Violence Against Women in Politics on Facebook

Tbilisi, Georgia

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CRRC Research

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CRRC-Georgia is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization, which collects, analyzes and publishes policy relevant data on social, economic and political trends in Georgia. CRRC-Georgia, together with CRRC-Armenia and CRRC-Azerbaijan, constitutes a network of research centers with the common goal of strengthening social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document presents the findings of a two-month study into online violence against women in politics, conducted by CRRC Georgia between August 31 and November 21, 2020 in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI). It examines abusive and harassing comments in response to posts by Facebook pages and profiles of majoritarian candidates in the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) and Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE) constitute a range of aggressive, abusive, and violent behaviors directed at women parliamentarians, candidates, activists and other public figures. These behaviors may reinforce traditional stereotypes and patriarchal gender roles, and seek to control women with a political profile and restrict their participation in public life. In an online context, such behaviors are typically facilitated by social media, and may involve public or private messages containing misogyny, aggressive or sexualized language, threats of violence (sexual or otherwise), and other personal abuse. Such attacks may cause severe psychological distress to the victim, and constitute a fundamental violation of their human rights as it is meant to silence women. Attacks on women in the public sphere also undermine the democratic process, through seeking to restrict women's fundamental right to participate in political processes.

This study examines the nature, extent, and sources of harassment of women majoritarian candidates in the 2020 parliamentary elections. Data for the study was collected using a combination of manual and automated (scraped) approaches. Additional data – deleted abusive comments and abusive inbox messages were received as screenshots via email from social media teams of women majoritarian candidates.

Findings

Nature of Online Violence

Online violence directed at women was frequently highly gendered, with women candidates receiving substantially more comments relating to their personal and sexual lives than their male counterparts. Attacks often sought to enforce patriarchal gender norms, suggesting that a candidate's role should be in the home or commenting on candidates' appearance or sexuality. Women candidates' public status was frequently attributed to their personal or sexual relationship with prominent male figures, a dynamic not observed in comments addressed to men candidates.

Candidates of both genders received highly obscene comments, often using vulgar, sexualized language. The nature of obscenity however differed substantially between men and women. Women received more obscene abuse directed at their person, whereas abuse towards men candidates was often directed at women in their lives (e.g. mothers, wives). Accordingly, much of the most obscene online violence identified centered either directly or indirectly on women.

Whilst clear differences were observed in the types of language used to attack women and men candidates, some forms of online violence appeared similar across genders. Most notably, the most frequent category of online violence observed was attacks on the credibility and trustworthiness of candidates, which took similar forms (e.g. affiliation with a foreign actor) for both men and women candidates.

Extent of Online Violence

The study identified thousands of abusive comments[1] against both women and men candidates in the 2020 parliamentary election. Women candidates observed during the study were far more likely to be targeted by online gendered

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[1] The study looked at both posts and comments of majoritarian candidates. However, it focused more on comments, since this was where violence happened.

harassment, receiving abuse at around three times the rate of their male counterparts. Whilst quotas have gone some way to improving women's representation in party lists, majoritarian seats were overwhelmingly contested by men. Despite comparatively few women being put forward by their parties in majoritarian seats, and representing only 22% of the overall sample, women make up 60% of the top ten candidates by abuse ratio, and 40% by absolute numbers.[2] Candidates from the two largest parties – Georgian Dream and the United National Movement – received proportionally far less online violence than those from smaller parties, with European Georgia seeing a particularly high rate of online violence.

Interestingly, the volume of online violence did not decrease after elections. In the period of 3-21 November, the project flagged 2502 comments as abusive. The nature of online violence did not change either.

Sources of Online Violence

Whilst male commentators were responsible for the most aggressive, violent and sexualized abuse identified during the study, women notably appeared responsible for more online violence than men in both proportionate and absolute terms.[3] Women candidates also received proportionally more online violence from other women (62%) than from men (38%). Similarly, a slight majority of abusive comments towards men candidates also came from other men (53%), although this effect was much less pronounced. This noted, the gender of most commenters was not observed due to unclear names of some Facebook accounts.[4]

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[2] There were 491 majoritarian candidates in the 2020 parliamentary elections, of which 107 were women. The monitoring covered 243 Facebook pages/profiles of majoritarian candidates, of which 47 were women and 196 men.

[3] According to a recent representative study by CRRC for Internews Georgia, women use Facebook more often than men. https://internews.org/resource/georgia-information-ecosystem-assessment?fbclid=IwAR2Lvrt_5O2vhKMSDp-CtDM_DtYyF7oTUur1s5QyaqJMFJlb5tNh4ScGd7k

[4] The study also bears in mind that deletion of comments is a common practice by Facebook page/account managers. It was confirmed by women politicians and their social media managers during the meetings on the initial stage of the project.

Recommendations

The study finds women to be disproportionately the target of online violence in the pre-election period. These attacks represent a specific affront to the dignity and legitimacy of both women candidates and the political process, and constitute barriers to women's political participation. It is incumbent on all duty-bearers within the electoral environment to undertake measures to ensure women candidates can participate in political processes on an equal footing to their male counterparts. To this end, specific action should be taken to ensure political dialogue takes place in a safe, civil environment and that women candidates are adequately supported during political campaigns.

To Political Parties

A. Make gender a part of the party's electoral strategy: explicitly mention gender equality and women's empowerment among the objectives and principles of all foundational and policy documents (like political party programs) to support women's equal participation.

B. Integrate gender equality into a party's political communication strategy, including online communication channels.

C. Set internal gender quotas (formal and informal) to change women's historic under-representation, including in leadership positions and decision-making processes.

D. Create internal mechanisms in the political parties to raise awareness of the party members regarding identification, prevention and response to all forms of violence against women and girls, including online.

To the Election Administration of Georgia

A. Conduct awareness raising campaigns directed at political parties and voters, aiming to increase awareness on VAW-E online and offline and ensure that ensure there are processes in place to monitor and mitigate against VAW-E - both online and offline.

B. Election administration should ensure the political party code of conduct prohibits parties and candidates from participating in or supporting online violence against women.

To the Parliament of Georgia

A. Incorporate actions against VAW-P into existing laws and frameworks, connecting the issue to laws related to violence against women and/or equal political participation.

B. Further research VAW-P online and offline, how it is manifested in Georgian socio-cultural reality, and how it affects women parliamentarians.

C. Raise awareness of parliamentarians (both men and women) on VAW-P in all of its forms.

D. Introduce a resolution condemning VAW-P in all its forms and create a platform to share best practice and international experience on combating VAW-P in the Parliament.

To the Government of Georgia

A. Designate the issue of VAW-P as a priority area for law enforcement office and state agencies, working to prevent violence against women and response the cases of violence.

B. Create procedures for registering and handling complaints specifically on VAW-P, including online, through new or existing state agencies, including police stations, electoral authorities or the office of Public Defender of Georgia.

To the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia:

A. Incorporate actions against VAW-P into existing risk assessment methodology and monitoring mechanisms.

B. Raise awareness of law enforcement office representatives on VAW-P, online and offline.

To Media Outlets and CSOs:

A. To advocate to political parties and elected officials to resolve the issue of VAW-P and convene civil society workshops bringing together stakeholders to discuss advocacy on combating online VAW-P within the Georgian context and interventions to push for change.

B. Continue to support election observers and CSO representatives in monitoring VAW-P in online and offline spaces as part of overall election observation, such as dedicated social media/disinformation monitors to track and report online VAW-P during elections.

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of a two-month study, conducted by CRRC Georgia with financial support from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), into online violence against women in politics in the 2020 Georgian parliamentary elections. It examines abusive and harassing comments in response to posts by majoritarian candidates Facebook pages and profiles. The study is based on extensive monitoring of candidate's Facebook presences between August 31 and November 21, 2020.

Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP)[5] and Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE)[6] constitute a range of aggressive, abusive, and violent behaviours directed at women parliamentarians, candidates, activists and other public figures. These behaviours may reinforce traditional stereotypes and patriarchal gender roles, and seek to control women with a political profile and restrict their participation in public life. In an online context, such behaviours are typically facilitated by social media, and may involve public or private messages containing misogyny, aggressive or sexualized language, threats of violence (sexual or otherwise), and other personal abuse. Such attacks may cause severe psychological distress to the victim, and constitute a fundamental violation of their human rights. Attacks on women in the public sphere also undermine the democratic process, through seeking to restrict women's fundamental right to participate in political processes.

