearly half of the posts operate with implicit hate speech and we have observed messages with mobilizing or agitational elements in only eight posts/tweets. Four posts have content expressing rumor or conspiracy theory, 14% include defamation, especially against LGBTQI activists or same-sex marriage (‘marriage for all’). Over 80% of all homophobic-related content provides links to articles of German- or international news outlets. Two-thirds of all posts can be found on Facebook.

The refined analysis revealed that the most important sub-issues are **rejection of same-sex marriage** and the topic of ‘**rainbow families**’. LGBTQI persons are considered unnatural, partly pathologized, and a danger to families. In some posts, same-sex couples are associated with pedophilia. LGBTQI values are supposed to be incompatible with Christian values and lead to the “slipping down” of marriage and society in general. Importantly though, homophobia-related posts have generally elicited more counter-speech than other topics.

In an *Initiative Familienschutz* post we analyzed some quotes from an interview with controversial evolutionary biologist Ulrich Kutschera (University of Kassel) he gave shortly after the law on same-sex marriage was adopted. He is speaking against the right of adoption for same-sex couples, recalling the idea that the law is “state-sponsored pedophilia and the most serious child abuse”. In solidarity with Kutschera and the accuser’s insinuations, many supporters acknowledge his expertise and support his views. They claim that nuclear families are the backbone of society, whereas gay parents lead to its destruction. Besides, supporting commenters position themselves implicitly with references to the loss of freedom of speech. Many users also express their opinion that their freedom of speech has been restricted in Germany. Some compare that to the restricted political freedom of expression in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Some voices, however, strongly dissent, pointing to the harmful messages the post advocates.

#### 4.2.2 Hungary

Potentially homophobic posts in our sample reflect the most recent public discussions in Hungary. During fall, 2020, *Labrisz* Lesbian Association published *Storyland is for Everyone*, a storybook that contains well-known tales rewritten in a way that the heroes belong to stigmatized or minority groups. Although most of the tales do not feature LGBTQI heroes, Dóra Dúró (*Mi Hazánk*) found the book harmful for this alleged reason and shredded it page-by-page publicly. The act has triggered wide condemnation from various public figures, making it become a bestseller within a few days. Later, however, the motive of “exposing children to homosexual propaganda” was taken up by the government, which led to the launch of an attack on same-sex parenthood. In the wake of the growing number of COVID-19 cases in Fall, 2020, the government passed an expedited law that restricts adoption rights to married heterosexual couples. The law was justified on the grounds of the rights and protection of children.

Following these junctures of political happenings, we have identified three subtopics of homophobia in our material: ‘*Storyland* scandal’ and the associated **cultural war on fairy tales; amending the child adoption law** to prohibit same-sex adoption (indirectly also due to the *storyland* scandal); and finally, **equating homosexuality with** (social, cultural, or even genetic) **deviance**. The drivers of homophobic speech are the politicians of the new far-right party, *Mi Hazánk*. In some of their posts, they criticize the authoritarian populist government for not being strict enough to the left-liberal opposition, by the same token, these radical politicians vocally supported the modification of child adoption law in order to “protect” children. Hate-speech acts figure in both the narrow and broad sense in their posts, as they promulgate nationwide protection against “deviant” LGBTQI activism. Interestingly, Fidesz and its politicians are silent on these topics, except for a post quoting a statement of Orbán on homosexuality. But KDNP, *Fidesz*’s minor coalition partner, and external actors *Alapjogokért* and *Vasárnap.hu* are very active. These posts create strong interlinks between homosexuality and the alleged danger of gender ideology.

Posts that evoke the ‘**Storyland scandal**’ are frequent and diverse. Authors envision a cultural war in which a minority (homosexuals) force their lifestyles to destroy majority norms. However, the qualitative analysis revealed that they do not directly target the LGBTQI community. Even Dúró’s post on announcing the book-shredding performance is carefully worded to avoid removal at a time when both the party’s and her husband’s sites have been suspended. The post, however, is strong by enacting book burning reminiscent of Nazi practices. It involves hate speech acts in the broad sense. Similarly, *Fidesz*’s quote of Orbán remains on the level of agitation for ‘normal behavior’ and alertness to those who do not share majority values. By grammatically using a general subject, it avoids blaming but rather uses the aura of a charismatic leader to make sure everyone understands what is right and what is wrong. Dissenting comments seem to dominate under both presented posts, but while the quote from Orbán attracted more articulate commentaries, Dúró’s post revealed a less educated audience. Denigrating communication was intensive among dissenting voices as well.

Posts on the **amendment of the child adoption law** are framed as warnings to protect children. They create a contrast between the “right of all children to a healthy development” (*Fidesz*-KDNP) and the “desire of homosexual couples to have children” (Semjén, KDNP) claiming that ‘the right to have a child’ does not exist (*Vasárnap.hu*).

A *Vasárnap.hu* post on an interview with a conservative psychologist makes serious efforts to provoke, but our comment analysis shows that it has not been very powerful. Voices have been polarized from the outset but have not radicalized as the conversation has grown, and concerns about homophobic and sham rights have not been directly applied. Voices supporting the posts stigmatize same sex couples as sick, and the issue of their adoption rights as an “abnormal propaganda against life”. More sophisticated reasoning proposes that by claiming the right to be LGBTQI, one declines the right to have children, and that children may have the right to heterosexual parents. By contrast, dissenting voices present inclusive, tolerant, and pedagogical arguments on the unharmed qualities of family pluralism and refer to patchwork families as today’s legitimate care units.

Finally, posts that **equate homosexuality with deviance** are the less salient type in the entire sample, but they deserve attention, representing the oldest and most exclusionary form of homophobia. This category of hate speech is advanced by KDNP sharing an article from *Vasárnap.hu*, and by far-right politicians of *Mi Hazánk*. *Vasárnap.hu* alludes to the LGBTQI community as “culturally” unfit, while *Mi Hazánk* politician Előd Novák straightforwardly propagates that homosexuals are “biologically” and “genetically” deviant. Radical right-wing media outlets have taken the lead in constructing a rich repertoire of portraying LGBTQI “sins” and “harms.” LGBTQI activists are blamed for being a noisy minority and aggressively promoting LGBTQI norms and identity. According to KDNP, for LGBTQI persons, or in the case referred to, transsexuals, it is impossible to reach the level of the Christian spirit and teachings. KDNP claims that they are using Hungarian and Christian traditions as a mockery. Novák’s posts make it unambiguous that homosexuality is a disease which should be cured or tamed, additionally, authors of the posts mentioned above envision a direct link between homosexual marriage and pedophilia. Given that these posts had been removed and Novák’s page suspended at the time of our research, comments under the posts are no longer accessible.

#### 4.2.3 Italy

In terms of potentially homophobic speech, we followed discussions around the proposed amendments to the Italian Criminal Code to expand the **prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity**. The draft law was presented to the Chamber of Deputies in May 2018 by Alessandro Zan, member of Democratic Party, hence it is often referred to as the ‘**DL Zan**’. The debate is currently ongoing, as the DL is being increasingly contested both by parliamentary right-wing parties and by various parts of organized civil society (for example, the NGO *Pro Vita & Famiglia*). On 11<sup>th</sup> July 2020, a march protesting this DL was organized, but it did not take place because of social distancing Covid-19 measures. Social media attacks occur when the Parliamentary discussion restarts and marches (or other events) are organized. Yet another nodal point, discussed in part here, is ‘**Parent 1 and Parent 2**’ (*Genitore 1*, *Genitore 2*). On 13 January 2021, the Minister of Internal Affairs announced to the Chamber of Deputies that in the identity documents of under 14-year-olds and in school registration forms the terms ‘genitore 1’ (parent 1) and ‘genitore 2’ (parent 2) would be used instead of ‘mother’ and

‘father’. Matteo Salvini, the then Minister of Internal Affairs has restored the terms ‘mother’ and ‘father’, but the case is still under discussion.

While political parties do not seem to be too active on this topic, a significant presence of potentially homophobic posts has been recorded on the FB accounts of Salvini, Meloni and NGO *Pro Vita & Family*. These are all for the debate on the ‘DL Zan’ and on ‘Parent 1 Parent 2’. The two lead actors, Salvini and Meloni re-share each other’s posts, for example the following post written by our external actor, Alessandro Meluzzi: “If the law is promulgated, children of couples who oppose gender education will be placed in LGBT communities [...] Nevertheless, the same female senator #Cirinnà has said that everybody should be re-educated...”. This post spreads both contempt against political opponents and shame on LGBTQI people. Furthermore, it alarms parents and thus it may evoke fear among readers.

The analysis of the conversations shows that Salvini and Meloni use political debate over the ‘DL Zan’ to undermine its legitimacy. They use the argument that those who want to fight hatred are actually **violent**. They often use the verb ‘indoctrinate’ to imply that the rules that would be imposed by the ‘DL Zan’ would indoctrinate children into gender ideology. Commenters argue that the real objective of the draft law is to “re-educate, spread gender theory and, above all, legalize the shame of surrogate mothers, child trafficking, and of pedophilia” – as one commenter puts it. Hence, criticism on sexual education of children and anti-discrimination related to LGBTQI are lumped together with **the criminal act of pedophilia**. Comments argue that those who disagree with the mainstream should be punished, re-educated, and imprisoned. *Fratelli d’Italia* is seen as a key force in Parliament against a very dangerous draft law that threatens democracy and **freedom of thought**. Some comments also make nostalgic statements about Italy’s former fascist regime.

In sum, social media conversations initiated by populist right-wing actors are able to trigger homophobic reactions by promulgating that homosexuality is unnatural and transsexuality must be medically treated, instead of being supported through stating a clear trajectory from legislation and public policies, so as to promote antidiscrimination, protection against violence against women, bullying for free adoption, surrogate motherhood, and other allegedly “shitty dreams” of social justice movements. “LGBTQI supporting lobbies want to **silence the mainstream** and morally impoverish families and innocent children”. Homophobic posts and conversations rarely remain separated from sexist and anti-gender conversations, and often serve as tools to express hatred against leftist political forces and traditions of thought.

#### 4.2.4 Spain

We expected potentially homophobic attacks in Spain to target LGBTQI groups and their public supporters due to the wide-ranging discussions about recently adopted policies. First, *Vox*’s so-called ‘**Parental Pin**’ policy in Murcia region has sparked significant debates across the country. It requires the permission and consent of the child’s parents to engage in activities related to ethical, social, civic, moral, or sexual values at school. That means that the child’s parents must consent to educational talks, including **sexual education** led by LGBTQI organizations. The policy was established by the local government in Murcia at their schools through an autonomic resolution. The resolution

was later suspended by the Administrative Chamber of the Murcia Superior Court of Justice, but the debate continues.

A review of the posts and analysis of the conversations shows that homophobic discourses do not directly target LGBTQI people. Instead, they confront LGBTQI organizations as groups with a political voice. Behind the homophobic posts, the political goal seems to be paramount, which is to **deny the legitimate place of political forces** and politicians mobilizing with and for LGBTQI equality agendas. The observed posts and comments most often accuse LGBTQI groups of **taking advantage of state funds**. Stronger voices see them as thieves of the state treasury and condemn the government's preference for them with different types of subsidies. In these arguments, neoliberal ideas serve to underpin the role of the state that should simply guarantee the freedom of its citizens. Furthermore, the phrase 'LGBTQI lobby' is used with a clear intention to propagate the image of these groups as '*chiringuitos*' (kiosks), i.e., outlets established to drain public money. A mocking tone is used to undermine the dignity and legitimacy of these groups in politics. It is also ridiculed that free choice of gender or sex identity is based on free will, "while, most importantly, it feeds on collecting state subsidies".

Supportive comments dominate the conversations under these posts. As well as echoing accusations about public funding, users also criticize **sexual diversity education** saying how much sex between siblings as a form of liberation from heteropatriarchy troubles them. Here, irony and mockery are the primary tools of communication, but sometimes it turns to blunt talk of **pedophilia** or pederasty. In addition, LGBTQI groups along with feminist groups are blamed in various messages for the spread of the COVID pandemic in Spain.

#### 4.2.5 Sweden

As for potentially homophobic speech, the most targeted issue in Sweden is the annual **Pride parade and festival**. Another nodal point in the inquiry is the controversy surrounding a male **homosexual politician**. Finally, we looked at the issue of **transgender participation in sports**, following a statement by a representative of a national sports organization. Many potentially homophobic posts revolve around the concept of '**indoctrination**', which suggests that LGBTQI **values are forced upon people** who are deceived or manipulated. Another path of reasoning is that sexuality is a matter to be kept private. Furthermore, homosexuality is associated with bestiality. Finally, *the Party* urges the government to cut economic aid to so called 'homophobic states' with a 'xenophobic twist'. This can be interpreted as a way of appearing politically correct (passively supporting LGBTQI rights) while using this as a legitimizer for a hidden xenophobic agenda. As regards actors, ideas and social acts described as threats, risks, and dangers to 'normal' values of society are present as well in posts.

