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**POLICY PAPER**

# **DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**


**Exposing Gendered Disinformation  
in the Czech Republic and Slovakia**

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# Introduction

Across Europe, women in politics face a growing challenge that goes beyond traditional political debate: **gendered disinformation**. It combines falsehoods, personal slander, and gender-stereotyped narratives, aimed not just at policies but at identities, aiming to **undermine women’s credibility, delegitimize their authority, and discourage them from public life**. In polarized information environments, gender becomes a weapon for silencing voices and narrowing democratic competition.

Czechia and Slovakia provide particularly stark examples. Both countries remain marked by **low representation of women in politics**. Polarized debates around corruption scandals, NATO, the EU, Ukraine, and domestic cultural issues create fertile ground for disinformation campaigns. Within these contested spaces, women politicians **attract not only political criticism but also attacks on their appearance, morality, and private lives**.

This publication brings together new research on the scope and impact of gendered disinformation in Czechia and Slovakia. Using a **triangulated methodology** – quantitative monitoring of social media posts through Gerulata Juno, a survey of politicians at national, European, and local levels, and in-depth

interviews with women politicians – it provides both statistical evidence and personal testimony. The result is a complex picture of how gendered disinformation functions, what narratives it employs, and how it affects not only individual politicians but also their families, institutions, and democratic life more broadly.

The findings are sobering. In Czechia, disinformation most often framed women as **incompetent**, using belittling nicknames, doctored imagery, and narratives of intellectual unfitness. In Slovakia, women were more often depicted as **morally corrupt**, framed as betraying the nation or serving foreign interests. In both countries, mainstream political actors, including senior governing politicians, played a central role in amplifying these narratives, demonstrating that gendered disinformation is not confined to the fringes of online extremism.

At the same time, the research highlights **resilience and agency**. Women politicians continue to serve despite abuse, drawing on solidarity networks and personal coping strategies. Yet resilience alone is not enough: **systemic responses** are urgently needed from platforms, parties, institutions, and civil society.

The structure of this publication reflects this approach. It begins with **case studies of Czechia and Slovakia**, presenting both quantitative and qualitative findings. It then summarizes the **key findings** across the cases and concludes with **policy recommendations** aimed at strengthening democratic resilience.

**Gendered disinformation is not only an attack on women – it is an attack on democracy itself.** Recognizing and addressing it is therefore essential not just for equality, but for the health and sustainability of democratic politics in Central Europe.

For the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, this issue is also deeply connected to **liberal values of freedom, pluralism, and equal participation.** Protecting women's voices in politics means defending the **principle that every citizen, regardless of gender, has the right to shape public life without intimidation or distortion.** Countering gendered disinformation is therefore not only about fairness, it is central to safeguarding liberal democracy itself.

## Key Findings

- **Gendered disinformation is systemic in both countries, but it takes different shapes.** In Czechia, hostility was primarily competence-driven (33.5% of hostile posts), while in Slovakia it was primarily morality-driven (41.2%). This distinction matters for policy: what “sticks” to women in each context differs, so countermeasures must be tailored accordingly.
- **Mainstream political actors amplify the problem.** In Czechia, nearly a quarter of the monitored posts (23.3%) came from a single politician (Jindřich Rajchl), showing how elite cues can seed and spread gendered narratives. In Slovakia, SMER–SSD and the Prime Minister’s Robert Fico ecosystem (including prominent party figures) were major sources and amplifiers of hostile content, demonstrating that disinformation is not confined to fringe actors.
- **Hostility spikes around women’s visibility and advancement.** Czech attacks peaked in June 2025 around the appointment of Eva Decroix as Justice Minister, when questions about her academic credentials were used to delegitimize her competence and fitness for office. Slovakia saw fewer sharp peaks but steady, persistent hostility, indicating a “slow-burn” environment of harassment.
- **Targets are politicized: liberal/pro-European women face disproportionate abuse.** Across both cases, liberal, pro-EU, and pro-Western women faced concentrated attacks, while conservative women were more often defended or shielded. Gender thus becomes a partisan weapon, narrowing pluralism and distorting democratic competition.
- **Facebook is the central battleground.** It dominated the monitored datasets in both countries and was also named by most survey respondents as their primary platform. (X was frequently used by politicians, though it appeared less in the monitored samples.)
- **Gender is often implicit rather than explicit.** Many respondents did not label attacks as “about gender”- yet simultaneously reported appearance-based remarks, “too emotional/irrational” stereotypes, patronizing language (“little girl”), and sexualized attacks. Male respondents in both countries agreed women face harsher/different abuse, underscoring a gendered pattern that may be under-recognized by victims themselves.

- **Coordination and “pile-ons” are part of the tactic.** Interview evidence described troll-farm–style swarms and copy-paste comment barrages around hot-button issues (Ukraine, COVID-19, LGBT+), showing that harassment is often organized, not merely organic outrage.
- **Current remedies are not working.** Platform reporting was widely seen as ineffective; legal avenues are slow. Institutional responses are uneven (some parties offer support; many do not). This gap raises the personal cost of participation and disproportionately deters women from leadership roles.
- **Gendered disinformation is not only an equality issue – it is a democratic resilience issue.** It is not only an equality problem but a threat to pluralism and fair political competition. Without targeted counter-measures that reflect country-specific patterns (competence-framing in Czechia, morality-framing in Slovakia) and mainstream amplification, women’s representation will shrink in practice, even if formal rights remain intact.

## Case Studies

### Slovakia Case Study

Women remain starkly underrepresented in Slovak politics. As of the 2023 parliamentary elections, they [accounted](#) for only around 23% of members of the National Council. The Slovak information environment is highly polarized, shaped by narratives around corruption, the war in Ukraine, and domestic disputes over values such as migration, family, and gender. Within this polarized space, **female politicians often become lightning rods for hostility and disinformation**. While criticism of political leaders is widespread, attacks against women are distinctive as they often mobilize gendered stereotypes, question competence, and extend into personal lives, discouraging participation in public life.