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[5] Krook 2020

[6] Schneider and Carroll 2020

POLITICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

This study examines the phenomena of Violence Against Women in Politics and Violence Against Women in Elections in Georgia, specifically online forms undertaken on the country's dominant social media platform, Facebook.[7] In June 2020, the Georgian parliament adopted a new law requiring parties contesting elections in the country to allocate 25 percent of party lists to persons "of a different gender".[8] This change has raised the profile of women in politics and will ensure minimum representation of women politicians in the country's legislature. This elevated profile exposed more women to the possibility of gendered political violence, including in the online spaces.[9]

Women politicians in Georgia have a troubled history of internet-enabled political violence. In the most high-profile case, a prominent women politician had an intimate video leaked online following a split with the ruling party.[10] The situation is worsened with the fact that to date, such cases have not been fully investigated, with prosecutors failing to bring those who produced, obtained and disseminated such video before justice.[11]

The problem of sexual blackmail has been recently highlighted in a memorandum signed by women politicians in September 2020, which called for action against the dissemination of videos and materials depicting the personal lives of

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[7] The Caucasus Research Resource Centers 2019,

https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2019ge/INTACFB/?fbclid=IwAR2YlqSNOcS9W5jwxbtpqmAg55Yysj2WJvZQGMEy4ZldNqlsaJJ4GpZhB2U

[8] "Georgia Takes on Male-Dominated Parliament with Gender Quotas | Eurasianet" 2020

[9] Notwithstanding the fact that the instruments and mechanisms against VAW have been significantly improved, the cyber-bullying and cyber-threats against politically active women and women human rights defenders remain a challenge as the response of law-enforcement agencies to these crimes is not effective and fails to respond to the scale of the problem. The situation of human rights and freedoms in Georgia, Parliamentary Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, 2018

[10] "MP Beselia Speaks of 'Moral Terror' After Alleged Sex Tape Leak" 2019;

"Georgia's sex-tapes politics returns", Eurasianet, 2019

[11] The situation of human rights and freedoms in Georgia, Parliamentary report of the Public Defender of Georgia, 2016

politicians. The memorandum read: "In recent years, it is frequent that images/videos depicting the personal lives of politicians and other public figures have been spread via different means and used for manipulation and blackmail. In this regard, women are a particular target. Manipulation [of a person's] personal life or publicizing it is the cruelest method for ousting women from politics, their moral discrediting and full marginalization."[12]

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study examines the nature and extent of online violence against women in politics in Georgia, specifically abuse and harassment of women majoritarian candidates in the 2020 parliamentary elections. It seeks to address the following research questions:

- To what extent are women majoritarian candidates the subject of online violence on Facebook?

- Are women more likely than men to receive online violence and do factors such as political affiliation contribute towards the likelihood of abuse?

- Does a person's gender influence the likelihood that they will engage in online violence?

- What are the different types of online violence experienced by candidates online and how do these forms of online violence differ between men and women candidates?

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[12] Translated from the original text of the document, accessed via: https://publika.ge/qalma-politikosebma-memorandumi-gaaformes-daushvebelia-seqsualuri-ckhovrebis-amsakhveli-informaciit-shantadji/

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on manual coding of comments on Facebook posts of majoritarian candidates in the 2020 Georgian parliamentary elections. Coding flagged individual abusive comments on the basis of a set of categories developed by the project team with the support of the project gender expert. Meeting with women majoritarian candidates and their social media teams preceded the process. At those meetings women politicians and their support team shared with their experience about real life and social media attacks, their focus and nature. The monitoring proceeded with coding according to the following categories:

- Abuse related to age,
- Appearance,
- Family/personal life,
- Gender roles,
- Intelligence,
- Objectification,
- Trust, reliability,
- Misogyny, general offence,
- Abuse related to parties,
- Pseudo compliments.

In addition, monitors also captured keywords in abusive comments, highlighting frequently used terms of abuse for analysis.

Data for the study was collected using a combination of manual and automated (scraped) approaches. Additional data – deleted abusive comments and abusive inbox messages were received as screenshots via email from social media teams of women majoritarian candidates.

Ethics

Measures were taken to ensure the privacy of Facebook commenters observed during the study. Specifically, where data was collected automatically, names were removed from comment data prior to monitor coding. Where coding was undertaken manually, commenter names were not recorded.

The qualitative analysis provided herein includes examples of offensive comments in order to substantiate and clarify analysis. This noted, names of candidates and other identifying information have been deleted or substituted with square brackets to avoid further dissemination of online violence.

Gender Expert

Independent gender expert, Anna Iluridze was a head of gender department at Public Defender's Office of Georgia in 2016-2020. Gender expert reviewed the methodology and elaborated the coding categories, trained the monitors concerning online violence and cyber-bullying against women politicians and produced recommendations for better identification, prevention of and response to the online violence against women in politics.

LIMITATIONS

Constraints imposed by the operation of the Facebook platform present limits on the extent to which representative quantitative estimates can be made, particularly in relation to subgroup analysis (e.g. gender, party). Furthermore, the multilingual nature of Georgian Facebook discourse presented some limited challenges for monitoring.

Representativeness and Comment Deletion

Specifically, data could not be collected in a way that can ensure a representative sample. Over half of all candidates (around two thirds of women candidates) were found not to possess a public online presence. Of those candidates that did, three forms of presence were observed: pages, verified profiles and unverified profiles. Of these, comments could only be scraped from pages and verified

profiles, with the NVIVO scraping tool used to gather comments unable to capture data from large numbers of pages.[13]

Where scraping was not possible, data was collected manually, with important differences between collection methodologies (see Annex 1). A common challenge across both scraped and manually collected data was that candidates frequently delete abusive comments, and that some candidates appear to be more active in this regard than others. Also, five pages were deleted during the period of monitoring; however, some data is available for those and it is included in the total numbers and nature of online violence identified by the study.

None of the above issues can be assumed to occur in truly random manner, violating core assumptions of most statistical tests. Accordingly, any estimates provided within this report should be understood as indicative – as opposed to representative – of any observed phenomena.

Language

Some comments on posts by majoritarian candidates in ethnic minority areas were presented in Armenian and Azeri languages. These comments were not monitored, given monitors' working languages of Georgian and Russian.

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[13] Scraping was undertaken in four waves, with the failure rate of each wave ranging between 40 and 60 percent.

PAGES MONITORED

The study identified 491 majoritarian candidates standing for 41 parties in 30 districts of Georgia.[14] Of these 491 candidates (of which 105 were women[15]), 243 were found to have some form of Facebook presence (either a page, profile or verified profile) and were monitored.[16] Some valid pages, belonging primarily to smaller parties, were not monitored as they were established and identified late during the project.

Table 1: Pages identified and monitored by gender and page type

	Gender	Valid				Invalid			Total
		Page	Profile	Verified profile	Total	Deleted	Not found	Total	Total
Monitored	Women	35	8	3	**46**	1		1	**47**
	Men	152	20	20	**192**	4		4	**196**
Total		**187**	**28**	**23**	**238**	5[17]	0	5	243
Not monitored	Women	0	0	0	**60**		60	60	**60**
	Men	0	0	0	**188**		188	188	**188**
Total		**0**	**0**	**0**	248	0	248	248	248
Grand total		187	28	23	486	5	248	253	491

The study saw an estimated[18] 366,897 comments reviewed across 13,032 posts by 243 candidates in the period August 31 to November 21, 2020.[19] Men candidates represented the majority of comments reviewed, due to their

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[14] These figures represent a combined dataset from CEC listings (published September 2020) updated in line with candidate withdrawal, and as such may not precisely match official figures.

[15] According to the data published by CEC by September 15, 2020

[16] Four low activity pages/profiles belonging to candidates were deleted shortly after identification following candidate withdrawal and have not been included in the final analysis.

[17] Five profiles were deleted during the monitoring period; however, data collected before deletion is included in the overall dataset.

[18] See *CrowdTangle and Imputation* in methodological annex.

[19] After November 6th data was collected manually and only abusive comments/posts were registered in the dataset.

oversized role in majoritarian lists (79%) and the large number of comments generated by particular male individuals – see below.

Table 2: Post and comment volume for monitored pages/profiles by gender

Candidate gender	Monitored	Estimated posts	Estimated comments
Women	84	3,317	89,429
Men	371	9,715	277,468
Total	**455**	**13,032**	**366,897**

Levels of Facebook activity varied substantially between candidates and between parties, and did not necessarily reflect party profile. For example, whilst the ruling party (Georgian Dream) produced large quantities of posts and received substantial numbers of comments during the monitoring period – the study found fewer posts and comments relating to Georgian Dream than for smaller, less well-resourced parties. Conversely, Giorgi Vashadze of Strategy Aghmashenebeli received more comments individually than many other parties combined.