In the conversations we analyzed, heterosexuality and cis normativity are posited as authoritative norms and everything that deviates from that is perceived as unnatural. **Homosexuality is supposed to be connected with pedophilia** as a form of serious sexual offense. It is argued that some people are given too much space in relation to their importance or status in society. Some commenters distinguish between LGBTQI people and **organizations that support LGBTQI rights**. The latter are seen as threats to society.



Transgenderism is also described as a threat to society as a risk against fair and equal conditions in sports.

Compared to other themes, anti-gender- and homophobic/transphobic posts were the easiest to find. Claims for justice and equal conditions are central values in both anti-gender and homophobic messages. While sexist discourse initiates personal attacks and belittles individuals, homophobic discourse focuses on groups of people, their excessive visibility, and rights.

#### 4.2.6 Summary on homophobic speech

The issues of potentially or supposedly detrimental effects of **same-sex marriage**, extended **reproductive rights**, and **sexual education** of LGBTQI matters in schools, on 'normal' families and society at large are discussed in all countries. In some of the countries where non-heterosexual partnership, family models, and gender identity have gained stable social support, right-wing homophobic talks seem less intensive than in the other two topics (in Germany). In the other countries, populist right-wing actors are more visibly and actively involved in public discussions (and policy making) around sexual orientation and gender identity (Hungary, Italy, and Spain).

It is salient in all countries that **LGBTQI individuals are not targeted directly** or at all. It is LGBTQI activism and rights advocacy groups which are posited as harmful and destructive enemies (Hungary, Italy, Sweden), or it is argued that LGBTQI activists rob public funds to support their activities (Spain). The alleged indoctrination of children by so-called 'LGBTQI propaganda' is also a recurring fear in social media talks (Germany, Hungary, Spain, Sweden). Furthermore, it is widely argued that '**LGBTQI values**' are **incompatible** with the values of (Christian) majority norms (Italy, Hungary). The strongest forms of hate speech claim that anything that diverges from the mainstream overlaps with social deviance or serves as its hotbed. Some populist right-wing actors connect **homosexuality and pedophilia** in all countries.

### 4.3 Antigenderism

#### 4.3.1 Germany

The topic of anti-genderism surfaced in several events and public debates of multiple facets. Regarding the debate on **gender-sensitive/non-discriminatory language**, first, in October 2020, Minister of Justice Christine Lambrecht published a draft law that only uses feminine forms when describing people to show women are misrepresented in German. The law was rejected, but discussions are ongoing. Second, there were debates about the formal **recognition of the third gender** as an option in personal documents that sparked concern and resistance from AfD (Gavrilis, 2018). Finally, conservative and right-wing actors publicly denounce the alleged '**early sexualization**' of children insinuating the dissemination of 'transgender propaganda' in education and care

institutions and calling for the protection of the traditional family based on heterosexual relationships (e.g., Ahrbeck & Felder, 2020).

Discussions on **gender-equitable language** are particularly hot in the social media in Germany as part of gender mainstreaming policies. Nearly 14% of all posts and almost 40% within the issue of anti-gender talk about it. Politicians who advocate gender-equitable language are pathologized and defamed as “complete idiots” or as having “cerebral shrinkage” in certain posts. In addition to agitation, trivialization and defamation, buzzwords such as ‘gender gaga’, ‘gagaists’ and ‘gender mania’ are used, which are also picked up by users. This can be explained by the fact that the structure of omnipresent genderism attracts a relatively wide range of different groups from “concerned parents”, to Christians, and masculinists and is a well-established enemy image construct (Lang, 2015, p. 167). Alarming, there are almost exclusively approving comments under these posts. Conversations among commenters are usually not among the top 100 comments. It is notable that the opponents of gender-equitable language see themselves as victims of a so-called dictatorship of opinion.

Posts on ‘**early sexualization**’ are rather less frequent but elicit a particularly large number of defamatory comments and the largest proportion of hate speech in the narrow sense. As part of AfD’s family policy, agitation is launched against any form of sex education for young children. In addition to the implicit insinuation of the proximity of ‘left-wing social educators’ to pedophilia, it is conspiratorially assumed that many parents probably do not know what is happening ‘there’, otherwise they would not allow sexual education programs. In the conversations, insinuations of violence and calls to punish those responsible for wrongdoings against children are apparent. A particularly large number of rumors and elements of conspiracy theories can also be identified in these posts, ranging from well-known topic-independent conspiracy paradigms such as the so-called “BRD-GmbH”, references to “the new world order”, a population exchange through migrants from West Asia to newer narratives such as QAnon. Moreover, there is an established connection between ‘early sexualization’ and pedophilia, which, in addition to homosexual persons, is claimed to be primarily associated with Greens.

Although almost two-thirds of the posts and tweets studied relate to current events in Germany and the world, only a few were posted on AfD federal account, while the majority is from external actors, first and foremost from *Junge Freiheit*. However, posts from AfD and its politicians are particularly strong in terms of reach and resonance. Regarding the type of hate speech, more than a third are implicit hate speech, some have agitating elements (HSB), but most importantly, the number of primarily defamatory posts is above-average compared to the other issues. Conspiracy elements can also be found in 16 posts.

#### 4.3.2 Hungary

We categorized the posts as antigenderism in which the anti-gender speech element is profound and overrides other potentially sexist or homophobic references. We identified three subthemes in this category, according to how the concept of ‘gender’ is understood and deployed, however, these categories are less clear-cut than the subtopics of the previous themes. Topic-wise, the posts reflect the recent anti-gender campaigns of the government. The posts from parties and politicians often seem to provide a tolerance-

based argument for meeting the mission of conservative politics, which is *to protect* an unambiguous order of nature, when addressing the antinomy of children's rights, the rights to privacy (in sexuality) or free speech. These political actors craft their posts within the boundaries of political communication of hate speech potentials. In the meantime, external actors' communication acts are vehement and passionate, primarily *attacking* rather than protecting. Outlets producing the most radical and influential posts promote anti-gender scholarships and thick volumes which are hardly to the interest of the wider public.

Some posts in our gender sample are about **women's rights**, and their 'anti-gender' language tends to undermine the concept and practice of 'equality between men and women'. These posts refer to the flagship topic of the government's anti-gender campaign, the rejection of the Istanbul Convention (IC). *Alapjogokért*'s 'stop gender/feminism' post, in which they list 5 anti-feminist claims including the refusal of the IC, is an example of the interconnectedness of sexist and anti-women's-rights speech. The analysis of comments under this post reveals that it is not perceived in anti-women's-rights terms. Supporting voices either discard the IC for the neglect of and violence against men, or claim that the Hungarian government fulfills women's rights, but 'gender-propaganda' – also promoted by the IC – aims to destroy the biological division between men and women. Dissenting voices either denounce the post (together with *Fidesz*'s gender politics) as 'misogynist' and/or point to the misinterpretation of gender in the IC and the other comments.

In the second group of posts, gender is understood as '**gender identity**'. Their anti-gender speech targets transsexuality by way of arguing for the unchangeable nature of "biological sexes" and rejecting "socially constructed genders". Judit Varga, Minister of Justice is a pioneer in speeches of this kind and this is the most common way the government generally attacks 'gender'. Several posts are connected with the amendment to the constitution that declares that in Hungary, "the mother is a woman, the father is a man," which was adopted in the fall of 2020. The justification of this phrase was to ensure that children can develop an identity "identical to their biological sex". A common rhetorical tool in these posts is irony and ridiculing, for instance, when referring to "newer and newer theories" or "hundreds of kinds of genders". The analysis of comments reveals that the most common refusal of 'gender-theory' or 'gender-ideology' is the perception that dubious forces are forcing Hungarians to deny the biological definition of sexes. However, comments under Ms. Varga's posts show an overwhelmingly negative reception. In one case, the comment thread begins with condemning the government's politics concerning women, but in spite of disagreement, the conversation did not radicalize. Instead, commenters point out that the post simply fuels hatred and exclusion. It was clear to this rather highly educated and well-informed audience, that 'gender' was used as a swearword to intentionally create enemies and polarize society in government communication.

Finally, in some posts, gender is understood as an element of the '**equality machinery**' that allegedly restricts freedom of speech (the so-called "PC dictatorship" or "cancel culture"), destroys national sovereignty by forcing the implementation of policies rooted abroad, and advocates for special rights for minorities instead of protecting the majority from what they perceive as alien, abnormal or unhealthy. This category of anti-genderism revolts against emancipatory movements of stigmatized or minority groups, as shown in an ironic video published by a propaganda site about the BLM movement. Moreover, they reject the entire policy of equality, shattering the various policy instruments, while the most radical voices propose that gender ideology should be considered a crime. A

*Fidesz* post, quoting Orbán's statement on 'the gender debate', claims that majority rights must be protected from aggressive minorities who demand new rights, instead of being grateful to a society that tolerates them. Conversations under this post range from a relatively balanced debate to unconditional support. However, an interesting phenomenon is the personalization of anti-gender speech, creating new expressions, such as 'gender-activists', 'gender-propagandists' or 'unscientific academics'. These are used to tie the message to a tangible social group. It is noteworthy that comments do not call for violence. A more alarming outcome of the analysis is the extent to which supporting voices approve and normalize anti-equality speech.

### 4.3.3 Italy

Potential anti-genderism occurs in the Italian public sphere in strong connection with certain **gender equality measures**, thus, we expected that most of the discussions on gender-related policies would provoke such reactions on our selected actors' social media pages. An example here is the proposed modification of the **anti-discrimination law**, especially the possible amendments regarding 'gender identity'. Additionally, the discussions around the declined policy of referring to parents as 'Parent1-Parent2', instead of 'mother-father' in identity documents of children are also noteworthy.

Regarding **the parenting debate**, one of Salvini's FB posts resulted in 31,685 reactions out of which 14,000 were angry and 15,000 liked the post. Some of the comments under this post took the chance and attacked the female Minister of the Interior (Lamorgese) including violent proposals (for example, "send her to the electric chair"). In another post, Giorgia Meloni was able to turn around a video criticizing and ridiculing her into 11 million views. She dared to share the video on her own Facebook page claiming that she is an exemplary woman, mother, and Christian. She presents this speech act as the defense of human rights against the tyranny of the Parent1-Parent2 concept, which is allegedly directed to erase people's identities and roots and reduce them to 'parent 1s' and 'parent 2s'. In a more explicit way, posts of *Pro Vita & Famiglia* not only denounced the government's equality policies but also took a stand against gay couples and single parent families.

Both Salvini and Meloni are active in political communication regarding the above topics. They often connect **anti-genderism with illegal immigration** and the criticism of left-wing and feminist political forces. The analyzed conversations embrace the general theme of fear of 'gender ideology' for its destructive consequences.

Our social media observations revealed that anti-gender communication is more frequent on FB than on Twitter and the potentially hate speech related posts are mainly written by politicians and external actors. The messages that constitute hate speech in the broader sense can be found on the profiles of external actors and rarely on the pages of politicians. It is equally important to recall that in Italy anti-genderism issues are fundamental mobilizing discourses of the right-wing parties and some Catholic movements. These actors do not seem to be bothered by the fact that their posts/tweets generate critical comments, which occasionally reach the intensity of hate speech. Their most important objective is to obtain high number of likes and shares.

#### 4.3.4 Spain

In Spain, antigenderism has been the subject of three types of public discussions. The first one concerns the **functioning of the Ministry of Equality**, as the representative body of public gender policies. As the ministry is headed by a female politician, Irene Montero, intersections with sexist speech were to be expected. One of the issues involved is a bill that is known in the wider public as the ‘Trans-Law’ because it recognizes the right to ‘gender identity’, and the change of sex to minors over 12 years of age. The proposal would allow access to assisted reproductive techniques to lesbians, bisexual, single women, and trans people. Furthermore, it prohibits any types of therapies aimed at modifying a person’s sexual orientation, identity, or gender expression. The anti-genderism discourse comes into play here because *Vox*’s prominent politicians claim that the law fosters the “ideological indoctrination” of young people.

The second topic of right-wing populist voices in this field is to stop the advance of feminist ideals and **women’s rights policies** that have recently been enacted in Spain. An example for this is that gender-based violence is questioned by arguing that “violence has no gender” and that this human conduct pertains to foreign people, not Spanish families. Another problem is abortion, in which the populist right-wing position speaks for women’s autonomy in abortion decisions, but it attacks public policies that guarantee women’s reproductive rights. It is noteworthy that female politicians in the *Vox* party play a prominent role in both anti-gender and sexist speeches. The gender equality infrastructure is questioned on several grounds in the analyzed posts and conversations. It is claimed that these represent **a waste of public funds**. The equality policy infrastructure is ridiculed by referring to it as “gender kiosks” (“*chiringuitos de género*”), and calling the Ministry of Equality, (*Ministerio de Igualdad*) ‘Ministry of Equal-“Whatever”’ (*Ministerio de "Igual-dá"*). It is noteworthy that it is mostly male politicians, who tend to focus on how the state invests its resources.