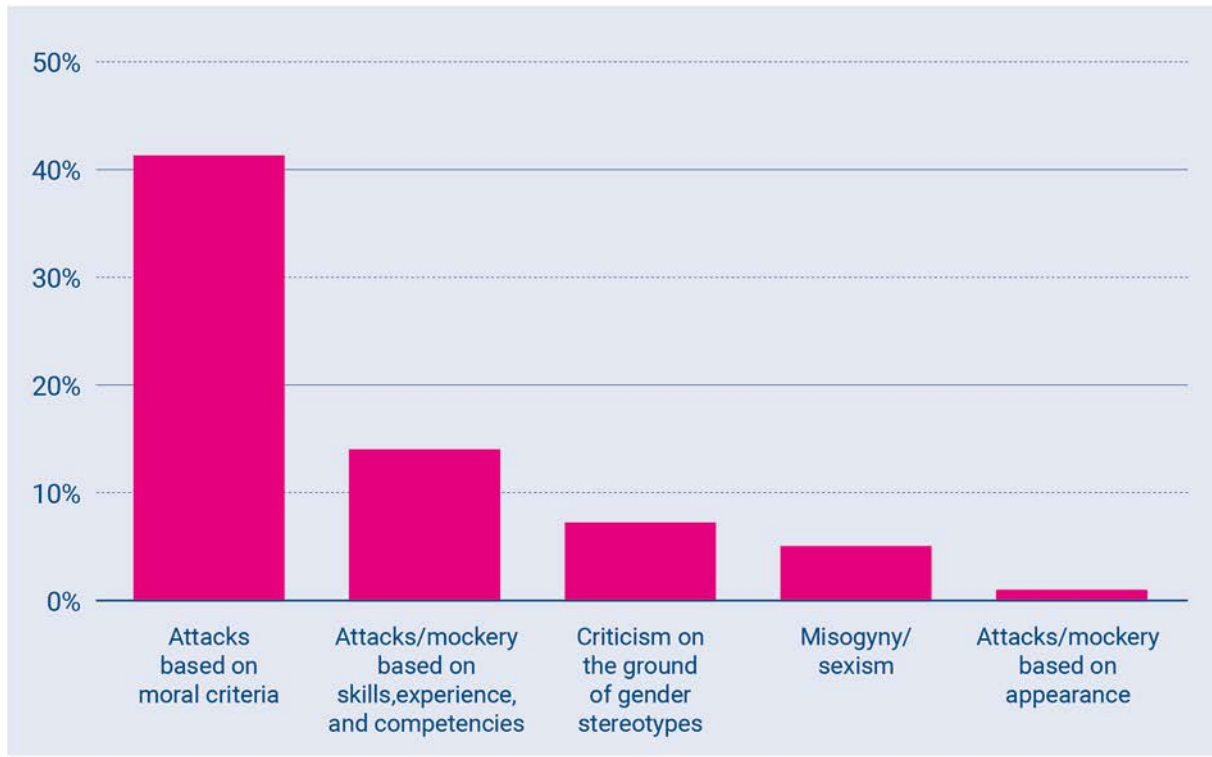
Quantitative monitoring of the Slovak information space of 182 posts targeting Slovak female politicians shows that **attacks based on moral criteria dominated** the landscape (41.2%), followed by competence-related attacks (13.7%) and gender stereotypes (7.1%). Misogyny and sexism accounted for just under 5%, while appearance-based mockery was rare (0.6%). Importantly, nearly half the posts (45.0%) were neutral, focusing on political decisions rather than gender. This indicates that **Slovakia's hostility is more morality-driven** (41.2%),

whereas in the Czech case, it was more competence-driven (33.5%). **The largest share of hostile narratives targeted former President Zuzana Čaputová**, often framed as a “progressive extremist” and contrasted unfavourably with conservative figures such as Martina Šimkovičová. [One post](#) of one of the current governing parties, SMER-SSD, for example, sought to downplay gendered motives by stating: *“So that Čaputová doesn't complain again that I'm criticizing her as a woman, I'll say it like this: you two progressive extremists are not even up to Šimkovičová's ankles.”*<sup>1</sup> Such rhetoric illustrates how gender-based mockery is normalized and legitimized in public discourse.

Other examples of morality-based attacks – all voiced by current Prime Minister Robert Fico – [portrayed](#) Čaputová as an “artificial product of anti-Slovak forces” installed to promote a single Western-imposed worldview, [accused](#) her of “openly serving the opposition while ignoring the needs of Slovakia,” or [claimed](#) she was a “fabricated, foreign-financed product” sometimes comparable to former president Andrej Kiska. These narratives tried to paint her as morally compromised, disloyal to the nation, and unworthy of holding office.



**Fig. 1 – Percentage of posts in the monitored sample that included attacks on women based on the UNDP Gender Barometer Typology**