Table 3: Post and comment volume for monitored pages/profiles by party

Party	Candidates Monitored	Estimated posts	Estimated comments
United National Movement	25	1,912	125,066
Strategy Aghmashenebeli	2	363	73,329
Georgian Dream	30	2,370	52,666
European Georgia	19	2,239	29,244
Lelo	28	3,055	21,356
Georgian Labour Party	8	187	13,484
Independent	7	308	11,656
Greens' Party	6	36	7,284
Girchi	4	359	5,762
Other	114	2,203	27,050
	243	**13,032**	**366,897**

Monitoring was conducted on at least one candidate from 41 parties standing in the 2020 parliamentary election. Five parties, listed below did not have a candidate monitored, as no Facebook presence could be identified for any standing majoritarian, or for whom a presence was found: Free Democrats, People's Party, Euro-Atlantic Vector, Socialist Workers' Party, and the Traditionalists.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The report proceeds by presenting the results of the study, inclusive of qualitative analysis of narratives of violence towards women and men majoritarian candidates, followed by quantitative analysis of the extent and sources of online violence. Further, deleted comments and personal messages self-reported by women politicians are summarized and followed by recommendations addressed to relevant duty bearers.

FINDINGS

THE NATURE OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

The study focused on psychological violence in online media and examined the nature of online violence majoritarian candidates were exposed to via Facebook. This type of psychological violence seeks to delegitimize women as political actors, undermining their trustworthiness, competence and visibility in political and public spheres. It negatively affects the way women are portrayed and therefore, how they are perceived.[20]

The study compared the extent of each of the categories of online violence tracked (see methodology in brief above and in more detail in annex 1 as a proportion of all abusive comments. Given the gender imbalance in the dataset, figures presented below are calculated separately for comments against men and women.

Whilst many comments contained several types of abuse, and hatred and aggression were often present explicitly or implicitly in abusive comments, the most frequent form of online violence observed was against the credibility, competence and trustworthiness of candidates, notwithstanding candidate's gender. Attacks on the credibility and trustworthiness of candidates comprised the largest share of online violence faced by both women and men majoritarian candidates. The next largest category identified against candidates of both genders comprised misogynistic comments and general offence (see figure 1 below).[21] Other types of online violence were comparatively smaller for each

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[20] Violence against women in political parties: analysis of the situation in Tunisia, NDI, 2019

[21] While coding, misogynistic comments, comments containing hatred and general offence were all coded under the category "misogyny, general offence" for two reasons: 1) monitoring categories were similar for women and men candidates; 2) Since the study looked at comments on posts in a

gender. However, certain differences were observed between the nature of online violence received by men and women. Women received more comments relating to party-related abuse, objectification, diversion of attention, intelligence, appearance, family/personal life and, importantly, stereotypical gender roles, the latter representing an 11%/1% difference ratio between women and men candidates. Comments questioning trustworthiness and the credibility of candidates was more commonly directed against men candidates.

Figure 1: Share of the types of online violence by gender of majoritarian candidates
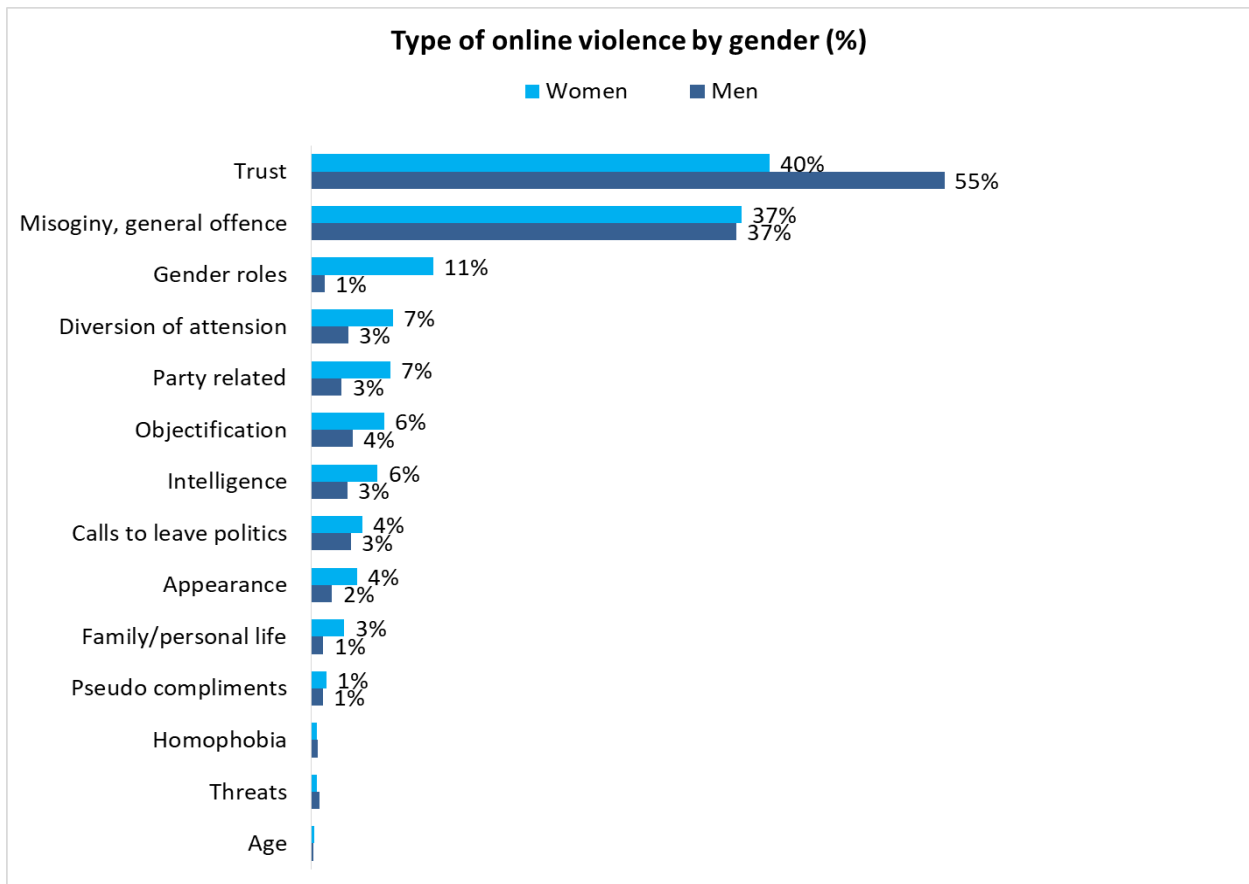
* The "misogyny, general offence" category unites all comments that expressed hatred and that contained general offence directed at candidates. In case of women candidates, since the study explored comments on Facebook posts as a snapshot, without following back the commenters, it is hard to distinguish whether comments containing violence and hatred are addressing women because they are women or for some other reasons.

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snapshot without following the commenters, it is hard to assess whether comments containing violence and hatred are addressing women because they are women or for some other reasons.

Qualitative observations on types of online violence and differences in the treatment of women and men majoritarian candidates are presented below. Out of respect for candidates and a desire not to further disseminate online violence, examples of abusive comments are provided without identifying candidates. It should be noted that the examples provided below are translated and often lose intensity in translation.

Online Violence Related to Trust/Professionalism

Both men and women majoritarian candidates appeared to receive similar attacks on their trustworthiness and credibility. Such attacks frequently saw candidates labeled as "Sorosite"[22], even "bitches of Soros", or as KGB agents, pro-Russian, traitors, demagogues, ungrateful, putschists[23], populists or unreliable. Commenters also frequently accused candidates of having unstable political preferences. In November, after the elections and after the release of election results, abusive comments questioning credibility were mostly focused on calling women candidates losers in the "who would vote for you" line. In addition, as there was a large opposition rally in November, perceived by many commenters as the UNM rally, UNM candidates' trustworthiness was questioned by saying they did not care for people as they tried to gather them and put them in danger of catching Corona virus.

Attacks linked to association with George Soros were most frequently addressed to candidates with Western education, or with some association with the Open Society Foundation. One commenter called on such politicians to leave public life as they are "snakes of the satanic Soros group". Conversely, politicians who were educated in or had lived in Russia were accused of being KGB agents or pro-Russian. Such comments included: "Have you already got your salary from KGB?" or "It is better for you to shut up, you fifth column agent. You were sending

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[22] Even though the word might normally mean a follower of George Soros, in comments it was used with a negative connotation indicating obedience and service to the ruining goals of Soros.