Gender theories (often referred to as ‘gender ideology’) compose the thirds topic in anti-gender attacks. Theories and gender equality policies are associated with or transposed into **critiques of leftist and egalitarian politics**, ‘cultural Marxism’, and the international elite which control the media. High-ranking left-wing politicians are prime targets, including PM Pedro Sánchez, deputy PM Pablo Iglesias, and the most severe attacks are directed against the Minister of Equality, Irene Montero.

The observed conversations perpetuate the status quo of the traditional family and attempt to dismiss theories that endanger it. Most comments appeal to **pseudo-scientific explanations** of gender and sex. Some make fun of the possibility given in German legislation to opt for a third, neutral gender. Gender ‘indoctrination’ of children in schools is portrayed to promote pedophilia in contrast with the objectives of the Parental Control Device popularized by *Vox* (see above, in 4.2.4.). It is proposed that **women already have excessive rights** and privileges over men. The feminist movement is portrayed as incoherent and often labelled as ‘junk feminism’. The argument that **violence has no gender** is reverberated in several conversations. It is mentioned that there are many false data in reports on gender violence. The posts enact hate speech in the broad sense but the tones of the comments occasionally turn into direct incitement of hatred, i.e., HSN.

An academic interpretation of anti-gender discourse proposes that this rhetoric is being cultivated among social media influencers. These circles seem to be becoming something of a counter-cultural movement. There are male groups who are bothered by feminist ideas and their numbers are growing in Spain. Anti-gender opinion makers try to make them join their cause.

#### 4.3.5 Sweden

A broad range of events and issues has been targeted in the collected posts in relation to anti-genderism in Sweden. Subtopics include the right to abortion, the regulation of kindergartens, gender equality reports (or rather the lack of it), public arts and culture institutions and their choice of propaganda art pieces, the Feminist Party, gender equality policy, and the #metoo movement.

The research findings revealed that in the selected social media posts gender is posited as “**propaganda**” that promotes gender ideology, feminism, gender equality, quota requirements, and diversity in representation. Feminism is portrayed as the reason for the authorities being too “lax” in combatting sexual crimes. The notion of “failing feminism” is underscored by xenophobic arguments, i.e., gender equality is not embraced by migrant groups, for which both migrants and feminists can be blamed. Feminism and gender equality endeavors are viewed as something **forced upon people**. In another track of reasoning, actors are described as liars, ideas and social acts are described as false, illogical, or contradictory.

In the selected conversations, certain actors, ideas, and social acts are described as rule violators and violations. Some posts and comments describe feminism as something that **undermines law and order**, a civilized society, the rule of law and something that makes the criminal law system toothless. Some of the anti-gender related conversations depict feminism and gender equality endeavors as something **unfair or unjust**. This unfairness privileges women and oppresses men. The freedom of family units and freedom from state intervention in ‘private’ matters threatened by gender equality thinking is often voiced. Another way of attacking gender theory is to describe it as a passing trend, something that now just happens to be politically correct.

#### 4.3.6 Summary on antigenderism

The hate speech content of anti-genderist political discourse seems to be the most diverse field among the three in our research. On the one hand, this shows that the subfield offers a **goldmine for right-wing radical discourses and political mobilization**. On the other hand, unsurprisingly, it also shows, that the master term of gender and in particular anti-gender notions and contents function as superbly elastic representational, cognitive, and political tools. Some of the topical preferences in the relevant discourses are eminently connected and resonate with sexist and homophobic communication (see, in the conclusive section of the chapter). In the first two subfields, its advocates and representatives are the main targets, in the current subfield, paradigms, institutions, and organizations identified with gender equality.

In some countries, the **gender equality machinery** and its representatives are denounced (Italy, Spain) and public spending on this purpose is questioned. Gender equality is argued to give too much power to women and in other discursive flows, to be unfair towards men

(Spain, Sweden). Gender thinking is claimed to **empower** or is simply conflated with **aggressive leftist propaganda** (Hungary, Spain, Italy). Gender equality language is seen as harmful or ridiculous (Germany). ‘Gender ideology’ promulgates **early sexualization** of children which liberates them from paternal control and again makes them potential victims of pedophilia (Germany). Overstressing women’s rights **endangers the primacy of children’s rights** in some talks of various degrees of hate speech (Hungary). Gender equality promulgates free abortion and murdering unborn children (Italy, Spain). **Freedom of speech** is allegedly at risk due to gender thinking (Germany, Hungary, and Sweden). Finally, gender equality is again connected with the danger of illegal migration and xenophobic talks (Italy).

#### 4.3.7 Cross-references

The analysis of potentially hate generating political communication revealed both similarities and differences among the three major themes of anti-gender talks. Some of the topics and hate speech shaping techniques are specific to one of the themes, however, a strong intersectional linkage is evident in the material. The dominant theme (i.e., sexism, homophobia or antigenderism) varies, depending on the actual topic of the posts. Some bring up more than one theme, and the one and the same post can trigger different kinds of themes in different comments.

Potential hate speech related posts in **sexism and homophobia themes** are similar insofar that they argue that the targeted subjects are given too much space in relation to their importance or status in society, and often dwell on the enforceable division between public and private matters. However, while sexist discourse is more connected with personal attacks and the belittling of individuals, homophobic discourse is more about groups of people, their visibility in society, and their individual rights.

**Sexism and antigenderism** are strongly connected because the defamation of female politicians, the mocking of feminist advocates, and the delegitimization of certain policies on women’s rights may happen at the same time. Mostly, we categorized messages that focus on females as biological beings as sexist, while a focus on political and ideological expressions about societal order, and ideas about institutions and divisions of power as antigenderist. However, when personal attacks are directed towards a female public figure, who promotes values like diversity and equality, these attacks can also be seen as antigenderism because that person is a symbol of or carrier of ideas.

**Homophobia and antigenderism** intersect in matters that have to do with gender identity, LGBTQI activism, and are often manifested in what we previously have referred to as ‘the gender indoctrination theory’ or ‘gender/gay propaganda’. While some topics, like same-sex marriage or same-sex parenting, manifest clear homophobic opposition or non-heterosexual partnerships, other topics, such as sexual education in school, go beyond the attack of the social group and manifest fears that LGBTQI groups pose major challenge to the norms of mainstream society. The links often seen between homosexuality and pedophilia provide an additional justification to that.

A common way of framing in **all the themes** is to describe social justice claims as rule violations or people and groups as rule violators, which is used as a legitimizer for messages with potential hate content. References to alleged ‘truth’ and to an assumed ‘normal way of living is another legitimizer that is used in all themes. Gender theory,

feminism, sexuality, and ideas about diversity are viewed as threats against the very foundations of society, individual freedom, against conservative values and ways of living. Conspiracy theories, religious- and pseudo-scientific reasoning can also be found in all themes.

Finally, the analysis of the data shows frequent **links to topics outside the realm of gender**, such as anti-Islam or anti-immigration sentiments, an ethno-national worldview, or the de-legitimation of political opponents on a variety of grounds. This shows that populist right-wing actors effectively fuse gendered political communication with discontent in other areas and concerning other social groups to envision coherent, large-scale societal enemies.



## 5. Modes and Tools of Hate-Speech Production

### 5.1. The Occurrence and Type of Hate Speech in Different National Contexts

The research set off by acknowledging that the political communication of radical populist right-wing forces in social media is becoming a vast and multilayered field. Gendered political communication with hate speech potential includes discursive acts that rights-based thinking and academic discussions capture around three themes: sexism, homophobia, and antigenderism (see the previous chapter on thematic findings).

The GENHA team decided on the following theory and conceptual framework building process. In the beginning, we gathered insights from our research experiences related to political communication, equality politics, anti-gender mobilization, regulatory debates and experiments in social media fields, and other linked areas. We also consulted the relevant scholarly literature and conducted initial conceptual discussions across the consortium, parallel to immersing ourselves in data mining administered by a carefully selected social media listener tool. As part of the initial conceptual repertoire, we assumed that in social media communication, a post may set the tone in one of the hate speech types, but the flow of comments may generate a full-fledged communication which twists the original message and/or intensifies hostility and incitement to hatred. Therefore, the ways and effects of generating hate speech in social media communication should be explored through a detailed examination of conversations composed by the original posts and comments. Moreover, original posts often display, cite, and deploy messages from other media outlets, connecting different publics and discursive practices.

The initial conceptual discussions identified the following modalities of hate speech that guided our empirical explorations and analytical discussion of the gathered data. **Hate speech in the narrow sense** (HSN) calls for mild or more brutal physical violence, e.g., beating, punching, or rape against persons or groups, e.g., women LGBTQI persons, ‘gender-activists’, feminist politicians, etc., that argue for the representation of, identification with, etc., disqualified ideas, concepts, and values. **Hate speech in the broad sense** (HSB) is degrading speech that destroys the dignity of and calls for denying the right to social membership and belonging to the wider political community to those who claim, represent, and advocate gender equality, freedom in choosing sexual identities, and minority rights. **Hate speech potential** (HSP) dwells on a variety of topics, including women, gender, family, etc., involves essentialized and hierarchical gender roles, and denies intimate partnership beyond conservative heterosexual relations.

Furthermore, we differentiate between **explicit hate speech** content, when a clear indication or intent is displayed, and **implicit hate speech**, when a more ‘subtle’ language is used, and the intention remains undetectable. Although hate speech in the narrow sense is almost always accompanied by explicit calls for action, hate speech in the broad sense and political communication with hate speech potential may use both forms. Thus, this division is not an indicator of the intensity of hate speech, but further characterizes the linguistic-communicative act that can be classified into the types proposed above. Based on these concepts, the country teams analyzed the material collected and interpreted the speech acts in the way they found most accurate. Before presenting the communication strategies and technologies specific to social-media, as well as refined modes of

communicating hate speech, the following are the main country-specific findings based on the initial concepts.

In **GERMANY** no hate speech in the narrow sense can be identified in post-level communication, but there are examples of that type among comments. The most cases of hate speech in the broad sense relate to posts of AfD and AfD politicians. These speech acts primarily denounce gender mainstreaming or agitate against political opponents (regardless of the political topic). The posts of external actors are more subtle and are of HSP or mixed type if they include HSB elements. Here, calls against abortion or non-heteronormative life models are the most salient, but defamation of LGBTQI communities is also frequent.

The analysis of the conversations revealed that regardless of the intensity of hate speech and the rhetorical means used in the post, no discernible differences in the reactions of social media users can be identified. Instead, it depends on the respective topic to what extent user reactions include elements of hate speech. We noticed that the thematization of 'physical' and 'psychological' violence in the posts provokes stronger reactions among users, some of them explicitly or implicitly inciting physical violence. The leading topics are: (1) the so-called 'early sexualization' framed as 'psychological' violence against children, (2) racialized violence, and (3) the discourse of abortion as infanticide. These target (1) educators and politicians, who implement sex education in schools, (2) Muslims and Muslim men along with left-liberal parties that stand for immigration policies, and (3) civil and political advocates of reproductive rights.

In **HUNGARY**, the typical hate speech modality in the domain of sexism is political communication strategically pitched against oppositional women politicians and their agendas. Among the political actors, the most violent posts are offered by KDNP [Christian Democratic Party], the satellite party of *Fidesz*. The harshest user comments combine the intention of exclusion with sexist language. Alarming, some of the HSN comments on sexism target oppositional women, and proposed kicking, beating, and raping. This is also the area where the least amount of dissent is to be observed, while comments on posts promoting conservative ideals for women are dominated by counter-arguments and have remained contested.

In homophobia-focused political talks, LGBTQI activists and left-liberal political actors are prime targets due to their allegedly 'aggressive and ruthless' promotion of 'deviant values'. Conservative-minded professionals are supported in their reasoning and often claimed to be the targets of leftist critics. In the homophobic conversations analyzed, a more simplistic and often ruder, and more educated and sophisticated communication can be identified among users. The first one was triggered by a young female politician of the new far-right party *Mi Hazánk*. In this case, the homophobic exchanges get combined with, and even overwritten by sexist talk, with which the participants target the politician and even each other. The second conversation type, initiated by (pro-)government actors, is dominated by well-argued counterpoints and the conversation remains tame. In the articulations of the most salient positions, there is a major overlap between LGBTQI and anti-gender themes. Explicit hate speech cannot be found in the posts of the highest leaders of ruling regime, but more so in the posts of media outlets, GOs, NGOs, and other affiliates of the ruling parties. These target leftists, liberals, academics, and government critics. The endorsement and normalization of the anti-equality agenda seems to be more alarming than the use of direct attacks or offensive language.

In **ITALY**, many of the qualitatively analyzed posts contain elements of hate speech in the broad sense, while only a few use very explicit communication that is verging on hate speech in the narrow sense. The use of indignation, concern and fear are clear communicative strategies used by all actors analyzed in this report to target political opponents (in the case of Salvini and Meloni), or feminists, the LGBTQI community, and migrants (in the case of each actor analyzed).