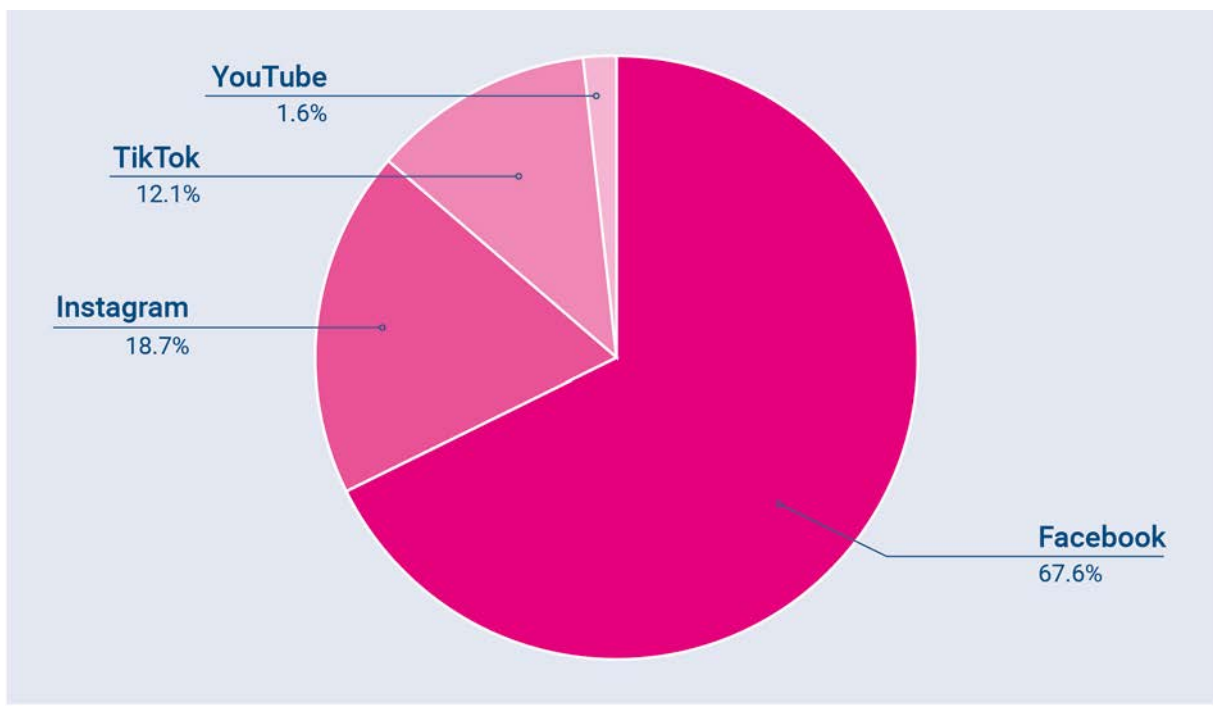
Patterns of selectivity and asymmetry emerged – conservative women such as Šimkovičová were defended, while progressive women such as Čaputová, Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová, or Veronika Cifrová Ostrihoňová were attacked, mirroring patterns also observed in Czechia. This reflects an environment in which **misogyny is tolerated when directed against liberal women**, but dismissed or denied when conservatives are targeted. These dynamics effectively frame gendered disinformation as a partisan tool, undermining not only individuals but also democratic pluralism. In effect, criticism of women becomes politically conditional, tolerated when it weakens liberal actors, yet dismissed when aimed at conservative ones.

Most of the monitored hostile content originated from SMER–SSD, one of the governing parties, and its leader, **Robert Fico**, the current Prime Minister. High-ranking representatives of SMER–SSD have themselves been key amplifiers of gendered disinformation and personal attacks. PM R. Fico repeatedly **smeared** ex-President Zuzana Čaputová as a “U.S. agent”. Current MEP Ľuboš Blaha built his political profile on such rhetoric, leading smear campaigns against Čaputová and against female reporters, to the extent that a Slovak court ordered him to stop personal attacks on the president. Another example happened at the SMER–SSD rally in 2022, when Ľ. Blaha openly **provoked** the audience by declaring he

was “forbidden by the state” to say the truth about President Čaputová and urging the crowd to “say it for me.” In response, people began chanting a vulgar slur – “American whore” - while SMER leaders, including Robert Fico, looked on and smiled, with Blaha not attempting to de-escalate.<sup>2</sup> This incident exemplifies how **senior politicians not only tolerate but actively incite misogynistic hostility, legitimizing such language in the mainstream.**

This highlights how gendered disinformation is not only spread by fringe actors but also amplified from the political mainstream. The most frequently used platform in the Slovak dataset was Facebook, which also corresponds with survey findings where all respondents identified Facebook as their primary social media channel. This alignment suggests that the online hostility women face is embedded in the platforms that dominate political communication in Slovakia.

**Fig. 2 – Most used platforms in the monitored sample**



Unlike in Czechia, where attacks surged after the appointment of Eva Decroix as Minister of Justice, the Slovak data

reveal only a few smaller spikes but no comparable peak; overall, hostility appeared more consistent over time.

**Fig. 3 – Number of attacks and observed data in the monitored period**



**Survey findings confirm the prevalence and consequences** of such attacks. Of six respondents (evenly split between women and men, mainly local-level politicians), half reported being targeted by disinformation. For some, this harassment was occasional, but two said it happened frequently, one occasionally, and one at least once – showing that for several respondents, it is a **recurring problem rather than an isolated experience**. Four respondents reported that attacks had intensified compared to the previous year, suggesting a worsening trend, similar to developments in neighboring Czechia. Most attributed these campaigns to a mix of domestic political actors and broader disinformation networks, with only one pointing directly to foreign sources.

The forms of disinformation were varied. The most common included fabricated quotes, personal slander, and accusations of incompetence. Respondents also mentioned edited photos, one case of sexualized con-

tent, and even a single instance of a deepfake – rare, but symbolically significant as a new technological tool for manipulation.

The gender dimension of these attacks is complex. When asked directly, only one respondent said attacks were clearly related to gender, one answered “maybe,” and four said “no.” Yet when asked about specific experiences, respondents identified comments on appearance or private life, stereotypes of being “too emotional” or “irrational,” patronizing remarks such as “little girl,” and two cases of sexualized attacks. This gap highlights how politicians may not always frame attacks as explicitly gendered, even when gendered tropes are present. **Male respondents, however, acknowledged that women colleagues were subjected to harsher and different forms of online abuse, reinforcing the gendered dimension even when not always recognized by women themselves.**

The consequences extend beyond political debate into personal lives. Respondents reported **low levels of safety** when expressing themselves online, with most selecting neutral or negative responses. Three admitted they had considered withdrawing from political life due to harassment. Severe incidents included threats of physical violence, one report of a death threat, and targeted attacks on family members. At the same time, four respondents also reported being subjected to constant hate comments, demonstrating that not only extreme threats but also continuous **low-level hostility take a cumulative toll over time.**

Coping strategies ranged from ignoring the abuse (five respondents) to reporting it (two), publicly responding (two), or taking legal steps (two). Yet few found these measures effective, with several noting a **lack of adequate support from institutions or parties.** Three respondents said their party or employer had supported them, while two said they had not – showing uneven levels of institutional protection.