[23] Putschist is a member of a small group of people trying to overthrow the government in a violent way. The term was used in comments with a highly negative connotation indicating unjustified attempts of violent government change.

information to Russia recently, and now you are trying to prove that you are a patriot?! You are a traitor rat!"

Accusations of treachery or putschist intent were sometimes connected to the candidates' families, an example of which being a candidate who was told that they were "[…] a putschist like your putschist father". Candidates which had moved between parties were frequently abused for their shift in affiliation, often accompanied by insinuations of treachery or unreliability. One such candidate was described as "the cork that fits every hole".

In the post-election period, there were two main lines of online violence related to trust/credibility of women majoritarian candidates: (1) portraying women candidates as losers who people would certainly not vote for ("You have no trust and no votes, who would vote for the bitches of Soros") and (2) blaming majoritarian candidates for not caring about people and organizing rallies, which threatened with the spread of Coronavirus ("How can you pose such a threat to people (with over 2000 Covid cases daily). You do not care about people"; "You are no less cowards than Bidzina. Why aren't you standing with people?"). In men's case there were similar lines and additionally questioning that they were not capable of building/prospering the country ("The country built by him will have no go"; "F..k Georgia changed by [candidate]"; "Who will come to power for the benefit of the country? No one!")

Misogyny and General Offence

Comments on posts of both women and men majoritarian candidates were frequently intense and hate-filled, and broad ranging in nature. Misogynistic language was widespread, as was the use of profanity. Whilst both genders received humiliating and abusive comments, there were differences in how this hatred was expressed and worded. Women saw considerable levels of online violence related to their sexual lives or "slut shaming". Many comments were loaded with implicit or explicit sexual overtones, and women candidates were frequently sexually connected to male leaders. Comments frequently used terminology, referring to hell, Satan, and witches. Women also received large

numbers of more general comments, such as being called "garbage", vomit and poop emojis, and simple direct expressions of hate (e.g. "I hate you").

Men candidates were the recipients of large volumes of profanity, which whilst also sexual in nature (referring to sexual organs or acts), was predominantly only linked to their personal sexual lives in an abstract or absurdist manner. Profanity directed towards men candidates range from crude, brief vulgarity to long, elaborate diatribes. Whereas women candidates were themselves at the center of sexualized online violence, men candidates' families – notably their mothers, wives, 'genes', and other women relatives – were often the subjects of comments. Homophobic comparisons were used to express hatred and humiliation, sometimes involving implicit threats.

Hatred Against Women Candidates

Women candidates were frequently referred to as "sluts", "bitches", or prostitutes. These attacks were often linked to prominent male figures in Georgian politics, for example "[this] concubine of Mihuilo's[24] harem has 0 chance against [men candidate]"). Women who have had more than one partner received abuse for their private lives, with such commenters presenting them as sex workers or otherwise sexually amoral, for example "F**k your prostitute soul jumping from one penis to another, you are a slut, bitch of [candidate's ex-husband] who left you"). Men rarely, if ever, received attacks relating to perceived promiscuity.

Commenters often used religious or occult terms – such as "witch", "Satan", "Satan's apostle" or "offspring of the devil" – in abuse of women majoritarian candidates. One such slur reformulated a candidate's name as "hell's entrance". Online violence frequently denigrated in a more general manner, describing women candidates as "trash", and otherwise using language that diminished or demeaned the candidate. In one comment, a woman candidate was told: "Born to crawl will never be able to fly".

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[24] Former Georgian president and still a leader of the largest opposition party, Mikheil Saakashvili.

After elections online violence against women candidates did not decrease. On the contrary, some women candidates became particular targets of online violence in November. The expression of hatred included swearing and F language, along the lines of "F..k you" or "You will be f..ked".

Hatred Against Men Candidates

Men typically receive more expletive-laden abuse, the most common form of which in the Georgian language contains reference to mothers, but in the context of the study frequently extended to wives, families and even bloodlines and genetic tree of candidates. Expression of hatred towards men often used homophobic language, such as "pederast". Men were also often targeted by online violence with humiliating intent. One man candidate was told that he "has no more value than a used condom", and that he "wears [his wife's] panties on his head". Several men candidates were abused by resembling them to clowns ("He needs a small ball on his nose and he is a cut clown, this goat man"). There were a few references to Fascists ("Is he Goebbels, Goering, Himmler or all three of them?") and Soviet leaders ("You are like Lenin, only the hat is missing").

A common theme of online violence saw both men and women candidates compared to animals. Women, but not men, were referred to as "cows" (or less frequently "buffalo"), making unflattering allusions to their appearance or weight. Women were also described as "hens", implying a lack of intelligence. Online violence against men candidates often made reference to equids, particularly horses or donkeys, occasionally including the suggestion of intercourse with said animal. Some of the men candidates were called pigs referring to their weight and luxury life. Both men and women candidates were described as rats, often to suggest immorality and unscrupulousness. Men and women candidates were both occasionally referred to as "goats", mostly as an attack on their appearance. In a small number of cases, jackals and frogs were worked into elaborate insults intended to humiliate men majoritarian candidates.

Threats

Direct threats to the physical wellbeing of candidates were comparatively rare, but addressed both men and women majoritarian candidates. Threats were generally not gender specific and frequently referred to "mass shooting" of the candidates and their party/team members. There were some arrest threats towards men candidates. A few threats made reference to (the Georgian Soviet leader) Joseph Stalin, for example "Give me the power that Stalin had and in 24 hours you will see [the candidate's party] all hanged; They say Stalin was a murderer but he f**ked the mothers of such rascals." One women candidate was told that she should be burnt with fuel, and a very specific violent threat against a man candidate: "I hate this man so much that if I come across him somewhere I will not be able to hold myself back and I will beat him up/kill him. I don't care if they arrest me for that".

Gender Roles

Women in particular received online violence based on stereotypical understandings of gender roles in society. More than one tenth (11%) of all online violence that women majoritarian candidates received on Facebook made some reference to the commenter's understanding of the role a woman should have in a society (compared to only 1% of men). These comments typically suggested that the commenter believed that women should remain at home, in a family, in a kitchen, and doing housework rather than being active outside home.

For example, some women candidates were told: "You will probably not have your house cleaned, how can you clean the country?", or "You are a pretty woman but go to the kitchen", "Go to the kitchen and try [working] there, can't you see that you can do nothing about [politics]?!" "Go… Don't you have a husband? Children? Why do you keep staying outside like a bitch." "These [women candidates] are a shame to a Georgian woman."

A consistent theme throughout such comments was the insinuation that the candidate should leave politics and dedicate their lives to domesticity. Some comments called on women candidates to leave because they were not "strong enough" to be in the political sphere ("Get rest, why are you in this fight of lions?

There will be fights of lower-caliber people, try your forces there"). Men majoritarian candidates also received comments calling on them to leave politics, but most frequently in an unspecified manner (e.g. "get lost", "go to hell", "leave us alone"). No men were told to spend more time in a kitchen or to look after their children, but some comments suggested they should take up another business, like agriculture or fishing ("Look after your barn, give up politics"; "You should have stayed in [city name], bought a fishing rod and started fishing. There's no place for you in parliament").

Comments relating to gender roles often did not address the candidate directly but suggested clear differences in female and male roles, particularly no place for women in politics. For example: "A man should be a man, a woman should be a woman!" or contained within a back-handed compliment "It is surprising how this kind-faced woman found herself in this misunderstanding".

Online violence against women often included sexist stereotypes around talkativeness, particularly talkativeness lacking common sense or reason ("Chit-chatter girl", "What is this woman blabbering"). Such commenters sought to undermine a candidate's credibility by insinuating that their words are vacuous or that their voice was annoying. These comments often appeared alongside comparisons with animals, notably hens or chickens, and sometimes even half hen, diminishing them even more; in which their speech was compared to a hen's clucking. Women candidates were often simply told to "shut up".

Some comments expressed disrespect towards women candidates if they deemed here "unwomanly" ("I don't want to hear your manly voice and speech"; "Fake woman"; "Not a woman she is a witch"). Notions of manliness were also sometimes used to praise women candidates, for example, "She can do what many current MPs cannot do. She is a manly girl." Conversely, offense against some men candidates was grounded on comparing them to women, for example "You are walking around with cameras like a gossiping woman" and "Spell out what you want, don't talk like a staggering woman"). Men candidates were also attacked by diminishing their manliness, with commenters saying that they are not "real man" or "manly man" ("…When a man licks his own spit! Unfortunately there are many such "man" nowadays").