Political leaders in Italy tend to be less direct in their communication than non-institutional actors. Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni use forms of hate speech in a broad sense: instead of directly triggering hatred, they subtly suggest to their followers what to think about a certain topic. The *Pro Vita & Famiglia* movement often uses communication shortcuts to instill fear and concern through simplistic and manipulative messages about the anti-gender and homophobic themes. Words like ‘monstrosity’, ‘indoctrination’, ‘re-education’, and ‘shameful’ are semantic shortcuts that make readers feel influenced by certain emotions and images. The cases cited magnify the alleged ‘risk’ that children and young people are exposed to. They suggest that if a particular equality law uses the concept of ‘gender’, children will be subject to ‘indoctrination’.

In **SPAIN**, the most common targets are gender theories, gender public policies, the Ministry of Equality (specifically the female minister), and *Vox*'s main competitor, the political party *Unidas Podemos*. Furthermore, anti-immigration advocacy and sexism are reconciled, as some actors portray immigrants as rapists, whereas they call themselves as the higher guardians of women.

Individual politicians rarely produce direct hate speech. Their means are irony, implicit or indirect criticism against gender theories, feminism or LGBTQI groups. Their messages are amplified when retweeted or commented on by the political party's official Twitter and Facebook accounts. These official accounts have the biggest number of followers and thus exert the biggest impacts. By contrast, external actors (*Vox* members without a parliamentary mandate, youtubers, freelance journalists, and an NGO) produce more explicitly hate speech messages on Twitter and Facebook than official politicians. They are the ones who dare to be more violent as well, occasionally producing texts that are on the verge of hate speech in a narrow sense. They do not cooperate explicitly with the Catholic Church or any other religion, but they do use some arguments endorsed by religious groups, like opposition to sex education in schools or to the right to choose gender identity. The ultimate goal and effect of anti-gender hate speech seems to link a whole range of conservative actors.

In **SWEDEN**, there is hate speech in the broad sense in all themes including conversations and comments. Sexist and homophobic discourses seem to attack specific bodies or groups of bodies, whereas anti-gender messages, typically address ideas and ideology (instead of specific bodies). Anti-gender messages are most commonly political communication. Furthermore, anti-gender, homophobic and sexist messages are often combined with expressions of xenophobia.

Most of the analyzed conversations are rooted in events that are local and country-specific but most of the conversations are of the nature that they could have occurred in another contexts. It is interesting that many HSP posts trigger HSN (often also HSB) comments. This means that seemingly ‘neutral’ messages may trigger hatred. Typical HSB

comments of all themes (1) make remarks about people's level of intelligence and mental status, (2) say that people should be locked up, put into prison, disposed of, or urge other limitations on their freedom of movement, and 3) include condescending names and epithets. These are all different ways of social exclusion or denying social membership. In some cases, the conversation is more like a debate with clearly opposing voices among the supporting speakers, but apart from a single exception, 'real debates' are rather short-lived.

**Overall**, a few basic findings are relevant to all countries. First, the content and style of communication ranges from subtle and sophisticated statements and messages to explicit and harsh attacks on enemies carefully selected and vilified. However, radical populist complexes today seem to differ from old far-right parties insofar that they avoid directly violent messages. Hate speech in the narrow sense is practically absent from the posts of our studied actors, although it is present to varying extents among comments. Second, the borderline between political communication and hate speech in the broad sense is in most cases fuzzy and strongly context dependent. Most posts studied are situated on the borderline between hate speech in the broad sense and political communication with hate speech potential.

Third, although there is no general pattern concerning the hate-speech potential among actors, there seems to be a division of labor between political parties, politicians, and their loyal external partners. Certain vocal political actors are gently setting the agenda, while other, less central politicians, influencers, media outlets and organizations elaborate on the intended messages and often use more explicit language. Fourth, radical populist complexes seem to override the 'bubble' of their strong supporters. The analysis revealed that both supporting and dissenting voices were used to engage in the conversations below the posts. Lastly, hate speech content seems to appear on both Facebook and Twitter. We have not identified any clear pattern or tendency on the intensity of hate speech per platform.

## 5.2. Social Media Specific Communication Strategies and Technologies

All national research reports highlight that radical right-wing voices use distinct communication strategies, along with visual and textual tools to craft their messages. We have found that the message making methods emerging in social media both rely on well-known communication tropes adapted to social media, and experiment with innovative methods enabled by the new types of communication platforms. These strategies are used not only to avoid the removal of posts and the suspension of social media accounts, but to normalize hatred as legitimate political communication.

Textual content rarely stands alone in posts, instead the **message is accompanied by an image, a video, or a link to external content**. The latter most often entails citing party-owned '**alternative' media pages**<sup>86</sup>, or sites created by their closest allies. Radical populist right-wing actors use these social media tools in two main ways. The images, videos, and links are used to help political actors better understand public affairs, on the one hand, and to denigrate or mock the targeted individuals, groups, or ideas, on the other.

---

<sup>86</sup> Note, that for *Fidesz* and external actors in Hungary, this means government-controlled mainstream media.

As in other domains of broader societal communication, political actors **amplify, simplify, and inscribe complicated messages** using images to promote their ideas. **Infographics** are especially impactful in turning complex ideas into quickly processable messages. This flyer-style format uses visuals to support explanations and display information in a certain way. A more advanced tool of this type combines infographics with motion to create interactive animated videos. While normally the use of infographics may ease the quick understanding of public affairs, according to our observations, they rather manipulate information to back up certain claims. The colorful shapes are eye-catching, while the texts are presented in expert voices, without proper reference.

Politicians often present or embed self-referential videos or **pictures of themselves**, and sometimes parties also promote their politicians by posting an image and a quote from the person to magnify the message. Politicians pose with pride in these images, combining charisma with the image of a caring mother/father. Other times videos of parliamentary speeches are shown to project the image of a competent politician. Self-promotional images add authenticity to messages by personifying political agendas. However, this can also backfire as the Hungarian case shows, where the efforts of highly emancipated female politicians to promote conservative gender roles by posing as good mothers or housewives, have led to significant resentment by users.

Videos and pictures are also used to **denigrate or ridicule targeted actors**, groups, or ideas and to promote alternative views. A special type of these posts is the so-called **'meme'**, which is the combination of an image and a short humorous text, often used to mock political opponents or political ideas. Sexism-related posts are a particularly good terrain for using distorted images, and when 'memes' are involved, they are very difficult to find with a regular social media listening tool, as in this research. A well-selected disparaging picture helps deepen the defamation of female political opponents, even if the text of the post is seemingly only critical of certain policies espoused by the targeted politician. Meanwhile, a contrasting communication style is also present. In Spain, female *Vox* members are champions of spreading sexist messages. The most representative and visible female members of *Vox* on social platforms share some physical characteristics: very attractive women, with long dark hair and elegant dresses, epitomizing the stereotype of Spanish feminine beauty.

**Visual and blended representations on social media often rely on synecdoche**, i.e., the presentation of a feature or part of an object, idea, or institution as a sign of the whole. It can create concise meanings on different types of social media platforms. When the part is posited as the essence of the whole, sophisticated distortions can be induced about the sense and overall qualities of the whole. **Social stereotypes** are synecdochic statements in which group members are identified with their particular group or a characteristic of the group, usually for the purpose of making quick judgments about people (Lakoff, 1987, p. 79; Gibbs, 1999, pp. 61-76). Instead of direct dehumanizing, stereotyping is used to devalue certain groups by assigning certain attributes to them in posts or comments. Examples include when quotas in Germany are discredited as patronage politics (a framework for corruption) and female politicians are portrayed as incompetent or when Muslim men are described as threats to Italian women.

Certain topics, however, particularly but not only connected to antigenderism, do not allow clearly identifiable targets. In these cases, more complex reasoning must be turned into simplified messages by shifting the focus from abstract concepts, ideas, or

worldviews to **tangible actors**. In many cases, political opponents serve as easy targets, a strategy that creates a fine line between an attack on an idea or promoted policy and an attack on a person. The Minister of Equality in Spain demonstrates this well, as it is often difficult to decide whether she is targeted as a female politician, or the ideas and policies advanced by her Ministry, or both.

Radical populist right-wing communication creates targets through **personalization**. Oftentimes authors only hint at “those promoting LGBTQI values” or “those behind gender propaganda”, and only in extreme cases do they clearly state that the problem is with LGBTQI/human rights activists, human rights civil society or politicians and educators involved in sexual education. The impersonation of targets is often done through images that magnify outliers of the given social group or depict peaceful protesters as a chaotic or even violent mob. Finally, there are examples of linguistic innovations, such as coining or paraphrasing the notion of “gender-gagaists” in Germany.

Certain communication tools seem to be directly used to **avoid the accusation of inciting hatred**. One of them is when post makers do not finish their sentences or paragraphs by asking the audience to engage in meaning-making, but also suggest that the missing part is obvious - there is no need to spell it out. Certain actors use **rhetorical questions** to stretch imagination and trigger debate among commenters to posts. These techniques also serve to avoid the use of expressions that would be considered hate speech in the narrow sense. Another relatively simple tool is to violate the original protocol of social media communication and **use capital letters** to reinforce an important part of the message. Furthermore, the overuse of **double quotation marks** is also recurrent, aimed at ambiguating the legitimacy of commonly used terms. Last but not least, the use of **emojis** (small pictograms) is also widespread as a way to trigger emotions, without the need to verbally communicate the authors’ standpoints. Emojis are specifically used to underscore irony and sarcasm, a common and central engine in populist right-wing communication.

The degree of **referentiality** visible in the frequently shared content, shows that the actors are well connected. External influencers tweet party content, politicians retweet influencers' content, and politicians guest post on external media but also back up their posts with articles from alternative media or right-wing media refer to party communications and actions. Frequent resharing, the use of hashtags, and the ‘trending topics’ feature on Twitter and more recently Facebook, greatly facilitate the rapid and widespread distribution and prolonged visibility of content. Moreover, cross-referencing also serves to weaken or undermine the responsibility of authorship of too sharp or inconvenient messages, the outcome of which is still desirable.

Across all country teams included in our research, we observe that several right-wing influencers and messengers, and their domestic complex as such, **invite both supporting and dissenting voices** in the political communication they induce. This directly enhances their traffic via comments, reactions, and shares, and involves the divided public to come into one communication space temporarily. Whereas this may contribute to political debate, deliberation, and most importantly for our agenda, to the fight against hate speech, dissenting voices unintentionally support the importance and communicative power of radical voices. The dynamic is that provocation yields to counter-voice and this intensifies hate related communication. This works well for the enemy seeking media presence as the ultimate goal is not to persuade the hesitant but to achieve greater visibility. The

**tagging of individuals** is likely to serve this purpose as well, as in several cases, we noticed that political opponents or even objects of communicative attacks are tagged in the posts of radical populist actors. By inviting followers of the attacked person, a larger and more polarized debate can take place.

### 5.3. Modes of Hate Speech Communication

Drawing on our initial conceptual framework and country-specific findings on actors, themes, and the initially defined types of hate speech, we now highlight the most important modes of communication of selected populist right-wing actors that, in our understanding, potentially trigger hate speech. To facilitate the processing of the empirical data, a spreadsheet has been created that may be interpreted as the expansion and refinement of the initial categorization of hate speech types and the preparatory work of the German team, outlined in Chapter 1. **Table 5.1** presents a scheme for capturing and analyzing social media communication modes that enact different types of anti-gender hate speech, as well as the different types of hate speech targets. The scheme relies on Wilhelm, Jöckel, and Ziegler (2020), the initial proposal of the GENHA German team, and the findings of the GENHA consortium.

**Table 5.1 Modes of hate speech communication**

Hate Speech Type	Target	Mobilization path	Description
Hate speech narrow (HSN)	Individuals Groups Organizations	Call for violence	Statements that mention violent acts, incite, or legitimize violence.
Hate speech broad (HSB)	Individuals Groups Organizations	Call for the restriction of rights and for exclusion	Speech acts that question and undermine the public visibility and rights to speak, organize, and participate in politics of targeted individuals, groups, and organizations.
	Individuals Groups Organizations	Defamation	Statements that contain insults and slurs or are worded in a derogatory manner. In extreme cases, dehumanizing in a direct manner.
	Groups Organizations Concepts	Call for protecting the mainstream	Swop majority-minority relations, the normal and conservatives, revolt against alleged oppression, in extreme case reverse victim-perpetrator relations.
	Groups Organizations	Delegitimation	Provocative statements on political or social problems to steer public

	Concepts		interest, often adopting a discriminatory and prejudiced perspective in the process. Post-truth talks.
Hate speech potential (HSP)	Individuals Groups Organizations Concepts	Othering	Indirect, subtle statements that present social groups, their sub-groups or members and alternative forms of living, loving, and acting as strange, inexplicable, etc.
Broad political communication	-	-	Self-asserting statements on one's own cultural and moral value system and mode of life.

Based on the results of the GENHA research, we propose that **target groups** and **tools of reasoning** help to set the intensity of emotions, convictions, enhancement, potentials of the respective **mobilization path**, while new technologies offered by social media enhance the amplification of the communication.