When asked what kind of support would help, respondents most often pointed to **digital security tools, legal aid, media literacy training, stronger platform accountability, and mentorship or community support for women.** One also called for stronger public condemnation of hate speech, underlining the

need for visible leadership on this issue. As one politician remarked, “the biggest hatred is shared by government politicians,” highlighting again the role of mainstream actors in amplifying hostility. While the survey sample is small and not representative of all Czech and Slovak politicians, it nonetheless provides valuable insights into recurring patterns of gendered disinformation and its impact across political levels.

**Interviews with Slovak politicians add depth to these findings.** One politician recounted that from the beginning of her career as a journalist, she was sexualized, mocked as a “light woman” who advanced through relationships, and told she should “stick to cosmetics instead of politics.” She was also subjected to repeated body-shaming, including ridicule of her appearance, clothing, and style, underscoring how women’s professional credibility is routinely undermined through personal denigration. Later, as a candidate, she was attacked for being a mother, with critics claiming she was selfish to pursue politics while having children. In the campaign, she received comments wishing that her children were born with disabilities or that she herself should die. She was also targeted by classic conspiracy tropes, described as a “Soros agent” and accused of serving liberal foreign interests – a narrative that blended misogyny with geopolitical disinformation.

Online troll campaigns, often coordinated, amplified such attacks around controversial topics like Ukraine, COVID-19, or LGBT+ rights. At times, **hundreds of nearly identical comments appeared within hours** on her social media profiles, illustrating that these were not spontaneous reactions but organized harassment campaigns. Another female politician noted that **pro-democratic women were systematically exposed to harsher targeting than their conservative counterparts**, reinforcing the perception that gendered disinformation functions as a partisan weapon.

The impact is twofold: it affects the targeted politicians directly, **harming their mental health, sense of safety, and family life**, and it also sends a chilling signal to other women considering public roles. As one politician observed, women often hesitate to pursue leadership positions not because they lack ability, but because of the anticipated hostility and the stigma attached to being mothers in public office. While many women withdraw under such pressure, **one politician emphasized that the anti-campaigns only strengthened her resolve to enter politics**, seeing engagement as a way to deny trolls the victory of silencing women's voices.

Coping with these experiences proved difficult. Some politicians attempted to **report attacks to platforms**, especially those targeting their children, but platforms **routinely responded that such**

**content did not violate community guidelines**. The frustration with this lack of accountability was evident. Interviewees stressed the importance of resilience, solidarity networks, and treating both praise and abuse with distance to stay grounded.

The need for systemic responses is urgent. Respondents emphasized the importance of **digital security tools, legal aid, and stronger platform accountability**, but also highlighted that support from political parties and **visible solidarity from male colleagues remain limited**. One politician argued that social media companies should be regulated in the same way as tobacco firms, given their harmful effects on public health and democracy. Interviewees argued that **unless men actively speak out against gendered disinformation, the problem risks being dismissed as a niche "women's issue" rather than recognized as a threat to democracy itself**.

In conclusion, the Slovak case demonstrates how gendered disinformation intersects with political polarization and partisanship, disproportionately **targeting liberal and pro-European women**. Most attacks focus on morality and competence, amplified by stereotypes and slander. The costs are borne not only by individual women but also by their families and by the broader democratic process. Unless parties, institutions, and platforms take stronger action, gendered disinformation will

continue to narrow the already limited space for women's political participation in Slovakia. Unlike in Czechia, where competence-based attacks were dominant, Slovak disinformation more often framed women as morally corrupt or untrustworthy – a distinction that underscores how different national contexts weaponize gender in different ways. Addressing these patterns is not just about protecting individual women, but about safeguarding pluralism and democratic competition in Slovakia.