Online Violence Related to Intelligence

There were also cases when women's intelligence and mental abilities were directly questioned. One was told, "You have a hollow head, empty, brainless", another "do you think of these [ideas] yourself or is someone helping you?" Many short, simple slurs on intelligence, such as "dim-witted", "uneducated", "lacking culture" were also identified.

Online violence related to intelligence was similarly directed towards certain men majoritarian candidates. One was told, "He thinks he is a genius, but he lives in his fantasies. He will ruin the country." Also, "I wonder if something is scattered in your head". There was overlap between language used in intelligence-related slurs towards both men and women candidates, for example: "Where do you find such dim-witted people?", "Brainless". Some comments on intelligence were linked to the calls to leave politics ("Go home, what budget are you talking about, you don't even know the multiplication table"), or to comments on appearance "Does he have a brain in this huge head?".

Online Violence Related to Appearance and Age

Online violence related to appearance accounted for 4% of all online violence that women candidates received on Facebook (2% for men). Such abuse frequently served to divert attention from the subject of a post (election campaign activity, position on current events, news stories, etc.) and sought to undermine the perception of a women candidate as a serious political figure.

Derogatory comments on women candidates' appearance included comments on weight ("How fat she is!", "Are you in intensive eating mode?"), on height ("Is this lilliputian running for office again?"), hair ("Finally combed her hair"), make-up ("Mascara does not look good on you"), outfit ("She is wearing a man's shirt", "You have no taste but don't have one normal person around you to advise you what to wear? You look like a first-grader, are going to school or what?") and style ("Man-woman"). Conversely, other comments, whilst superficially positive, sought to undermine women candidates' message by reducing them to their appearance: "You are so beautiful that I cannot follow what you are talking about", "She is super woman with incredible beauty", "Remember, no one will

vote for you because of your beautiful eyes". Few, if any comments towards men candidates saw them objectified in a similar manner.

Abusive comments based on the appearance of men candidates were also frequently used to divert discussion away from substantive issues. Men received comments on their weight ("How fat you have become!", "He looks like a pig", "Cheeks swollen by Khashlama"), hair/beard ("Let [candidate] shave his moustache and [other candidate] cut his hair. Then people may not recognize them and vote for them", "Shave your neck"), style outfit ("Why did you choose a shirt of that color, it is truly not nice", "This suit does not suit you", "This man has tired the suit, he is wearing the same one all the time"), bald head ("If as many hair grew on your head as many lies you said, you would be crested", "Let that bald stupid head of yours dry") or narrow-cut eyes ("Go ahead, narrow-eyed, kick the swallow").

Only a small number of comments drew attention to a candidate's age. Only long-standing women candidates were targeted for their age, ("Your time is up. Go home, you are old. Give way to young people", "Oh, she appears to be alive"). Conversely, only men candidates appear to have been targeted for their youth and inexperience ("Who is this kiddo checking? He needs to be checked himself", "Have you even graduated from school to be meeting with directors […] ?").

Online Violence Related to Party/Objectification

Both women and men majoritarian candidates received frequent abuse based on party affiliation – 7% of online violence directed towards women and 4% in the case of men. Candidates of the former ruling party, the United National Movement (UNM), and the recently-formed Lelo received particularly high levels of party-related abuse, as did other candidates which had links to the UNM earlier in their political careers.

Candidates of the United National Movement were often abused using word derived from the word "Naz",[25] examples of which include: "Naz-executioners", "Naz-dissenters", "Naz-pack", "Naz-prostitute-band", "Naz-charlatans".

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[25] The first three letters of the word "National" in the Georgian language are "Naz".

Comments frequently referenced incidents that took place under the UNM government – sometimes referred to by commenters as the "bloody" regime. Such comments made reference to the abuse of prisoners and other controversies of the UNM era. UNM candidates were told that they were "full of vice as the party since they stand with". Some comments were more sympathetic with at least one commenter noting they vote for the candidates if they were not representing the UNM.

In case of the Lelo candidates, abuse related primarily to the party's leaders' role as senior figures at a major Georgian bank. Candidates were criticized for representing a party of "creditors" that were felt to have left many people homeless. Some commenters suggested that candidates had loans themselves and were representing the party for financial reasons.

Party-related abuse often presented candidates as "puppets" ruled by their party leaders. Some candidates were described in more humiliating terms, as "panties" of their party leaders. There was a set of comments which called on candidates to express gratitude towards their former political leaders or reproaching them for being perceived to be ungrateful. "Wasn't she created by [political leader]?! She might not be able to get married without him. She is so ugly." "Whose hand woman are you that you received some percent [of votes]." Many candidates were portrayed in comments not as independent political figures, but as being incapable of making decisions for themselves or having an independent stance on issues.

Online Violence Related to Family/Personal Life

A smaller subset of comments (3% of online violence for women and 1% for men) saw majoritarian candidates exposed to abusive comments related to their family and personal life. Both women and men majoritarian candidates received this form of online violence, although the final "addressees" of family related abuse were typically women – either a candidates' wife or mother or women candidates themselves. Women candidates were criticized for their "complicated personal lives" and choice of partners. Women were sometimes offended by mentioning their former husbands, sometimes also emphasizing the fact that they were left

by their husbands or exchanged for another woman ("How can you speak up having that ex-husband?" "If you had any signs of womanliness, [former husband] would not leave you. Look at the woman he is married to now! You are probably very envious and tearing apart. If you become softer and gentler you might even marry for the third time"). One commenter attempted to portray a woman candidate as unreliable by a commenter saying: "How can you solve [state-level] problems while you are not able to put your personal life in order?!"

Comments directed at men candidate's families frequently addressed their wives, mothers, families and often contained obscene phrases, such as "F**k your wife!", "Where is your crazy wife?" Also, "I will f..k your mother that you have in Armenia"[26], "Your family deserves to be f..ked for raising a man like you" or "With this money [political leader] will take his whore wife away abroad to make an abortion".

Sexually Charged Comments

Most profanity directed against men candidates centered on sexual activity relating to their mothers or wives – using terms and phrases which constitute the most frequently used obscenities in the Georgian language. Women candidates however received much more personal sexually charged comments, ranging from flirtatious language to highly personal abuse. Milder comments involved comments on appearance, such as "I am crazy about your face [the] movement of your eyebrows and eyelashes". Many women candidates received unwanted solicitations such as "Come on, girl, I invite you to [place], I will make you forget everything. What are you doing this evening?" or "If you agree to go on a date with me, I will vote for you." Through to direct sexual harassment such as "If I was a man I would happily be stuck with you in that elevator" and "You are better at sex". Some commenters used highly explicit language when addressing women candidates, for example, "My grandpa called from [town]. There are rumors that you do blowjobs in exchange for each vote" and "I would bend you from behind, you d**k-woman", "You will be f..ked". No such comments were observed to this effect directed towards men candidates.

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26 This was one of several xenophobic comments containing abuse and direct offence.

THE EXTENT OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

Of the 364,391 comments examined from August 31 to November 2, 3,595 (1%) were flagged by monitors as containing some form of abuse or harassment. In November, 2-21, 2502 more abusive comments were traced.[27] In absolute terms, monitors identified a greater number of abusive comments against men candidates (4,678) than women candidates (1,419).[28] The majority of monitored candidates (63%) saw no online violence recorded, although when broken down by gender slightly less than half of women monitored (49%) received no online violence compared to 66% of men.

Absolute figures are however misleading, as they reflect incidence within the sample, which contains substantially more comments for men candidates. To address the issue of imbalance within the sample, this study presents both absolute numbers and the extent of online violence identified for any given sub-group (e.g. gender) through the ratio of abusive comments to non-abusive comments.

Equation 1: Online violence ratio

$$online\ violence\ ratio = \frac{abusive\ comments}{all\ comments}$$

When analysed thus, the study finds significant[29] differences between mean rates of online violence for women and men, with women receiving around three times the rate of online violence (around 2% of comments) than men (0.6%).

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[27] Data collection in November proceeded manually so only abusive comments were included in the dataset. It makes impossible to count the ratio as there were candidates whose pages were monitored and no abusive comments were found.

[28] Not surprising taking into account that number of men candidates in the overall sample largely exceeded the number of women candidates.

[29] $p \leq 0.05$ in a two-sided t-test for difference in means. Note limitations with regard to significance testing on page . Calculation made for data collected from August 31 to November 2.