First, according to our findings, a **continuum of targets** can be drawn from individuals to paradigms, involving attacks on micro, meso and macro levels. Individual targets bear particular properties and identities. They are always named public figures, like a member of a political party, a feminist/LGBTQI or other human rights activist, who participate in a political action, or an intellectual, who is engaged with public affairs on professional grounds. Groups as targets bear self-assigned or externally imposed characteristics. Notably, the attacks studied in the GENHA research are almost never directed against larger social groups, such as women, or homosexuals in general, but rather against specific sub-groups, such as ‘metoo advocates’ or ‘rainbow families’, but first and foremost, activists of emancipatory movements, such as feminists or LGBTQI activists. Organizations are similarly attacked on the basis of advocating for and representing specific groups. This may include various civil society organizations, but also governmental bodies, such as the Ministry of Equality. Finally, attacks against concepts are stemming from the conscious misinterpretation and demonization of abstract and complex ideas, for example, the strategic conflation of gender equality with the innocuous terms of ‘propaganda’ and ‘ideology’.

Specific types of political communication are combined with specific targeting strategies, ultimately leading to the generation of hate speech. Most communicative modes can be used to attack various types of targets. Hate speech narrow can be launched against individuals and groups, while when calls are made to protect the mainstream from allegedly dangerous minorities, it is groups and ideas that are attacked. In several cases, the open-ended or multiple direction of the speech acts makes it difficult to distinguish the primary target. When a speech act implements othering, it dwells on groups and their members. Within different modalities, the nature, intensity, and appeal of the types of hate speech can be different for different targets.

Second, when hate speech acts in a broad sense, some **distinctive tools of reasoning** are used, such as humor, rumor, conspiracy-based, (pseudo)-scientific, and religious explanations. Most noteworthy is **humor** that is used by nearly all actors in all countries. Funny posts are all over the social media platforms of parties, politicians, and external



actors, however, the humor employed in these posts is of a particular style: based on irony, sarcasm, occasionally even cynicism and used to mock political opponents or ridicule certain ideas. This humor is often directly denigrating or invites denigrating comments. ‘Gender’, ‘gender equality’ or ‘gender studies’ are very often depicted as worthless and futile also through humorous reasoning.

Another tool of reasoning is invoking **rumors or conspiracy theories** to spread “unconfirmed allegations directed against social, cultural, or ethnic groups or their members” (Wilhelm et al., 2019, p. 5). This tool of reasoning is often used in provocative and sensationalist posts to magnify extreme cases of human rights, feminists or LGBTQI activists, to disqualify entire groups or the general demands of these movements. This is the case when *Alapjogokért*, a pro-government think-tank in Hungary, shares the scandalous story of a dubious ‘Swedish feminist’ who allegedly called Volvo and complained that its long-used logo was ‘sexist’. The post was meant to discredit feminist claims by referring to a salient case, even though no source was provided where the story came from. Besides posts, it is also common among comments, when users try to defend their point by alluding to unspecified “Brussels bureaucrats” or simply say, “I have heard/read that...”

**Scientific explanations** are also frequently used by the radical populist right-wing complexes in our research. Two types of this reasoning are observed in the material. On the one hand, authors frequently refer to legitimate and mainstream scientific results in a selected way, emphasizing what is needed to back up certain arguments, but (consciously) disregarding disruptive details, or using scientific results for different purposes than originally stated. On the other hand, hobby-, or pseudo-scientific explanations are also presented as valid arguments, and persons without scientific standing are called ‘scientists’.

A post by the German *Initiative Familienschutz* summarizes Beatrix van Storch’s (AfD) interview with Prof. Kutschera, a controversial biologist. Kutschera is framed as an expert to prove that only the nuclear family can fulfill a child’s needs, while same-sex parenthood is abnormal, and that “men and women are not equal and consequently cannot be made equal by politics”. The hate speech comments respectively use references to biology to discredit same-sex relationships and parenthood. Besides, mainstream science is depicted as incorrect, and gender studies as non-scientific. In fact, it is a returning topic in scientifically alluding posts to contrast ‘gender studies’ or, even more broadly, the social sciences with the so-called ‘hard sciences’, especially ‘biology’, and claim that ‘biological facts’ do not justify claims of social movements.

Interestingly, references to **religion, in particular Christianity**, or simply the ‘natural order’, appear alongside the scientific explanations. This is more common in homophobic and anti-genderist posts, while less used in posts related to sexism. In Italy, where anti-abortion posts are the most frequent, there are many references to the “sacred sources” of all lives, to “children as God’s gift” and to possible consequences of disobeying to religious precepts. Posts and comments discrediting same-sex relationships are also making use of references to Italy as a county of ‘Christian values’ to posit that homosexuality is a sin, thus no further argument can be made to enhance LGBTQI rights.

Finally, the Swedish team recommends naming **‘the principle of truth’** as a distinct tool of reasoning in several posts that portray the author as truthful and the enemy as a liar. In these cases, following this reasoning seems to legitimize hate: a harsh message that hurts people can be justified if the message is grounded in the principle of truth, a liar deserves

some sort of punishment, people deserve to know the ‘truth’ about things and so the truth must be told. The principle of truth plays a part, for example, in homophobic messages that link pedophilia to homosexuality in Sweden. One of the posts is commentary to a news article that begins with the sentence: “This is the only leading article so far that speaks in plain language...”

Our final conceptual scheme identifies **seven types of political communication** by relying on and refining hate speech types defined at the outset of the research. We have found the hate speech narrow field to be precise and apt as originally stated. However, this category of speech is rarely enacted, whereas our data is rich in providing various examples of **hate speech broad**, we specified four cases within the latter field. Besides, we distinguished between communication with hate speech potential and broad political communication that presents self-assertive statements on one’s own cultural value system, norms, etc. by positing it as natural, respectable, socially benign, historically enabling, etc.

The **call for restriction of rights and exclusion** is a common and very harsh mode of anti-gender talks in our research findings. These speech acts and communication flows theorize, articulate, explain and justify different forms of delegitimizing individuals and groups, including their organizations, to undermine their visibility and participation in the wider political community. Although these speech acts do not call for physical violence, they are actively calling for the exclusion of people and their collectives from different domains of life and to lock them up in symbolic ghettos or other closed spaces.

A clear and very symbolic example of this is the video shared by government MPs on how they clapped into the speech of a female opposition politician in Hungary. The post celebrates this act as a legitimate way of silencing a critical voice, to which certain commentators have responded that she should be expelled from the parliament or the country. In Sweden, defamatory posts against female public figures also triggered such reactions. Certain users under a post that discussed a woman’s testimony of sexual harassment demanded that she should stop speaking out publicly, and one commentator suggested that “Every single #metoo-bitch should be locked up.”

**Defamation** is the act of harming the targets’ reputation by making untrue statements about them and attributing false claims to them. It is most often directed towards individuals, but also appears in relation to groups and organizations. It mostly occurs coupled with derogatory and offensive language. A key motive behind defamatory attacks is the devaluation of particular properties or identities. An extreme form of it is dehumanization through metaphorical or metonymical language, for instance, by comparing the target to animals or hominids. In Spain, criticism of the Vice President of the government goes as far as to portray him as the head of a harem. The female Secretaries of the State in this imaginary are depicted as members of the harem.

Another type of communication to be added to the conceptual scheme calls for actively **protecting the mainstream against ideas, groups, and individuals** who speak and act for gender equality, non-heterosexual intimate relations and families, egalitarian roles, and equal treatment to men and women. These speech acts argue that egalitarian and diversity advocates (often called ‘social justice warriors’) endanger or victimize mainstream conservative and conventional values, practices, and norms. For instance, it

is proposed that white heterosexual males are attacked by gender equality, feminist, and LGBTQI activism or state policies; those who fight hate are violent. Oppression is exercised by the minority, and the rights of the mainstream should be protected. The most powerful speech acts within this way of mobilization occur when radical voices reverse the perpetrator-victim and majority-minority relations.

The most frequent manifestation of this category of hate speech is the juxtaposition of children's rights with the rights of women and LGBTQI persons, as observed in all countries. The general logic of protecting the mainstream is also to be captured in the portrayal of the LGBTQI movement as 'noisy' and LGBTQI rights advocacy as purposefully 'stigmatizing the majority'. Likewise, violence against women has sparked much of this kind of communication, as if the recognition and treatment of gender-based and domestic violence would in fact discriminate against men. In Spain, *Vox* campaigns to introduce the 'Parental Pin' and claims that the healthy development of children has to be secured from the alleged harms of sexual education. The same party condemns gender-based violence by claiming that it goes against the presumption of innocence and criminalizes half of the Spanish population for 'being men'.

**Delegitimation** is a mode of communication aimed at diminishing or destroying the authority of an institution, at making a claim, a theory or an idea seem invalid or not acceptable, or at evoking trivializations, such as "Don't we have other problems in this country?". In the hassle of uncovering the "real face" of things, the authors of these types of posts refer to scientific or religious reasoning or simply 'normality'. Posts of this type often use an agitational tone. The often-recurring phase of 'gender indoctrination' in Sweden posits that 'gender theory' is 'propaganda' and gender equality state policies are threats against the free will of citizens. Similarly, same-sex couple's desire to become parents is at times interpreted as a 'right to entitlement'.

In more severe cases, delegitimation also involves attempts to normalize hierarchies as essential, given, and unchangeable, as well as the denial of equal worth. This is observed even when seemingly positive statements are made, such as "I don't have a problem as long as homosexuality is a private matter." Delegitimizing posts and comments are not necessarily using offensive language, in fact, their harm lies rather in positing inequality as normal. For instance, in a quote PM Orbán claimed that instead of "tolerating and accepting difference" Western societies "posit exceptions as part of the normal flow of life". Consenting comments under this post applied this logic in a variety of ways, for instance, one user wrote that "just because there are white blackbirds, we shouldn't teach our kids that the blackbird is a white bird".

Finally, in the **field of hate speech potential**, we propose to use the communication mode of **othering**. This type of speech involves ambiguous statements that present social groups and their sub-groups or members, most importantly politically active women, homosexuals, trans persons, and alternative forms of living, loving, and acting as strange or inexplicable. These statements frequently draw a line between in-group and out-group in a subtle way. The posts and comments are critical but do not recommend excluding anyone from social or physical space. Communication acts that magnify the scope and impacts of feminist or LGBTQI activism also belong here. In the German and the Hungarian data, 'othering' often occurs with nationalistic sentiments and attempts for an inclusive society are interpreted as unpatriotic acts.

## 6. Conclusions

The GENHA research has resulted in a number of observations that confirmed the main arguments of a growing cross-national scholarship on populist right-wing anti-gender talks. Furthermore, the research has offered results that may sharpen the knowledge on the production of hate speech in online media related to political ideology building, branding and mobilization. Finally, taken together, the selected countries offer a landscape of the political contexts in Europe in which right-wing anti-gender communication contributes to reshuffling politics and endangers democratic arrangements and equality achievements. All this together helps identify obvious and less obvious paths for further research.

As an overarching observation, all country-specific inquiries acknowledge that leading right-wing politicians, social media platforms, and ‘external’ voices show significant experimental drive, should that be instinctive or professionally supported, to craft messages that effectively provoke the (neo)liberal political infrastructures and promote counter-hegemonic norms. As the Spanish team argues, these social media operations, with their intensive and rule-breaking tools, may look as the 21<sup>st</sup> century reminiscences of the leftist or anarchist counterculture of former decades. Or more precisely, this is how they may appear in the eyes of the younger generation said to be less interested in liberal democratic political traditions (Forti, 2021).

By the same token, right-wing populist political communication bears some of the most essential properties of traditional political ideology building and public representation as discussed in earlier scholarship (e.g., Lakoff, 2002). For example, the exercise of ‘pathological stereotyping’ that traditional liberal and conservative parties and ideology producers pursued in earlier decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be easily traced in the observed social media conversations. Yet, whereas in former ideological debates stereotyping was meant to refer to the subverted and distorted version of the critiqued political ideas without engaging in deep moral understandings (Lakoff, 2002, p. 318), 21<sup>st</sup> century right-wing populist communication tends to radically devalue or deny the existence of any moral convictions on the side of the attacked political groups.

### 6.1 The Underlying Logic of Populist Right-wing Political Communication in Anti-gender Talks

Gender and gender equality thinking, advocacy, policy development, and rights protecting activities challenge basic power structures in society, saturate various domains of life, question authorities that for centuries seemed unquestionable, and mobilize for extending egalitarian relations to ever growing walks of life. In this wider context, right-wing political efforts for ideology and constituency building have found gender as a suitable target and a tool to enhance their antagonism against important equality ideals, selected political achievements of modernity, and also against competitors in contemporary democratic politics. Furthermore, they have also engaged in rearticulating, and in fact reappropriating, a conservative women’s agenda in its entanglement with concerns for the maintenance of strong nation states, social hierarchies, and population control.