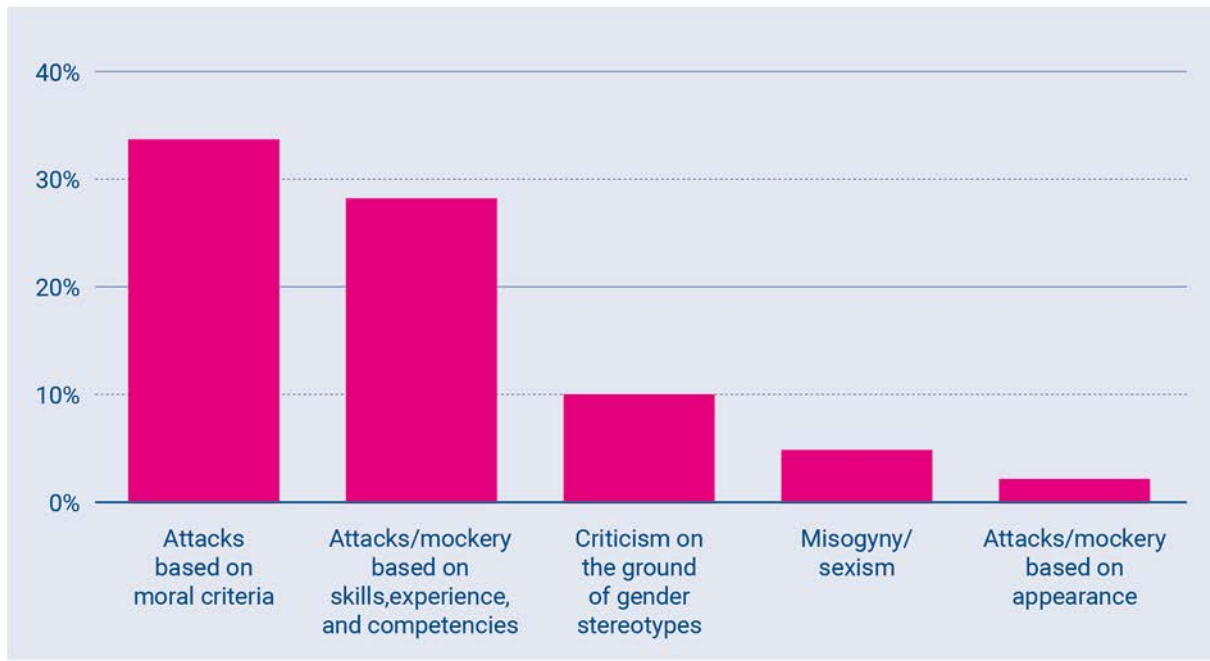
### Czech Republic Case Study

Although women currently [occupy](#) around 26% of seats in the Czech Chamber of Deputies, their visibility in senior political roles is often met with disproportionate hostility online. In the run-up to the parliamentary elections on the 3rd and 4th of October, the Czech information space has become highly polarized, with dominant narratives revolving around corruption scandals such as the 'Bitcoin case,'<sup>3</sup> disputes over military expenditure, including the F-35 purchase, and debates on the country's orientation toward NATO, the EU, and support for Ukraine. Within this polarized landscape, disinformation flourishes, and female politicians have

become recurring targets. Their experiences reveal that while all (mostly governmental) politicians face criticism, women are singled out with mockery and attacks that draw on gendered stereotypes, questioning not only what they stand for but also whether they belong in politics at all.

Quantitative analysis of **176 online posts** illustrates how these dynamics manifest. The majority of hostile content fell into two categories: **attacks on competence** (33.5%) and **accusations of moral corruption or dishonesty** (27.8%). These attacks positioned women as unfit for office or lacking integrity, echoing wider disinformation narratives about government illegitimacy and corruption. Gender-specific categories such as **criticism grounded in stereotypes** (9.7%), **misogyny/sexism** (4.6%), and **appearance-based mockery** (1.7%) were less frequent in absolute numbers but had a disproportionate symbolic effect. Such content trivializes women's professional standing, reinforcing public perceptions that they are unworthy of serious political roles. It is important to note that 42.6% of the posts were neutral, criticizing the politicians' decisions without reference to their gender or other personal characteristics.

**Fig. 4 – Percentage of posts in the monitored sample that included attacks on women based on the UNDP Gender Barometer Typology**

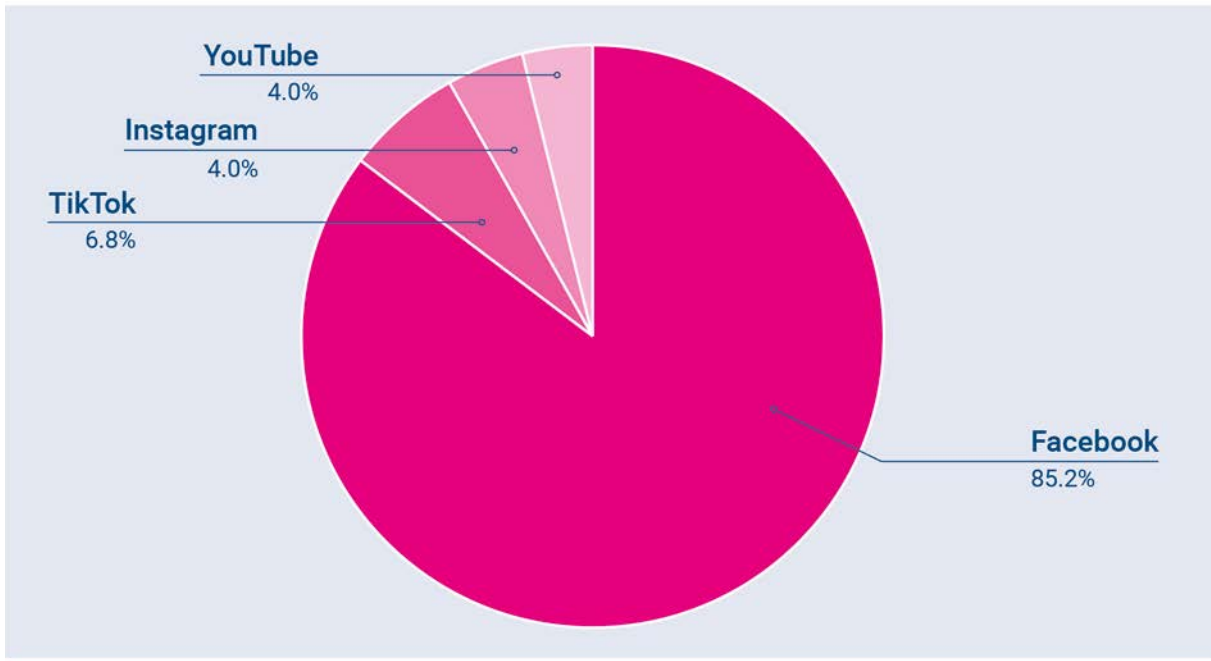


Concrete examples highlight how gender blends with political attack. Justice Minister Eva Decroix was frequently [belittled](#) with the diminutive “Evička” and [depicted](#) in manipulated imagery holding a broom, reducing her authority to domestic stereotypes. Defense Minister Jana Černochová was [referred](#) to as “Fraulein”, an outdated and derogatory address for unmarried women. Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Markéta Pekarová Adamová was repeatedly [mocked](#) as “Blběna” (roughly “idiot woman”), an insult designed to discredit her intelligence. MEP Markéta Gregorová faced persistent targeting by opposition leader Jindřich Rajchl, who [described](#) her as a “woke fanatic” and linked her name with the term “špína” (“filth”). These narratives illustrate how disinformation weaponizes gendered

language to question not only political positions but also personal legitimacy.

Out of the six channels with the highest number of posts, **five belonged to politicians**. Notably, **23.3% of analyzed posts came from Jindřich Rajchl<sup>4</sup>**, founder and chairman of the far-right PRO (Právo, Respekt, Odbornost – Law, Respect, Expertise) party. Rajchl not only amplified gendered narratives but also **weaponized them as part of a broader anti-government and anti-liberal rhetoric**. While Facebook was by far the most common platform for hostile content in the monitored dataset, survey respondents also identified X as a key arena of hostility – even though this monitored sample did not capture comparable volumes of X posts.