Figure 2: Distribution of online violence ratio by gender
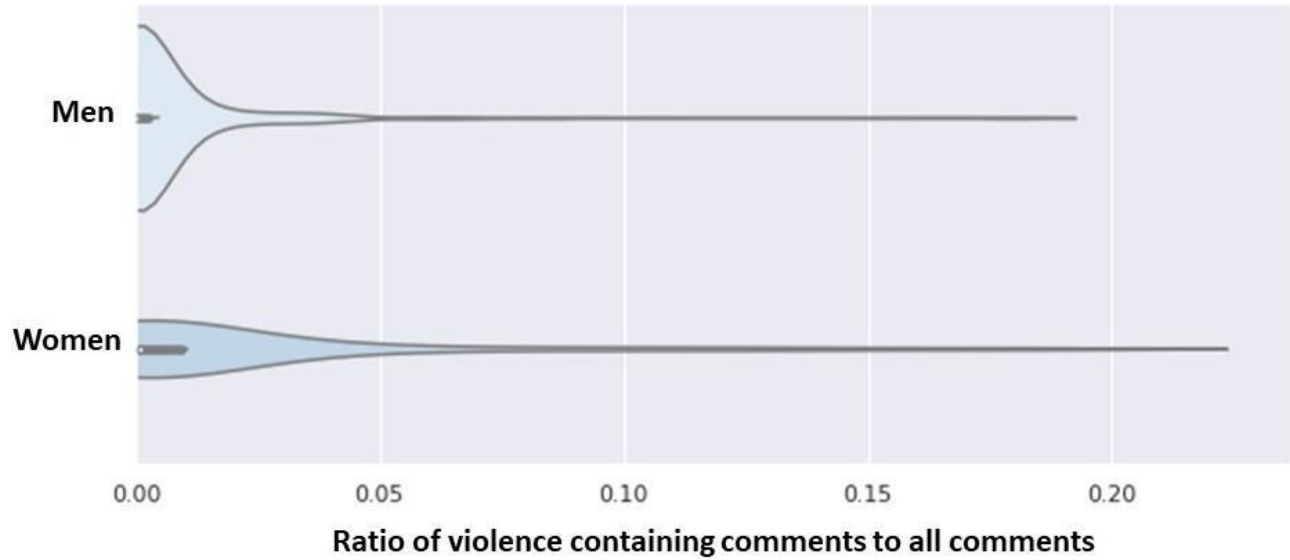
This noted, these mean figures are strongly affected by a small number of extreme outliers and large numbers of zero values, and when central tendency is examined at the median level, which is more robust to outliers, the median woman candidate received less than 0.1 percent abusive comments and the median man none.

Table 4: Top ten candidates by online violence ratio (Aug.31-Nov.2)

Name	Party	Comments	Abusive	Ratio
Irma Nadirashvili	European Georgia	877	160	18%
Bidzina Gegidze	Independent	78	14	18%
Ani Mirotadze	Lelo	1,046	145	14%
Lela Keburia	European Georgia	354	39	11%
Giga Bokeria	European Georgia	3,686	310	8%
Khatuna Saginashvili	Conservative Party of Georgia	12	1	8%
Armaz Akhvlediani	European Georgia	981	65	7%
Akaki Bobokhidze	European Georgia	101	6	6%
Khatuna Gogorishvili	European Georgia	669	35	5%
Eka Beselia	For Justice	1,048	49	5%

Of the candidates monitored, ten had comparatively high rates of online violence per comment (≥ 5%), and Irma Nadirashvili, Bidzina Gegidze, Ani Mirotadze and Lela Keburia all were all found to exceed ten percent. Also notable with regard to online violence ratios is the prominence of European Georgia candidates, who appear to have received particularly high levels of online violence compared to other parties. Candidates from the two largest parties – Georgian Dream and the United National Movement (UNM) – do not appear within the top ten.

Table 5: Top ten candidates by number of abusive comments (Aug.31-Nov.2)

Name	Party	Comments	Abusive	Ratio
Giorgi Vashadze	Strategy Aghmashenebeli	73,175	834	1%
Giga Bokeria	European Georgia	3,686	310	8%
Ana Dolidze	Independent	10,360	290	3%
Elene Khoshtaria	European Georgia	6,118	198	3%
Gigi Ugulava	European Georgia	5,336	161	3%
Irma Nadirashvili	European Georgia	877	160	18%
Ani Mirotadze	Lelo	1,046	145	14%
Shalva Natelashvili	Georgian Labour Party	10,377	138	1%
Zurab Japaridze	Girchi	3,631	116	3%

When viewed in absolute terms, the number of online violence comments received by a candidate is to some extent a function of the number of comments received – higher profile candidates with more active Facebook presence typically receive larger numbers of abusive comments. Notable exceptions in this regard are Irma Nadirashvili and Ani Mirotadze, who received hundreds of abusive comments despite having comparatively small online presence.

In both proportional and absolute terms, large numbers of women candidates appear to have received substantial levels of online violence. Despite representing only 17% of the overall sample, women make up 60% of the top ten candidates by online violence ratio, and 40% by absolute numbers.

In both proportional and absolute terms, the study finds relatively little online violence towards candidates from both major parties. This is to some extent surprising, giving their profile and proximity to controversy. It should be noted that the study is unable to observe where offensive comments have been deleted after posting. Larger and/or more resourceful parties in particular may have the resources to employ large full time social media teams that sanitize their candidates' Facebook presences, which may explain the comparatively low levels of online violence for these parties. Conversely, comment deletion may also

downplay the extent of online violence experienced by candidates from smaller parties. Women candidates who have engaged with the project report deleting comments (see the section on self-reporting by women majoritarian candidates below), and as such the true extent of online violence may be higher.

SOURCES OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

The study attempted to track the gender of each individual commenter. For manually collected data, this was possible for all commenters, however due to inconsistencies in capturing by the NVIVO software used to scrape, gender was only captured for a small subset of automatically collected comments. Where gender was identifiable, in absolute terms, a larger number of men (19,075) made comments than women (5,729) with 80,739 records unidentified.[30]

Online Violence and Commenter Gender

A striking finding of the study is that from within the available data, women appear to make abusive comments on majoritarian candidates' posts at a proportionally much higher rate than men. Of 5,729 posts by women, 1,120 (20%) were flagged by monitors as offensive, compared with 5% of male commenters.

*Table 6: Inoffensive and Offensive comments by commenter gender*

Commenter	Inoffensive	%	Offensive	%	Total
Men	18,093	95%	982	5%	19,075
Women	4,609	80%	1,120	20%	5,729
Unknown	79,246	98%	1,493	2%	80,739
Total	101,948		3,595		105,543[31]

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[30] For data collected from August 31 to November 2.

[31] NB: This figure is inconsistent with comment estimates at a candidate level as numbers of comments for individual candidates have been imputed due to absent inoffensive comment data for manually gathered data.

Whilst striking, these figures should also be interpreted with caution. Deletion of offensive comments is assumed to be practiced at some level by most candidates, and there is no reason to assume that deletion was selective of commenter gender. That the online violence ratio for commenters of unknown gender[32] is lower than both men and women commenters is also surprising, and may result from high levels of proactive deletion by candidates with large quantities of scraped data, such as Giorgi Vashadze.