In congruence with the arguments of the literature, we have found that various modalities of hate speech pursue **politics of fear, animosity, and enemy seeking** (Wodak, 2015). Most of the targets are not portrayed as merely suspicious, despised, and devalued but also dangerous and harmful or freak, worthless and false or both simultaneously. Moreover, the overall presentation of important actors, institutions, and ideas that may fall under gender or ‘gender ideology’ regards them ‘power hungry’. There are three variations of a **reversal mechanism** in which the goal is not simply to target the enemy (Wodak, 2015; 2020). The first is the **appropriation of a human rights language** positing the child, the family, and mainstream society as vulnerable subjects and rainbow, feminist, and LGBTQI coalitions as aggressive intruders. This means reversing the historically established and widely endorsed narrative of victims and perpetrators, the disempowered and the powerful, respectively. A distinctive target has been discovered in the gender equality policy infrastructure (political representation, basic legal instruments, executive institutions, consultation mechanisms, etc.). This is the case in Italy and Spain, but less so in Germany and Sweden, where this infrastructure may look too powerful and mainstreamed to be directly attacked. In Hungary, the destruction of a relatively weak gender equality machinery was so fast in the early 2010s that, by the time of the GENHA investigations, only the gender equality thinkers and activists remained to be targeted.

Another strategic reversal mechanism is to portray the attacked equality and rights claims, progresses, and actors as if their critical content, voices, and arguments made them the prime agents that incite hatred. In short, critical talk outside of right-wing circles is labelled as hatred. This is used as the justification for hate speech acts in right-wing posts and flows of comments discussing the initial ‘wrongdoing’ of the attacked political actors. A widely used strategy is to target female members of the opposition, who use strong critical language in their political communication, and interpret these acts as hate speech. In other words, hate speech is enacted as **right-wing alertness to alleged hate speech** practiced outside of the right-wing circles. Finally, the third mode of strategic reversal lies in claiming that **critical reactions to hate speech** of right-wing political actors are in fact hate speech. In other words, when the presented hate content is criticized by the political opposition to populist right-wing forces, this critical act is labelled as hate generation. Critical reflection and hate are conflated if practiced by the political opposition.

In all the countries participating in the research, we captured the practice of ‘flexible enemy seeking’, whereby the same communication act, line or cross-referenced social media talk found different embodiments of danger, displaying a **continuum of autonomous women–LGBTQI activists–feminist enemy**. Any of these actors are often linked to the other ones by metonymic representations: it is enough to target one of these groups of actors to suggest that the other ones in the continuum are also responsible for the danger and harm posed against ‘normal’, mainstream society. In other cases, these actors are portrayed as closely connected by conspiracy against normal people, which vigilant right-wing forces sharply notice. Notwithstanding, enemy-seeking practices are partly distinctive according to the three main sub-groups/sub-themes under the larger umbrella of anti-gender talks. Furthermore, the three sub-themes have partly different genealogies in the rhetorical and ideological constructions of radical right-wing arenas. Chapter 4 of this report puts forward a detailed account of these differences.

In several conversations, composed of a leading post and its comments, we have found **pastiches of arguments and propositions**. While feminist and LGBTQI activists are presented as power-hungry actors who successfully distract public funds and inflect legislative agendas, they are also portrayed as conspicuously incompetent. Incompetence

is often associated with faulty justice theorems that potentially destroy freedom of action and thought and unduly widen the concept of gender violence. This strategic path demonstrates efforts to defend the pillars of liberal democracy. It can gain traction where full attack on gender equality and democratic politics may not be very attractive (e.g., Sweden).

The literature intensively discusses how gender and gender equality actors are blamed for breaking essential social norms. Therefore, the public shall be constantly reminded of, and unified around, moral judgements that are endorsed by unquestionable authorities allegedly undermined by gender equality thinkers and LGBTQI and feminist advocates. In addition to this, we have also found that feminism and ‘gender indoctrination theory’ are presented as a justification for **distorted priorities in public policy**. Gender thinking is portrayed as placing equality above other important agendas, draining public funds, wrongly conceptualizing violence as a social problem, and even committing injustice by denying men’s rights. As part of the ‘gender indoctrination theory’, gender thinking, gender equality and endeavors towards diversity (as expressed, for example, in law, policies, goalsetting actions by the government, public authorities, media, research and the educational system, and other core institutions in society) is perceived as propaganda and brainwashing. These institutions are portrayed as biased and their actions as threats to individual freedom, and traditional values and norms.

In all four Western and Southern European countries in our research, which are destinations for refugees and migrants, anti-gender messages are often combined with xenophobic and racial reasoning. This linkage is established by emphasizing the political blindness of the incompetent feminist and equality paradigms, and also by hatemongering against another target group which is “as dangerous as the gender equality advocates”. Intersectional hate speech thus entangles the civilizational or even terrorist danger assigned to selected foreigners or migrants, in particular Muslims, and the potential destruction of gender equality norms through unconditional social inclusion (Edström, 2016; Jaki & Smedt, 2019 p. 15; Norocel et al., 2020; Doerr, 2021; Ferreira, 2019). Further, feminist arguments on honor-related types of violence and forced marriage are deployed for advocating for an offensive criminal policy. This results in inciting xenophobia and islamophobia in the dress of gender equality (e.g., in Sweden). The Hungarian case is unique in that the right-wing forces do pursue vehement anti-migrant political mobilization, but primarily against imaginary migrants and refugees. Most recently, the main xenophobic content of anti-gender speeches has come through anti-Brussels and anti-EU scapegoating and, in some cases, through anti-Roma talks.

An emerging stream in the literature addresses the phenomenon that populist, radical and authoritarian right-wing forces make tangible efforts to appropriate and reinterpret some essential components of the women’s rights agenda by fully or partially denying gender equality paradigms (Krizsan & Roggeband, 2018). While overlapping with the GENHA research, a deep analysis of this problem is beyond the scope of this study. Overlaps are generated by speech acts, in particular for sexism and antigenderism, which endorse the proper, righteous, and ethically appropriate ways of practicing male and female roles in society. These speech acts, often constructed by textual and visual tools, present conservative women operating in private and public life as emancipated working mothers. Sometimes this is explicitly associated with anti-gender and anti-feminist lessons, while in other cases the representation claims exclusive authority over defining the worthy and the unworthy in softer forms. In such speech acts, the antagonistic habitus and mode of speaking is temporarily and strategically suspended, or more precisely, substituted by talks of alternative moralities and commonsense. In both the soft and strong versions of

these communication acts, the result is ‘decoupling’ gender equality and feminism (Nygren et al., 2018).

## 6.2 Leading Actors and Division of Labor in Hate Speech Production

Our research has unveiled that the major right-wing online media platforms are parts of wider and burgeoning right-wing media complexes in all countries. It would be intriguing to explore in further research how strategically these complexes have been developed. In all five countries we scrutinized, political leaders hardly ever offer anti-gender hate speech in a narrow sense of the term, while they sometimes venture to use hate speech in the broad sense. Hate speech is often generated in the conversations induced by the posts of political leaders and becomes intensified in the comments to the posts or the mini conversations among the commenters. Like-minded online party platforms behave more straightforwardly, they often present posts containing hate speech in the broad sense. These communication acts often stretch to domains of hate speech in a narrow sense as well. The most willing actors to engage in all types of hate speech are formally independent civic platforms, think tanks, social media outlets, and individual pages of public intellectuals. At the outset of this research, we called them ‘external’ political actors. However, social media research has revealed that they are anything but outsiders to the mechanisms of hate speech generation.

Inquiries similar to the GENHA research have examined the roles that **female actors** of right-wing populist parties play in ideology construction work and mobilization. It is understood that these women appeal to potential women voters and followers and make women’s agendas more credible in respective political programs (Gutsche, 2018, p. 14). Our research has also revealed that a highly controversial role is assigned to such senior female politicians in the production of anti-gender hate speech, particularly in Italy and Spain. They are supposed to take the lead in latching the harshest attacks against feminists and leftist ‘fellow’ female politicians to **preempt the blame of sexism**. This performative purification can be played in a context where there are enough right-wing women in leading positions and in possession of the communication skills and credentials required by contemporary online media presence. Paradoxically, these women turn against social transformations and institutions that have contributed to their equal opportunities and recognition in political participation.

It is important to acknowledge that right-wing political communication in general relies on established **external authorities** in order to make truth claims. Apparently, there is no need to draw on sophisticated reasoning to articulate hate and incite hatred by scapegoating selected actors. But the more manifold a justification is to support anti-gender claims, the more likely it is to appeal to different publics. As gender theorems engage in the production of truth claims about the significance of gender in different domains of life, anti-gender talks explore protean opportunities in making their counter claims (Verloo, 2018a, pp. 20-22). Given that all important powerful social institutions, such as religions, sciences, and education take part in knowledge production on vital questions of life, online media actors also feel urged to rely on these. We have found that scientific voices and authorities are occasionally incorporated in enemy-seeking reasoning, especially for producing anti-LGBTQI talks. Religious references are also used, depending on the actual alliances between political forces and religious groups, or the intensity of the religious commitments of the commenters. Christian ethics is

frequently evoked, either by citing some of the essential teachings of Christianity, or merging those with what is presented as commonsensical, ‘natural’, in need of no explanation. The ‘arrogance of ignorance’ (Wodak, 2015) makes the choice of strategic partners and authoritative references fully flexible.

Our research results allow us to contemplate what sort of public spaces are generated by populist right-wing political communication. Does this communication yield to **epistemic bubbles**, solidify **counter-publics**, shape **battlefields**, or dwell on some **assemblages** of these? Our research in Germany has found that right-wing social media advocacy succeeded in promoting distinctive counter-publics by embracing a considerable number of social media followers and spreading agitation. The Spanish team has acknowledged that anti-gender hate speech links a whole range of conservative actors, voices, manifesting power in this way. By the same token, all country teams have observed that several right-wing message-makers and their domestic complexes invite both supportive and dissenting voices to their Facebook and Twitter based political communication. In this way, their traffic is directly enhanced by comments, reactions, and shares, and involves a divided public gathering in one communication space, at least temporarily. Whereas, in theory, this may contribute to political debate, deliberation and, most importantly, fighting hate speech, it may also enhance the **significance and communicative power** of right-wing radical voices.

According to the results of the Hungarian study, dissenting comments can efficiently radicalize the hate speech generation dynamics of social media conversations, or to the contrary, these comments may demonstrate significant non-hate-based critical accounts. It is tempting to try to identify the types of actors and topics that generate the most intensive hate speech spirals and the ones where conversation provokes tangible resistance, however, our empirical material is not diverse and deep enough to offer sound arguments on that. One of the most stunning examples in the Hungarian data concerns the young female leader of a radical right-wing party (a mother of four). She regularly incites hatred against LGBTQI ideas and activists, but also receives abusive and sexist reactions in the comments to her posts similarly to the ones that feminist and leftist politicians get. This never happens when two middle-aged conservative women ministers (also working mothers of 3+ children) speak against gender equality and LGBTQI ‘propaganda’.

We have recognized that in some conversations, constructed by the lead post and the reacting comments, the dissenting voices constitute a **mini counter-public** within the right-wing arena. These voices stand up for the dignity of the attacked subjects, deny and ridicule hate, and demonstrate solidarity with the hated targets. Some of these voices are highly sophisticated, while others are commonsensical though still clear in their reasoning. These messages call for protection for the main subjects of hate speech, should they be individuals, groups, or organizations. This observation contradicts to, or at least calls for refining, the arguments about the chilling effects of social media participation and spiral of silence due to intensive populist online media operations. What is likely, however, is that these dissenting voices are not enough to exceed reflexive and dialogical communication on debated gender and gender equality ideas or the worth of the social actors identifying with them. We need to dig deeper into our empirical data and conduct further cross-readings to assess the validity of the thesis that internet radically increases the possibilities of direct participation, while not the capacities of critical reflection on a massive scale (Sauer et al., 2018).



### 6.3 The Consequences of Hate Speech

We finally articulate three outstanding issues of political hate speech in a schematic manner: the direct and indirect harms caused by hate speech, the significance of online populist political communication saturated with hate speech, and the transformations of the political landscape due to the advance of right-wing populist imagination and online mobilization.

The GENHA research results contribute to an outstanding debate on the direct and indirect harms of hate speech from communication, sociological, and legal perspectives. The antagonistic signifying process, embraced and intensified by expressions of hate, results in two saliently different interpretations of hate speech consequences. One account argues that hate speech makes visible what otherwise is nurtured as prejudice in unspoken domains of human thought (Fumagalli, 2019). Therefore, drawing the attention of the public by different communication acts, which are not to be celebrated, does not cause additional harm as an initial negative attitude is already present in society. The other position argues that hate speech detracts from the understanding that human dignity is a widely accessible public good. This can contribute to a social atmosphere in which expressing prejudice and advocating for discrimination are accepted as normal (Waldron, 2012). Our research results do not provide robust evidence for taking sides in a collective scholarly voice in this debate. This does not imply that GENHA researchers will refrain from expressing distinct opinions on this matter in their autonomous scholarly publications.