**Fig. 5 – Most used platforms in the monitored Sample**



The timing of hostile activity also tells a story. Online attacks in the Czech information space peaked in June 2025, coinciding with Eva Decroix’s appointment as Minister of Justice. Attention quickly shifted to her academic background.<sup>5</sup> Opponents mocked Decroix as academically unqualified, untrustworthy, or even fraudulent. This case illustrates how real or ambiguous controversies become amplified through gendered disinformation. For male politicians, scandals often remain framed as po-

litical or ideological; for women, they are personalized and tied to questions of competence. In Decroix’s case, her degrees became a shorthand for incompetence and illegitimacy, reinforcing long-standing stereotypes about women’s supposed lack of qualifications. It also shows that moments of political advancement for women are often accompanied by waves of online hostility, suggesting that visibility and promotion trigger renewed efforts to undermine their credibility.

**Fig. 6 – Number of attacks and observed data in the monitored period**





**Survey results confirm the pervasiveness and impact of these attacks.** The survey respondents, evenly split between women and men, included both national and European-level politicians across a broad age range (25–64), providing insights from different levels of visibility. Seven out of eight reported being targeted by false or manipulated information online. For some, this harassment was occasional, but two reported experiencing it constantly, and another two frequently. Most attributed the origins of such attacks to a mix of domestic political actors and wider disinformation networks, with only one pointing to foreign sources.

The most common forms were fabricated quotes, accusations of incompetence, and edited images, with several also noting sexualized content or slander about private life. Half of the respondents observed gender-specific elements in these attacks, including remarks about appearance, insinuations of irrationality or being “too emotional,” and patronizing labels such as “little girl.” **Male respondents unanimously agreed that women face harsher or different forms of online abuse, underscoring that gender is a critical factor shaping the character of disinformation.** Importantly, four respondents said the intensity of attacks had increased compared to a year ago, while only three felt it had stayed the same. This points to a worsening trend, suggesting that gendered disinformation is escalating rather than stabilizing.

The consequences extend beyond political debate into personal lives. Respondents rated their sense of safety in expressing themselves online at just 2.88 out of 5, and four admitted that online abuse had negatively affected their mental health. Some of the most severe incidents included death threats, threats of physical violence, unsolicited genital images, and even one report of a threat of sexual violence. While numerically fewer, these cases highlight the extreme risks women face in digital spaces. One politician explained that **attacks had also affected her family, with children distressed by seeing their parent exhausted and demoralized.** Another described how persistent harassment pushed her into depression and even suicidal thoughts before she learned to disengage from hostile commentary. At the same time, respondents emphasized the importance of resilience and support networks: colleagues, friends, and family often played a critical role in helping women place online hostility into perspective.

Interviews further reveal the **intersectional nature of these attacks.** One politician reflected that while her male colleagues were mocked mainly for their ideology, her own competence was consistently questioned, particularly in defense and security, a portfolio still perceived as “male.” Another highlighted that being both a **woman and pro-democratic, pro-European, and openly supportive of Ukraine** meant she was targeted not only with political

criticism but also with body shaming, disinformation about her family, and threats of violence. This suggests that gendered disinformation is most severe where gender identity intersects with political orientation, making **liberal and pro-Western women especially vulnerable**, while women on other parts of the spectrum often face less personal targeting. The impact on political participation is also visible: While most respondents rejected the idea of withdrawing from public life, the average score was 2.38/5, with some reporting they had at times considered stepping back. This demonstrates how harassment creates constant pressure to disengage.

**The need for systemic responses is clear.** Politicians reported that platform reporting mechanisms rarely brought meaningful results, while legal remedies were slow and often ineffective. Four respondents said their party or employer offered support when attacks occurred, but two received none, illustrating uneven levels of institutional protection. Survey respondents emphasized public awareness campaigns, stronger accountability of social media companies, digital security tools, and legal aid as the most urgent forms of support.

Several also stressed the importance of visible solidarity from male colleagues, noting that if only women speak about gendered disinformation, the issue risks being dismissed as a niche concern rather than recognized as a broader democratic problem.

In sum, the Czech case illustrates how **gendered disinformation intersects with political polarization**, reinforcing stereotypes that frame women as incompetent, unserious, or morally suspect. Attacks not only damage individual well-being but also spill over into family life, further raising the personal cost of political engagement. These attacks spike at moments when women gain visibility, discouraging political engagement and narrowing democratic representation. Without effective interventions, whether through stronger platform accountability, institutional support mechanisms, or cross-party solidarity, gendered disinformation will continue to undermine women's political participation and weaken the resilience of Czech democracy. For Czech democracy to remain resilient, addressing gendered disinformation must become not only a women's issue but a shared democratic priority.

# Recommendations

## 1. Hold digital platforms accountable

- **Enforce meaningful moderation of gendered abuse.** Both survey respondents and interviewees stressed that reporting systems on Facebook and/or Instagram rarely produced results. Posts calling for sexual violence or threatening children were left online. Platforms should be required to establish rapid-response moderation teams in local languages, with clear escalation paths for high-risk content such as threats against children or sexual violence.
- **Increase transparency of algorithms.** As Czech interviewees noted, algorithmic amplification rewards content that is polarizing and hateful. EU-level enforcement of the **Digital Services Act (DSA)** should prioritize opening platform data for independent auditing of gendered disinformation patterns.
- **Treat gendered disinformation as a systemic risk under the DSA.** The DSA explicitly requires extensive online platforms to assess and mitigate systemic risks, including those affecting democratic processes. Coordinated gendered harassment and disinformation should be formally recognized within this framework.

Regulators should make clear that even when content is “lawful but awful,” platforms have a responsibility to reduce its amplification and provide remedies for targeted users.