Figure 3: Online violence by candidate and commenter gender
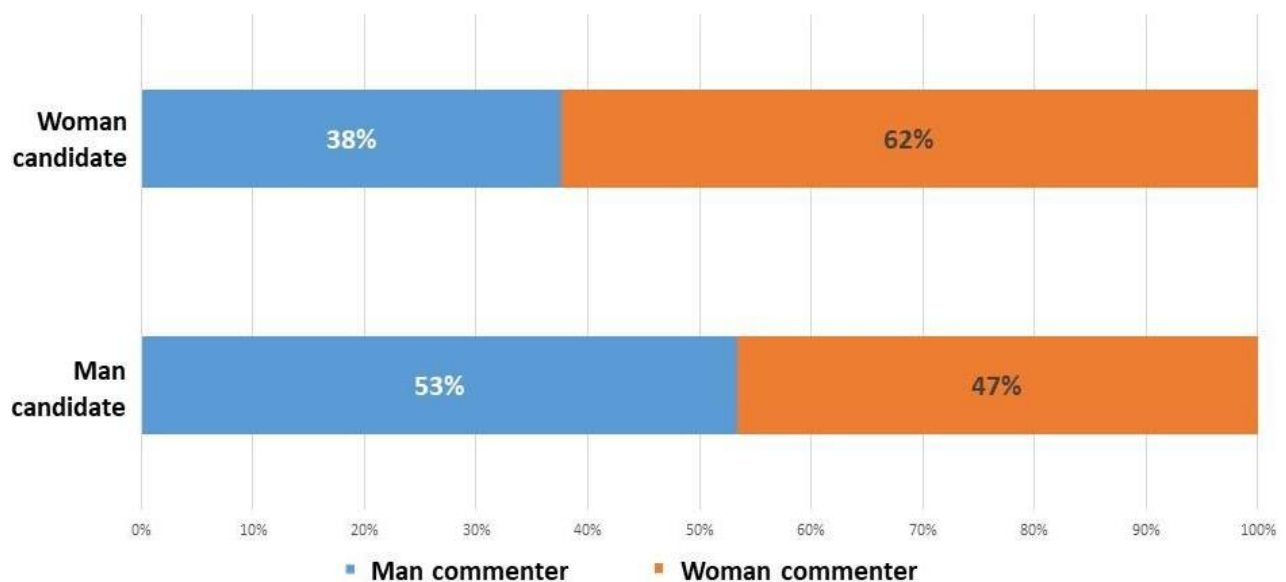
Of the comments that were both marked as abusive and for which a gender was identifiable, it appears that women receive proportionally more online violence from women (62% of abusive comments) than men (38%). Conversely, but to a lesser extent, men also appear to receive the majority of online violence from other men (53%). As above, however, proactive deletion may introduce unseen bias in these calculations. Women in particular may be more proactive in deleting comments of a sexual nature, more likely to originate from male commenters, than more general online violence such as attacks on credibility.

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[32] In the case of Facebook accounts, for which it is impossible to detect gender of the account holder from the account name.

SELF-REPORTING BY CANDIDATES

As deletion of particularly abusive comments is common practice, CRRC coordinated with women majoritarian candidates and their social media teams to capture the nature of deleted comments and online violence that is received via direct message. Three candidates and administrators from the Women of Georgia Facebook page provided the project with screenshots of deleted comments and inbox messages containing online violence.

Both inbox messages and some deleted comments were of a sexual nature, ranging from unsolicited comments on appearance to stalking. Candidates received repeated messages in their inbox at regular intervals from the same individual, requesting sex and marriage, and making highly sexualized comments and abuse.

Candidates and their media teams also deleted comments which were not overtly sexual, including comments containing intense hatred, commenting on appearance, party affiliation, age, personal life, as well as generalized profanity.

GENDER EXPERT CONCLUSIONS

The violence against women in politics (VAWP) represents a specific form of gender-based violence that is often underrecognized and uncounted[33]. VAWP aims to silence women in politics, delegitimize them as political actors, and negatively affect women's equal political participation.

A global study finds online violence towards political candidates to be overwhelmingly directed towards women. Further, much of this online violence is highly gendered, relating to patriarchal gender norms and underpinned by notions that women should not play a role in politics. Women are also frequently the subject of highly sexualized, personal abuse and accusations of sexualized patronage, which seeks to undermine their legitimacy as political actors. These attacks represent a specific affront to the dignity and legitimacy of both women candidates and the political process, and constitute barriers to women's political participation. It is incumbent on all duty-bearers within the electoral

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[33] Not the Cost: A Call to Action to End Violence Against Women in Politics, NDI, 2016

environment to undertake measures to ensure women candidates can participate in political processes on an equal footing to their male counterparts. To this end, specific action should be taken to ensure political dialogue takes place in a safe, civil environment and that women candidates are adequately supported during political campaigns.

Meetings with women politicians, which the project team held in the initial stage of the project, revealed that most of them are not willing to talk about psychological violence in online spaces and the personal or political harm they receive as a result of the harassment and online violence. Moreover, they often do not identify certain forms of gendered abuse as violence. This can be the result of low awareness on different forms of gendered violence and abuse and lack of internal mechanisms that support identification and reporting within political parties. The only form of violence women politicians recognize as harmful is alleged violation of their private life or threats of thereof, that is often connected to intimate video leakage in online space. This attitude can also be connected to the stereotypical approach that "doing politics is dirty work" and these cases of harassment and abuse can be interpreted as "the cost of doing politics" in Georgian socio-cultural reality.

Neither men, nor women politicians make gender-related abuse and violence the part of their communication strategy. They do not talk about the barriers women politicians face as a cost of being in politics in party programs, key speeches and interviews. Moreover, they refrain to talk about the harm of the gendered violence in closed settings as well (such as closed meetings). This means that either psychological violence in online spaces is normalized by politicians and deeply rooted in individual, sociocultural norms or the topic is too sensitive to talk about in the pre-election period. As a result, the actual cases of violence are not recognized, identified and reported neither by law enforcement offices nor by the victims of such violence.

Also, the fact that none of the parties have been vocal about the abuse and violence women politicians disproportionately faced in online space during pre-election period, indicates that the problem of violence against women politicians is not recognized and there are no political party mechanisms that are designed to specifically root out violence and protect women party members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Political Parties

How political parties function and what kind of internal equality mechanisms are in place can have a significant impact on opportunities for women's political participation. The legislation governing political parties and electoral processes in Georgia does not discriminate against women, on the contrary, it supports equal participation. However, direct or indirect gender-based discrimination in internal party procedures can create barriers to women's participation.[34] Therefore, political parties are recommended to:

A: Make gender a part of the party's electoral strategy: explicitly mention gender equality and women's empowerment among the objectives and principles of all foundational and policy documents (like political party programs) to support women's equal participation.

The founding and policy documents of political parties govern how parties function internally as well as externally, what main messages they deliver, and what kind of political culture they support. If political parties make efforts to promote gender equality through, and integrate gender-sensitive language into, their founding documents, it will support the raising of awareness about gender equality and better political culture. This will also indirectly support women politicians to feel more confident voicing their views about gender equality and gendered violence (online and offline) from a political party's perspective. *In their future campaign communications, parties and candidates should consider issuing statements in support of equality and anti-discrimination, particularly in the online context, namely, parties should work together to create a MOU ahead of the next election to jointly pledge to not participate in any forms of online abuse and VAW-P* Unfortunately, too often, in Georgian reality, the founding and policy documents of political parties contain no reference to gender equality whatsoever. Therefore, *parties should acknowledge and identify internal obstacles to women's participation and consider changing internal behaviors*

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[34] Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties, OSCE/ODIHR 2014 pp. 16-17

and practices, including working hours and decision-making processes, in order to promote women's engagement and leadership[35].

B: Integrate gender equality into a party's political communication strategy, including online communication channels.

This is essential to increase women's presence in the party and during campaigns. Equal representation will help political parties to move beyond rhetoric and make a change in political campaigning. Unfortunately, observations from social media and more broadly, reveal that women candidates often remain behind the scenes in electoral campaigns. Instead party leaders (usually men) represent women candidates, speak for them, and dominate campaign posters, party communications, and media time. Making women politicians visible in campaigns requires political parties to a) Conduct research on media coverage of women politicians (including online media) and plan online campaigns accordingly; b) Create profiles and publish data on women's leadership roles in political parties; c) Advocate for more equal society and women's rights through their political campaigns, including online, to change perception of political processes.

C: Set internal gender quotas (formal and informal)[36] to change women's historic under-representation, including in leadership positions and decision-making processes.

Gender inclusive communication strategies are not sufficient to address the persistent gap of women's political participation, as decision makers and party leaders in Georgia are mostly men. Women face different barriers to advance their political career. Therefore, internal gender quotas are necessary to increase the number of women leaders and decision makers in political parties. Political parties should a) Avoid superficial efforts to increase the number of women within a party, like creating women's wings and women's clubs that lack

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[35] Ibid.

[36] There are various kinds of quota systems according to the legal basis: one that is enshrined in the legislation, party's founding and policy documents (formal) and more informal, *soft quotas* that affect candidate selection to address gender imbalance in the political recruitment process.

institutionalized power and resources; and b) Tailor political recruitment initiatives to attract women with different backgrounds and experiences into the political parties and make sure the diversified portfolios they own are duly represented. In addition to creating internal mechanisms, *parties should reconsider the gender quota sunset clause. Promoting a balance between men and women is a long term process that should not have an expiration date so early into implementation[37].*

D: Create internal mechanisms in the political parties to raise awareness of the party members regarding identification, prevention and response to all forms of violence against women and girls, including online.