Several scholars argue that successful political communication must hook into the background culture, symbols, narratives, and myths of the respective society. This is necessary to competently use rhetorical and argumentative tools for persuasion (Wodak, 2015, p. 12). Other scholars talk of a ‘web of hate’, which enacts a virtual space of exclusion, a parallel reality exempt from control and the norm of political correctness (Pajnik & Sauer, 2018, p. 3). Some of the GENHA team members have found evidence for this web of hate through a geographically expanding cross-border production of the spirit of hate in Europe and beyond. For instance, the New Right in Germany can be explained as an interwoven international solidarity network. Discourses on abortion, LGBTQI rights or gender equality concern transnational issues promoted by the EU and also addressed, though inversely, by domestic forces, such as PiS in Poland and *Fidesz* in Hungary. The New Right in Germany shows solidarity with the right-wing conservative actors in Central and Eastern Europe and tries to normalize reactionary and restrictive policies regarding LGBTQI rights and gender studies programs. In addition, it strategically pathologizes and trivializes the socially liberal policies of German majority politics (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021).

What we can confidently underline as a conclusion of the GENHA research is that hate speech effectively contributes to distracting and downsizing the spaces for deliberative political discussions. In order to judge whether this process is irreversible or not, one must scrutinize the interacting details of both right-wing political communication and the encounters between right-wing circles and their counter-publics. In this way, it could be explored if social media indeed only helps generating ever more powerful exclusionary communication and political imagery, or there are spaces, forces, and efforts that effectively resist to that. The five countries of Europe we closely examined encompass different balances between the political forces that accept, and others that attack,

democratic pluralism, and have diverse civic traditions and other safeguards of democratic politics. Media pluralism, the robustness of independent media, and the relations of traditional and online media also have major influence in creating restrictive or permissive conditions for right-wing exclusionary talks. These conditions and opportunity structures are likely to drive the respective right-wing actors to go for variegated engagements with hate speech. We argue that the five countries of the GENHA research demonstrate three types of contexts in which the strategic objectives of right-wing political forces shape up differently. First, where the right-wing controls the legislative and executive powers (Hungary), second, where it has little chances for dominating the political landscape (Germany and Sweden), and third, where the populist right is powerful and has already gained majority for limited periods of time or shows gradual popularity and electoral successes (Italy and Spain, respectively). The gender and sexual equality policy achievements and related social transformations are rather robust in two polities, Germany and Sweden, not as strong but well-established enjoying societal support in Spain, and more fragile and regionally diverse in Italy. Gender equality efforts are the most vulnerable, having been quickly tarnished in a country under the full control of the populist right, namely, Hungary. The interlinkages of the political power relations and cleavages, the conditions of media pluralism and control, and institutional and social support to gender and other equality matters are to be studied by further comparative inquiries to offer deeper knowledge on hate speech producing contexts.

Immersing in social media communication of right-wing political leaders, parliamentary parties, and civic platforms may inspire one to underscore a point widely discussed in the literature: populist exclusionary communication, relying on fearmongering and hate generation, encroaches on the communication of the mainstream forces, and becomes a **normalized feature of all major political parties**. GENHA insights allow us to stress the need for research investigating the interactions between the populist right-wing and the mainstream forces in the production of political agendas on gender. Also, it is to scrutinize if social media technologies and imageries inspire and inform the mainstream media in producing or resisting hate, and if so, is the result potentially different from what we have observed in social media platforms?

Finally, our research results may offer inspiration to examine the relations between the **generation of fear and that of hate**. These two sets of individual and collective dispositions and discursive strategies seem to be inherent to all radical right-wing enemy-seeking communications. Yet, despite their tangible overlaps, they are not the same. The latter strategy produces actual or potential harms warranting urgent preemptive measures and legal remedies; hence the recourse to the initial goal of the GENHA research<sup>87</sup>. At the same time, we sense that fear and hate do not only inform and inspire each other but they can be differently aroused and utilized against particular subjects. Our anti-gender focus has helped revealing some of these differences. However, much has remained to be discovered and explained in order to resist fear and hatred by political coalitions and instruments so far protected from all forms of hate-related communication.

---

<sup>87</sup> Investigating social media communication of radical right-wing political forces that generates some forms of hate speech and/or stirs hatred in society.

## References

- Abou-Chadi, T., Breyer, M., & Gessler, T. (2021). 'The (Re)Politicisation of Gender in Western Europe.' *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 4(2), 311-314.
- Ahrbeck, B., & Felder, M. (2020). Die klassische Familie wird zum Ausnahmefall. Politisch Verantwortlichen fehlt der Mut zum Widerspruch gegen die Transgenderpropaganda in Kindertagesstätten und Kindergärten [The classic family is becoming the exception. Politically responsible persons lack the courage to contradict transgender propaganda in daycare centers and kindergartens]. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 9th, 2020.
- Austin, J. (1975). *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bayer J., Holznagel B., Lubianiec K., Pinteá A., Schmitt J. B., Szakács J., & Uszkiewicz E. (2021). *Disinformation and Propaganda: Impact on the Functioning of the Rule of Law and Democratic Processes in the EU and its Member States*. Brussels: European Parliament.
- Beisch, N., & Schäfer, C. (2020). Internetnutzung mit großer Dynamik: Medien, Kommunikation, Social Media [Internet use with great dynamics: media, communication, social media]. *Media Perspektiven* 9, 462-481.
- Berg, L. (2019). Between Anti-Feminism and Ethnicized Sexism. Far-Right Gender Politics in Germany. In: M. Fielitz & N. Thurston (Eds.), *Post-digital Cultures of the Far Right. Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US*. (pp. 79-91). Bielefeld: transcript
- Boberg, S., Quandt, T., Schatto-Eckrodt, T., & Frischlich, L. (2020). Pandemic Populism: Facebook Pages of Alternative News Media and the Corona Crisis--A Computational Content Analysis. arXiv preprint arXiv:2004.02566
- Bos, L., van der Brug W., & de Vreese C. H. (2013). 'An Experimental Test of the Impact of the Style and Rhetoric on the Perception of Right-Wing Populist and Mainstream Party Leaders,' *Acta Politica*, 48(2), 192-208.
- Brown, A. (2020). *Models of Governance of Online Hate Speech*. Council of Europe. May 2020.
- Brünig, L. (2020). Schwangerschaftsabbruch zwischen Biopolitik und Selbstbestimmung – Eine feministisch-diskursanalytische Perspektive auf die parlamentarischen Debatten zur Änderung des §219a Strafgesetzbuch [Abortion between Biopolitics and Self-Determination - A Feminist Discourse Analytical Perspective on the Parliamentary Debates on the Amendment of §219a Penal Code]. *Femina Politica – Zeitschrift für feministische Politikwissenschaft*, 2-2020, 50-62.
- Claus, R., & Virchow, F. (2017). 'The Far Right's Ideological Constructions of 'Deviant' Male Sexualities.' In: *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (pp. 305-319). London: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

- Delgado, R. (2018). 'Words That Wound: A Tort Action for Racial Insults, Epithets, and Name Calling'. In: M. Matsuda (Ed.), *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment*. (89-110). New York: Routledge.
- Di Meco, L., & Brechenmacher, S. (2020) '[Tackling Online Abuse and Disinformation Targeting Women in Politics](#)', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Dietze, G., & Roth, J. (2020). 'Right-wing populism and Gender'. *European Perspectives and Beyond*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Doerr, N. (2021). The Visual Politics of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): Anti-Islam, Ethno-Nationalism, and Gendered Images. *Social Sciences*, 10(1), 20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10010020>
- dw (2017). Debatte um "Ehe für alle" geht weiter [Debate on "marriage for all" continues]. *dw.com* July 1th, 2017. Retrieved 29 July 2021, from <https://p.dw.com/p/2fkF3>.
- Edström, M. (2016). The Trolls Disappear in the Light: Swedish Experiences of Mediated Sexualised Hate Speech in the Aftermath of Behring Breivik. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 5(2), 96-106. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v5i2.314>.
- European Parliament. (2020). [Hate Speech and Hate Crime in The EU and the Evaluation of Online Content Regulation Approaches](#). Brussels.
- Feezell, J. (2017). Agenda Setting through Social Media: The Importance of Incidental News Exposure and Social Filtering in the Digital Era. *Political Research Quarterly*, 71(2), 482-494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912917744895>
- Ferreira, C. (2019). Vox como representante de la derecha radical en España: un estudio sobre su ideología. ("Vox as a Representative of the Radical Right in Spain: A Study of its Ideology") *Revista Española De Ciencia Política*, 51, 73-98. <https://doi.org/10.21308/recp.51.03>
- Forti, S. (2021). "[Decirse de derecha para muchos jóvenes suena transgresor e incluso 'cool'](#)" ("To be called of the alt right sounds provocative and even cool for many young people"). *ctxt.es* | Contexto y Acción.
- Fritzsche, C., & Lang, J. (2020). Die GegnerInnenschaft zur Ehe für alle: ein autoritär-regressives politisches Projekt? [Opposing marriage for all: an authoritarian-regressive political project?]. In: A. Henninger & U. Birsl (Eds.), *Anti-Feminismen. 'Krisen'-Diskurse mit gesellschaftsspaltendem Potential* (pp. 265-307). Bielefeld: transcript.
- Fumagalli, C. (2019). Propositional Attitudes, Harm and Public Hate Speech Situations: Towards a Maieutic Approach. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 1474885119836627. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885119836627>
- Gavrilis, P. (2018). [Drittes Geschlecht: Weiblich, männlich, divers](#) [Third gender: female, male, diverse]. Deutschlandfunk.
- Gibbs, R.W. (1999). Speaking and thinking with metonymy. In: K.-U. Panther & G. Radden (Eds.), *Metonymy in language and thought*: 61–76. Benjamins.

- Grzebalska, W., & Petó, A. (2018). The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland. *Women's Studies International Forum Vol. 68*, 164-172. Pergamon.
- Gutsche, E. (Ed.) (2018). *Triumph of Women. The Female Face of the Populist and Far Right in Europe*. Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Jaki, S., & De Smedt, T. (2019). Right-wing German hate speech on Twitter: Analysis and automatic detection. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1910.07518*
- KhosraviNik, M., & Unger, J. W. (2016). Critical discourse studies and social media: Power, resistance and critique in changing media ecologies (pp. 206-233). In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*. London: Sage.
- König, W., & König, M. (2018). [Digitale Öffentlichkeit - Facebook und Twitter im Bundestagswahlkampf 2017](#) [Digital Public Sphere - Facebook and Twitter in the 2017 Bundestag Election Campaign].
- Korolczuk, & E. Graff, A., (2018). Gender as “Ebola from Brussels”: The Anti-colonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism. *Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 43(4), 797–821.
- Kováts, E., & Pöim, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The Position and Role of Conservative and Far Right Parties in The Anti-gender Mobilization in Europe*. Brussels: Foundation for European Progressive Studies and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest.
- Krizsan, A., & Roggeband, C. (2018). Towards a Conceptual Framework for Struggles over Democracy in Backsliding States: Gender Equality Policy in Central Eastern Europe. *Politics and Governance*, 6(3), 90-100. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i3.1414>
- Krolzik-Matthei, K. (2019). [Abtreibungen in der Debatte in Deutschland und Europa](#) [Abortion in the debates in Germany and Europe]. bpb.de.
- Kuhar, R., & Paternotte, D. (Eds.) (2017). *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, Limited.
- Lakoff, G. (2002). *Moral politics: How liberals and conservatives think*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lang, J. (2017). Feindbild Feminismus Familien- und Geschlechterpolitik in der AfD [Feminism as an Enemy. Family and Gender Policy in the AfD]. In S. Grigat (Ed.), *AfD & FPÖ* (pp. 61-78). Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Langton, R. (1993). Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts'. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 22(4), 293–330.
- Maitra, I. (2012). Subordinating Speech 1 In I. Maitra & M.K. McGowan (Eds), *Speech and Harm: Controversies Over Free Speech*. (5). Oxford Scholarship Online. DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199236282.003.0005
- Maitra, I. & McGowan, M. K. (2012). Introduction and Overview. In I. Maitra I & M. K. McGowan (Eds.), *Speech and Harm: Controversies over Free Speech* (pp. 1-23). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Matsuda, M. (2018). Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the Victim's Story. In: M. Matsuda (Ed.), *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment* (pp. 17–52). New York: Routledge.
- Mudde, C. (2016). *On Extremism and Democracy in Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2013). Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America, In: *Government and Opposition* 48(2), 147-174.
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2015). Vox Populi or Vox Masculini? Populism and Gender in Northern Europe and South America. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 49(1-2), 16-36.
- Norocel O.C, Saresma T, Lähdesmäki T, Ruotsalainen M. Discursive Constructions of White Nordic Masculinities in Right-wing Populist Media. *Men and Masculinities*. 2020;23(3-4):425-446.
- Norocel, O.C. (2017). Åkesson at Almedalen: Intersectional tensions and normalization of populist radical right discourse in Sweden. *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 25(2), 91–106.
- Nygren, K. G., Martinsson, L., & Mulinari, D. (2018). Gender Equality and Beyond: At the Crossroads of Neoliberalism, Anti-gender Movements, “European” Values, and Normative Reiterations in the Nordic Model. *Social Inclusion*, 6(4), 1-7.
- Pajnik, M., & Sauer, B. (Eds.) (2018). *Populism and the web: Communicative practices of parties and movements in Europe*. Routledge.
- Paternotte, D., & Kuhar, R. (2018). Disentangling and Locating the “Global Right”: Anti-gender Campaigns in Europe. *Politics and Governance*, 6(3), 6-19.
- Pedraza, C. (2019). Cibermisoginia en las redes sociodigitales: claves para el análisis desde la masculinidad. *Cuestiones de género: de la igualdad a la diferencia*, 14, 51-66.
- Pytlas, B. (2021) "Hijacking Europe: Counter-European Strategies and Radical Right Mainstreaming during the Humanitarian Crisis Debate 2015–16." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 59(2), 335-353.
- Sauer, B., Pajnik, M. & Meret, S. (2018). Media populism in post-democracy: the crossroads of right and left political parties. In Pajnik, M. & B. Sauer (Eds.), *Populism and the Web* (pp. 157-171). Routledge.
- Snelson, C. L. (2016) Qualitative and Mixed Methods Social Media Research: A Review of the Literature. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. January-December: 1-15
- Sobieraj, S. (2020). *Credible Threat: Attacks Against Women Online and the Future of Democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- Sunstein, C. R. (2018). *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- The Scottish Government (2018). *Independent Review of Hate Crime Legislation in Scotland. Final Report*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/independent-review-hate-crime-legislation-scotland-final-report/>