## 2. Strengthen political institutions and parties

- **Adopt internal duty-of-care protocols.** Survey data showed uneven levels of party support. Parties should establish clear internal guidelines: designate a contact person for complaints, provide communication and legal support, and ensure access to psychological counseling.
- **Promote cross-party solidarity.** Several interviewees stressed that unless men speak out, gendered disinformation risks being dismissed as a “women’s issue.” Male politicians should visibly denounce gendered attacks against colleagues, regardless of party affiliation, making this a matter of **democratic integrity rather than partisan debate.**
- **Training and resilience-building.** Parties should offer training in **digital security, media literacy, and psychological resilience**, equipping politicians to better handle harassment without isolation. This could be made part of onboarding for all new MPs, MEPs and candidates.

- **Mentorship for young women.** Institutionalize cross-generational mentoring so that women entering politics are not isolated and can learn coping strategies from senior colleagues. This is best done through **cooperation with women's NGOs**, leveraging their existing expertise.
- **Family-friendly politics.** Interviews highlighted motherhood as a key stigma. Policies such as childcare support during campaigns, flexible scheduling, and visible normalization of fathers in politics would counteract stereotypes.

### 3. Legal and state-level responses

- **Streamline legal remedies.** Politicians in both countries described legal steps as slow and ineffective. Governments should explore **fast-track legal mechanisms** for online threats, especially when they involve sexual violence or family members.
- **Integrate gendered disinformation into national security strategies.** The Czech and Slovak information environments show that attacks are often coordinated around geopolitical issues (Ukraine, NATO, migration). Gendered disinformation should be recognized not only as an equality issue but as a **tool of hybrid threats** (especially when linked to pro-Kremlin or anti-EU narratives), undermining democratic resilience, with monitoring responsibility assign-

ned to cyber or strategic communication units.

- **Systematic monitoring.** States could support independent institutions or think tanks to continuously monitor gendered disinformation, similar to election monitoring, to provide policymakers with regular evidence.
- **Protect elections.** Integrate **gendered disinformation monitoring into electoral observation frameworks**, ensuring fairness includes inclusivity. This would help guarantee that women can campaign without disproportionate harassment becoming a barrier to political competition.

### 4. Civil society and public awareness

- **Public awareness campaigns.** Survey respondents emphasized the importance of naming the problem so it cannot be trivialized. Campaigns should highlight **real cases of gendered disinformation** and its democratic costs, not only its personal harms.
- **Mentorship and support networks.** Respondents in both countries called for mentorship programs and peer networks for women in politics, creating **safe spaces for sharing coping strategies** and strengthening resilience.

- **Media responsibility.** Interviewees pointed out that when media outlets reproduce sexist framing (e.g., focusing on appearance or motherhood), it normalizes hostility. Media codes of ethics should explicitly discourage amplifying gendered tropes.
- **Cross-sector alliances.** Build bridges between women in politics, journalism, academia, and activism to **share tools and resources** (legal aid, digital security training, psychological support).

## 5. Cross-country learning

- **Tailor counter-measures to national contexts.** In Czechia, attacks most often delegitimized women as **incompetent**, while in Slovakia, they painted women as **morally corrupt or untrustworthy**. Responses must reflect these differences; for example, fact-checking in Czechia should emphasize professional competence, while in Slovakia, emphasis should be placed on debunking narratives about moral betrayal.
- **Regional cooperation.** Given the shared experience across Central Europe, Czech and Slovak liberal institutions should collaborate with partners in Poland, Hungary, and beyond to **exchange best practices on countering gendered disinformation**.

- **Leverage EU frameworks.** Push for **EU guidelines on gendered disinformation**, linked to the **Digital Services Act** and **European Democracy Action Plan**, ensuring harmonized protection across member states.

## 6. Reframing the narrative

- **Shift from “protecting women” to “protecting democracy.”** Public communication should avoid framing gendered disinformation as a “women’s issue” and instead emphasize that it **undermines pluralism and fair competition**.
- **Showcase role models.** Elevate stories of women who resisted disinformation and succeeded politically, normalizing resilience and countering deterrence effects.
- **Engage men as allies.** Run initiatives targeting male politicians to **publicly commit** to standing against gendered disinformation (pledges, campaigns, joint statements).

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that **gendered disinformation is not an isolated phenomenon but a systemic and escalating challenge** in both Czechia and Slovakia. Across both cases, women in politics face attacks that extend far beyond legitimate criticism of their policies. They are targeted with narratives that question their **competence, morality, and very right to participate in public life**. While Czech female politicians were most often framed as *incompetent*, Slovak women were more frequently portrayed as *morally corrupt or untrustworthy*. Despite these differences, the underlying logic is the same: to discredit women, undermine their legitimacy, and deter others from entering politics.

The consequences are severe. Attacks spill over into **family life**, with children and relatives subjected to secondary trauma. They erode **mental health and safety**, leading some women to consider withdrawing from public life. Most importantly, gendered disinformation **narrows democratic competition** by discouraging participation, amplifying polarization, and legitimizing misogyny as a tool of political struggle. The fact that such attacks are often **amplified by mainstream political actors**, including senior government figures, underscores the urgency of addressing this problem.

At the same time, the research also reveals resilience. Women politicians develop coping strategies, draw on support networks, and often become more determined to continue their public service. Yet resilience at the individual level is not enough. Without stronger support from **political institutions, parties, platforms, and civil society**, the burden will remain disproportionately on the women themselves.

**Gendered disinformation is not merely a “women’s issue.”** It is a threat to pluralism, democratic integrity, and the resilience of liberal societies. If unchecked, it will continue to silence voices, reduce diversity in decision-making, and weaken public trust in democratic institutions.

The recommendations in this report, therefore, call for urgent, coordinated action: platforms must be held accountable, parties and institutions must protect and support their members, states must recognize gendered disinformation as part of broader hybrid threats, and civil society must challenge its normalization in public discourse. Only by treating gendered disinformation as a **shared democratic challenge** can both Czechia and Slovakia safeguard equal political participation and strengthen the foundations of their democracies.