- Trilling, D., Tolochko, P., & Burscher, B. (2017). From Newsworthiness to Shareworthiness: How to predict news sharing based on article characteristics. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 94(1), 38-60.
- Verloo, M. (2018a). Gender Knowledge, and Opposition to the Feminist Project: Extreme-Right Populist Parties in the Netherlands. *Politics And Governance*, 6(3), 20-30. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i3.1456>
- Verloo, M. (Ed.). (2018b). *Varieties of opposition to gender equality in Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Waldron J. (2012). *The Harm in Hate Speech*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Wilhelm, C., Joeckel, S., & Ziegler, I. (2020). Reporting hate comments: Investigating the effects of deviance characteristics, neutralization strategies, and users' moral orientation. *Communication Research*, 47(6), 921-944.
- Wodak, R. (2020). *The politics of fear: The shameless normalization of far-right discourse*. Sage. Second edition. London: Sage.
- Wodak, R. (2018). Populism and the web: Communicative Practices of Parties and Movements in Europe. Introductory Remarks from 'hate speech' to 'hate tweets' (pp. xvii-xxiii). In Pajnik, M. & B. Sauer (Eds.). (pp. xvii-xxiii). *Populism and the Web*. London: Routledge.
- Wodak, R. (2015). *The Politics of Fear: What Right-wing Populist Discourses Mean*. London: Sage.
- Young, I. M. (1990). Five Faces of Oppression. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (pp.39-65). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

## Appendix

Sources for **Table 2.1: GERMANY**

Actor type	Actor	Facebook Account	Twitter Account
Political party	AfD	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/alternativ fuerde/">https://www.facebook.com/alternativ fuerde/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/afd?lang=en">https://twitter.com/afd?lang=en</a>
Politicians	Alice Weidel	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/aliceweidel/">https://www.facebook.com/aliceweidel/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/alice_weidel?lang=en">https://twitter.com/alice_weidel?lang=en</a>
	Beatrix von Storch	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/BeatrixVonStorch">https://www.facebook.com/BeatrixVonStorch</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/beatrix_vstorch?lang=en">https://twitter.com/beatrix_vstorch?lang=en</a>
	Martin Reichardt	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/MartinReichardtAfD/">https://www.facebook.com/MartinReichardtAfD/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/m_reichardt_afd?lang=en">https://twitter.com/m_reichardt_afd?lang=en</a>
	Mariana Harder-Kühnel	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/M.Harder.Kuehnel/">https://www.facebook.com/M.Harder.Kuehnel/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/m_harderkuehnel?lang=en">https://twitter.com/m_harderkuehnel?lang=en</a>
	Björn Höcke	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/bjornhocke">https://twitter.com/bjornhocke</a>
	Uwe Junge	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/UweJunge.Politiker/">https://www.facebook.com/UweJunge.Politiker/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/uwejunge?lang=en">https://twitter.com/uwejunge?lang=en</a>
	External individuals	Reinhild "Amandina" Boßdorf	-
Anabel Schunke		-	<a href="https://twitter.com/ainyrockstar">https://twitter.com/ainyrockstar</a>
Non-parliamentary organizations	<i>Initiative Familienschutz</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/InitiativeFamilienschutz/">https://www.facebook.com/InitiativeFamilienschutz/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/familienschutz_?lang=en">https://twitter.com/familienschutz_?lang=en</a>
	<i>Junge Freiheit</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/jungefreiheit/">https://www.facebook.com/jungefreiheit/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/junge_freiheit?lang=en">https://twitter.com/junge_freiheit?lang=en</a>

Sources for **Table 2.2: HUNGARY**

Actor type	Actor	Facebook Account	Twitter Account
Political party	<i>Fidesz</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FideszHU">https://www.facebook.com/FideszHU</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/FideszEP?lang=en">https://twitter.com/FideszEP?lang=en</a>
	KDNP	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/kdnphu">https://www.facebook.com/kdnphu</a>	-



	<i>Mi Hazánk</i>	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/mihazank?lang=en">https://twitter.com/mihazank?lang=en</a>
Politicians	Viktor Orbán	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/orbanvikt or/">https://www.facebook.com/orbanvikt or/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/_miniszterelnok">https://twitter.com/_miniszterelnok</a>
	Judit Varga	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/VargaJuditMinisterofJustice">https://www.facebook.com/VargaJuditMinisterofJustice</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/JuditVarga_EU">https://twitter.com/JuditVarga_EU</a>
	Katalin Novák	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/csaladesifjusag">https://www.facebook.com/csaladesifjusag</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/KatalinNovakMP">https://twitter.com/KatalinNovakMP</a>
	Dóra Dúró	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/durodora">https://www.facebook.com/durodora</a>	-
	Előd Novák	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/novakelod">https://www.facebook.com/novakelod</a>	-
	Zsolt Semjén	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/semjenzsolt">https://www.facebook.com/semjenzsolt</a>	-
External actors <i>Individuals</i> <i>Media</i>	Zsolt Bayer	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/bayerzs">https://www.facebook.com/bayerzs</a>	-
	<i>Összhangban a Fidesszel</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/%C3%96szhangban-a-Fidesszel-103992344647274">https://www.facebook.com/%C3%96szhangban-a-Fidesszel-103992344647274</a>	-
	<i>Milliók Orbán Viktor és kormánya mellett</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/harcolunkazigazsagert">https://www.facebook.com/harcolunkazigazsagert</a>	-
	<i>Vasarnap.hu</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/vasarnap.hu">https://www.facebook.com/vasarnap.hu</a>	-
<i>Civil Society Organizations</i>	<i>Alapjogokért Központ</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/alapjogokert">https://www.facebook.com/alapjogokert</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/alapjogokert">https://twitter.com/alapjogokert</a>

Sources for **Table 2.3: ITALY**

Actor type	Actor	Facebook Account	Twitter Account
Political party	<i>Noi con Salvini</i> [All together with Salvini]	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/NoiconSalviniUfficiale">https://www.facebook.com/NoiconSalviniUfficiale</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/Noiconsalvini">https://twitter.com/Noiconsalvini</a>

	<i>Lega Salvini Premier</i> [Salvini Premier League]	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/legasalvinipremier">https://www.facebook.com/legasalvinipremier</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/LegaSalvini">https://twitter.com/LegaSalvini</a>
	<i>Fratelli d'Italia</i> [Brothers of Italy]	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Fdl.paginaufficiale">https://www.facebook.com/Fdl.paginaufficiale</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/FratelliItalia">https://twitter.com/FratelliItalia</a>
Politicians	Matteo Salvini	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/">https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/matteosalvini">https://twitter.com/matteosalvini</a>
	Giorgia Meloni	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/giorgiameloni.paginaufficiale/">https://www.facebook.com/giorgiameloni.paginaufficiale/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni">https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni</a>
External actors <i>Individuals</i>	Filippo Facci	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/filippofacci1">https://twitter.com/filippofacci1</a>
	Vittorio Feltri	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/vfeltri/">https://www.facebook.com/vfeltri/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/vfeltri?lang=it">https://twitter.com/vfeltri?lang=it</a>
	Alessandro Meluzzi	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/alessandromeluzzi.official/">https://www.facebook.com/alessandromeluzzi.official/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/a_meluzzi">https://twitter.com/a_meluzzi</a>
	Nicola Porro	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/NicPorro/">https://www.facebook.com/NicPorro/</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/nicolaporro">https://twitter.com/nicolaporro</a>
<i>Civil Society Organizations</i>	<i>Casa Pound</i> [Pound's Home]	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/casapounditalia">https://twitter.com/casapounditalia</a>
	<i>Pro Vita &amp; Famiglia onlus</i> [Pro Life & Family]	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/provitaonlus">https://www.facebook.com/provitaonlus</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/ProVitaFamiglia">https://twitter.com/ProVitaFamiglia</a>

Sources for **Table 2.4: SPAIN**

<b>Actor type</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>Facebook Account</b>	<b>Twitter Account</b>
Political party	<i>Vox</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/VOXEspana">https://www.facebook.com/VOXEspana</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/vox_es">https://twitter.com/vox_es</a>
	<i>Vox Madrid</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/MadridVOX">https://www.facebook.com/MadridVOX</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/madrid_vox">https://twitter.com/madrid_vox</a>
	<i>Vox Barcelona</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/BarcelonaVOX">https://www.facebook.com/BarcelonaVOX</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/vox_barcelona">https://twitter.com/vox_barcelona</a>
Politicians	Iván Espinosa de los Monteros y de Simón	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/IvanEspinosaDeLosMonterosVOX">https://www.facebook.com/IvanEspinosaDeLosMonterosVOX</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/vox_es">https://twitter.com/vox_es</a>

	Macarena Olona Choclán	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/Macarena_Olona">https://twitter.com/Macarena_Olona</a>
	Francisco Javier Ortega Smith-Molina	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/j.ortega-smith">https://www.facebook.com/j.ortega-smith</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/Ortega_Smith">https://twitter.com/Ortega_Smith</a>
	Hermann Tertsch	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/hermanntertsch">https://twitter.com/hermanntertsch</a>
	Rocío Monasterio	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/RocioMonasterioVOX">https://www.facebook.com/RocioMonasterioVOX</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/monasterioR">https://twitter.com/monasterioR</a>
	Carla Toscano de Balbín		<a href="https://twitter.com/eledhmel">https://twitter.com/eledhmel</a>
External actors <i>Individuals</i>	Cristina Seguí	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/CristinaSegui_">https://twitter.com/CristinaSegui_</a>
	Marina de la Torre	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/ANIMA_red">https://twitter.com/ANIMA_red</a>
	Roma Gallardo	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/romagallardoofficial">https://www.facebook.com/romagallardoofficial</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/roma_gallardo">https://twitter.com/roma_gallardo</a>
	@Unaalienada	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/UnaAlienada">https://twitter.com/UnaAlienada</a>
<i>Civil Society Organizations</i>	<i>Hazte Oir</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/HazteOir.org">https://www.facebook.com/HazteOir.org</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/hazteoir">https://twitter.com/hazteoir</a>

Sources for **Table 2.5: SWEDEN**

<b>Actor type</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>Facebook Account</b>	<b>Twitter Account</b>
Political party	<i>The Party</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/xx">https://www.facebook.com/xx</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/xx">https://twitter.com/xx</a>
	<i>The Youth Party</i>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/xx">https://www.facebook.com/xx</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/xx">https://twitter.com/xx</a>
Politicians of the Party	Member A	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/xx">https://www.facebook.com/xx</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/xx">https://twitter.com/xx</a>
	Member B	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/xx">https://twitter.com/xx</a>

	Member C	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/xx">https://twitter.com/xx</a>
External actors <i>Individuals</i>	External actor 1	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/xx">https://twitter.com/xx</a>
	External actor 2	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/xx">https://www.facebook.com/xx</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/xx">https://twitter.com/xx</a>
	External actor 3	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/xx">https://twitter.com/xx</a>
	External actor 4	-	<a href="https://twitter.com/xx">https://twitter.com/xx</a>
<i>Media</i>	The Media Platform	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/xx">https://www.facebook.com/xx</a>	<a href="https://twitter.com/xx">https://twitter.com/xx</a>