# Methodology

This study combined three complementary research methods: **online monitoring of disinformation content**, a **survey of politicians**, and **in-depth interviews** with female politicians in Slovakia and Czechia. Together, these approaches allow us to capture both the quantitative scale of hostile narratives and the lived experiences of those directly targeted.

## Online Monitoring with Gerulata Juno

To map the prevalence and character of gendered disinformation, we conducted systematic monitoring using the Gerulata Juno tool. The monitoring focused on female politicians with a public presence of more than 10,000 followers as of 5 August 2025. Separate lists of Slovak and Czech women politicians were compiled (see Annex).

The monitored period covered **1 January 2024 – 31 July 2025**, a timeframe chosen to include both regular political debate and moments of heightened political visibility. In particular, it captures the campaign and aftermath of the June 2024 European Parliament elections, which served as a significant flashpoint for disinformation narratives in both countries. Platforms included **Facebook pages and groups, Instagram, Telegram channels and groups, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and You-**

**Tube**. Posts were filtered for those receiving **over 5,000 interactions**, ordered by engagement, and further narrowed to Slovak- or Czech-language content. Posts from mainstream media outlets were excluded to focus on citizen and political actor discourse.<sup>6</sup>

From this dataset, the first 200 posts per country were tagged for relevance. After excluding non-relevant items, **182 posts remained for Slovakia and 176 posts for Czechia**, which formed the basis for qualitative categorization.

Narratives were coded following the **UNDP Gender Barometer typology**:

- **Misogyny/sexism** – general attacks on women or women’s rights.
- **Attack/mockery based on appearance** – insults linked to body, clothing, or manner of speech.
- **Ageism** – stereotypes and discrimination based on age.
- **Attack/mockery based on skills, experience, and competencies** – undermining intelligence, skills, or knowledge.
- **Attacks based on moral criteria** – portraying women as corrupt, untrustworthy, or morally unfit.

- **Criticism on the grounds of gender stereotypes** – claims tied to stereotypical expectations of women's roles or family responsibilities.

Each post was assigned one or more tags according to this framework, enabling both quantitative analysis and qualitative illustration of hostile narratives.

### Survey of Politicians

To complement online monitoring, we designed a **survey distributed to female and male politicians at national, European, and local levels** in both Slovakia and Czechia. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions, capturing demographic data, experiences with online disinformation, frequency and forms of attacks, perceived gender dimensions, coping strategies, and institutional support.

The survey generated **six valid responses in Slovakia and eight in Czechia**, with a balanced gender split in both countries. Although the sample size is

limited, it provides unique insights into the prevalence, intensity, and personal impact of gendered disinformation across different political levels.

### In-depth Interviews

Finally, to capture the human dimension behind survey statistics and online monitoring, we conducted **three semi-structured interviews with female politicians**: two from Czechia and one from Slovakia. The interviews explored personal experiences with disinformation, the psychological and professional impact of attacks, coping mechanisms, and views on needed institutional or policy responses.

By combining **quantitative online monitoring, survey-based perceptions, and qualitative interviews**, this methodology allows for a holistic understanding of how gendered disinformation operates, whom it targets, and what its consequences are for democratic participation.



# Endnotes

- 1 In Slovak, the phrase „nesiahat' ani po členky“ (literally “not reaching even up to someone’s ankles”) is a common idiom meaning to be far inferior to someone in ability, status, or quality.
- 2 Journalists have also been frequent targets: RTVS moderator Marta Jančkárová [received](#) waves of death, rape, and torture threats after hosting a debate, while investigative reporter Xénia Makarová was [discredited](#) through a selectively edited video that SMER supporters further amplified with paid advertising. These cases demonstrate that gendered disinformation and harassment are not only tolerated but actively fueled from the political mainstream, creating a hostile environment for women in both politics and journalism.
- 3 The so-called “bitcoin scandal” erupted in spring 2025 when then-Justice Minister Pavel Blažek (ODS) accepted a €40 million bitcoin donation from Tomáš Jiříkovský, a convicted drug dealer and operator of an illegal darknet marketplace. The revelation, first reported by Czech media, triggered a major political crisis. Blažek resigned, and the scandal fueled opposition claims of corruption within the governing coalition. Eva Decroix was appointed as his successor in June 2025 with the mandate to restore credibility to the Ministry of Justice.
- 4 He first gained prominence as an organizer of protests against COVID-19 measures and later anti-government demonstrations linked to energy prices and the war in Ukraine. Rajchl has repeatedly [spread](#) conspiracy narratives and misinformation, including predictions of economic collapse and scaremongering about fuel shortages. Czech media have [identified](#) him as a figure who profits from spreading fear and manipulation. His party has been [described](#) as pro-Kremlin, in part due to ties with politicians critical of sanctions on Russia and sympathetic to Moscow. In 2023, he organized the large-scale demonstration “Česko proti bídě” (Czechia Against Poverty), where attempts were made to remove the Ukrainian flag from the National Museum, reinforcing the movement’s anti-Ukraine orientation.
- 5 Czech media [reported](#) that while she studied law in France, she had completed only four years of study and received a Master 1 diploma, without finishing the full five-year program leading to a Master 2. Despite this, Charles University nostrified her education in 2008 and granted her the Czech title Mgr. (Master of Laws). The controversy escalated when investigative media highlighted inconsistencies: another Czech lawyer, who had completed the full French program including Master 2, was denied nostrification only a year later. Although Decroix subsequently completed a Ph.D. at Charles University, critics portrayed her case as evidence of favoritism, dishonesty, or inflated credentials.
- 6 Query for the group of females in Czechia: Pekarov\* OR \*Adamov\* OR \*Konečn\* OR \*Majerov\* OR \*Nerudov\* OR \*Peštov\* OR Černocho\* OR Mračkov\* OR Vildumetzov\* OR Richterov\* OR Šafrank\* OR Charanzov\* OR Decroix\* OR Gregorov\* OR Balaščíkov\* OR Stehlíkov\* OR Kubískov\* OR Urbanov\* OR Bartůšek\* OR Pokorn\* OR Jermanov\*

# About the Author



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