VAW-P, particularly in its online form, is often stigmatized and not recognized as violence due to the low level of awareness among political parties. VAW-P happens in private and in protected public spaces, and is not restricted to acts of physical harm. In fact, it encompasses a spectrum of acts committed in person and, increasingly, online, that are designed to control, limit or prevent women's full and equal participation in politics and public life[38]. Therefore, political parties should develop more transparent and democratic candidate selection processes, place women higher on the candidate lists within groups of three or four, and support women in leadership positions once in office. Those that received bonus funding for exceeding the quota should dedicate it to initiatives that promote gender mainstreaming and empower women within their organizations[39]. Also, it's strongly advised to: a) Create the effective internal mechanisms for the prevention and dealing with VAW-P, online and offline, and b) Denounce the cases of gendered violence within political parties[40].

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[37] Georgia Election Watch, NDI, 2020

[38] Not the Cost: A Call to Action to End Violence Against Women in Politics, NDI, 2016

[39] Georgia Election Watch, NDI, 2020

[40] In 2019, Tbilisi Sakrebulo Member Accused of Sexual Violence and in 2020, MP from Telavi arrested for domestic violence. These are only few cases that got identified and none of them received due attention from respective political parties that would have served as a preventive measure for politicians in future.

The Election Administration of Georgia

The Election Administration of Georgia is advised to encourage all political actors to promote equal participation of women and men in political parties, with a view to achieving better gender-balanced representation in elected public offices at all levels of decision-making[41]. Therefore, CEC is recommended to:

A: Conduct awareness raising campaigns directed at political parties and voters, aiming to increase awareness on VAW-E online and offline and ensure there are processes in place to monitor and mitigate VAW-E - both online and offline.

B: Election administration should ensure the political party code of conduct prohibits parties and candidates from participating in or supporting online violence against women.

The Election Administration of Georgia should focus on illustrating what online violence against women is and explaining why it is unacceptable in light of laws and societal values regarding democracy, human rights, inclusion and equality.

The Parliament of Georgia

According to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Dr. Dubravka šimonovic, violence against women in politics targets women because of their political_activism, but also because they are *women* who are politically active[42]. The legislative framework of Georgia does not contain specific definition on violence against women in politics. Therefore, Parliament of Georgia is advised to:

A: Incorporate actions against VAW-P into existing laws and frameworks, connecting the issue to laws related to violence against women and/or equal political participation.

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[41] Women in Political and Public Life, OSCE Athens Ministerial Council, 2009

[42] Violence Against Women in Politics, Expert Group Meeting and Recommendations, 2018

The law should be clear as to what constitutes an act of violence against women in politics, as well as who can make claims and which bodies are responsible for receiving complaints.

B: Further research VAW-P online and offline, how it is manifested in Georgian socio-cultural reality, and how it affects women parliamentarians.

This should be done through conducting a confidential survey of parliamentarians' experiences with electoral and political violence offline and online, including incidents occurring within parliament and parties. This study will raise awareness of the issue and identify specific forms that such violence might take, especially in the parliamentary workplace. The Parliament is also advised to revise parliamentary codes of conduct to address the findings of the research and create a strategy to combat this form of VAW-P.

C: Raise awareness of parliamentarians (both men and women) on VAW-P in all of its forms.

This should be done through providing training about the specific nature, forms, and impact of VAW-P. The study revealed that sometimes politicians may not identify certain abusive actions directed at women in politics as violence or may not register that those acts are discriminatory toward women. Such training could involve enhancing the gender sensitivity and awareness of parliamenttarians, as well as providing parliamentarians with knowledge about the resources available for responding to acts of violence against women in politics.

D: Introduce a resolution condemning VAW-P in all its forms and create a platform to share best practice and international experience on combating VAW-P in the Parliament.

MPs should be invited to signal their support for combatting this problem. This will raise awareness about this type of violence and register VAW-P as a priority issue. The resolution/introduction of the new platform to share best practice, might be timed to coincide with events like a national or international Women's Day, or the announcement of upcoming elections, to attract greater levels of support.

Government of Georgia

A: Designate the issue of VAW-P as a priority area for law enforcement office and state agencies, working to prevent violence against women and response the cases of violence,

This should be done with the help of the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Issues.

B: Create procedures for registering and handling complaints specifically on VAW-P, including online, through new or existing state agencies, including police stations, electoral authorities or the office of Public Defender of Georgia.

Given the specific nature of VAWP that might target women as voters, activists, party members, candidates or public officials, the government might need to designate multiple agencies to process claims and provide services for victims and survivors.

Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia:

A: Incorporate actions against VAW-P into existing risk assessment methodology and monitoring mechanisms.
This should be done to ensure effective response from the law enforcement office on VAW-P cases.

B: Raise awareness of law enforcement office representatives on VAW-P, online and offline.
This should focus on the specific nature and different forms of VAW-P and the tools and mechanisms in place to prevent and respond. In particular, continuous training will be important to ensure that service providers that respond to victims of violence fully recognize this type of violence and its perpetrators, and are equipped to support its victims.

Civil Society Organizations:

A: To advocate to political parties and elected officials to resolve the issue of VAW-P and convene civil society workshops bringing together stakeholders to discuss advocacy on combating online VAW-P within the Georgian context and interventions to push for change.

This should be done to ensure better recognition of and attention to the acts of violence against women politicians, better understanding of what discriminatory media coverage looks like, and how to report on VAW-P, including online and offline forms, in a gender-sensitive manner.

B: Continue to support election observers and CSO representatives in monitoring VAW-P in online and offline spaces as part of overall election observation, such as dedicated social media/disinformation monitors to track and report online VAW-P during elections.

This should create the knowledge and data that will be used by different political parties, civil society activists and government agencies in order to combat VAW-P effectively.

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ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY

The study of violence against majoritarian candidates on Facebook focuses on the online violence that happens in comments to the posts. The main focus of the study are women majoritarian candidates; however, pages of men candidates are also monitored for comparison purposes.

DATA COLLECTION

The scope of the research questions necessitated the examination of comment-level data, where the bulk of online violence was assumed to be taking place. Access to comment-level data is not permitted by default by the Facebook API, and as such, CRRC utilized a range of strategies to examine comments on posts by majoritarian candidates. Specifically, the study used data gathered through automated collection (NVIVO), manual monitoring of pages, submissions from candidates, supplemented by post and candidate-level data from the CrowdTangle platform.

NVIVO

NVIVO allows downloading of comment data from Facebook pages, public groups and verified profiles, but not basic profiles. The ability to access full comments and metadata provides numerous advantages, including speed of monitoring, ease of quality of control, and the potential sophisticated modelling on large-scale data. Capture via NVIVO was thus initially preferred as a collection method. Regrettably, the tool proved unreliable, being unable to scrape large numbers of valid target pages – including high profile women candidates. Data produced was also inconsistent, for example providing commenter name only for a subset of records.

Manual Monitoring

Early in the study, CRRC began supplementing automatically collected data with manual monitoring, through which monitors visited the online presence of candidates that could not be scraped, recording abusive comments and metadata. Whilst lacking many of the advantages of scraped data, the approach proved effective, and eventually replaced automated collection altogether due to the complexities of consolidating two separate datasets.

CrowdTangle and Imputation

Manual monitoring traded off speed and volume of comments reviewed against levels of data collection, with data collected only on abusive comments. This presented an important gap in the dataset, whereby negative cases – and thus total comments per candidate – were unobserved.

To resolve this issue, CRRC used data from CrowdTangle to identify the number of posts and comments generated by each candidate during the period in which they were monitored. This approach enabled consistent data to be generated for candidates using pages and verified profiles. However 28 (13%) of the manually monitored candidates used public profiles for their internet presence. For these missing values, CRRC utilized an imputation strategy based on a multivariate OLS regression

Submissions

During the preparatory stage of the project, NDI Georgia team members organized meetings of the research team from CRRC-Georgia with women majoritarian candidates and/or their social media teams. CRRC representatives presented the project goal, study design and approach they were planning to take and asked for their feedback as well as their experiences of abuse on social media. This helped develop categories for coding the data.

CRRC-Georgia set up an email for receiving submissions of deleted abusive comments and/or abusive inbox messages so that women candidates and their social media teams could self-report. Overall, three candidates and the Women from Georgia page social media administrators sent screenshots of deleted comments.

Data Confidentiality, Privacy, and Storage

Data collected through this monitoring effort is combined in an Excel dataset and stored offline, on a CRRC-Georgia computer with two researchers who had been working on the project from the beginning having access to it. Since the dataset contains full texts of abusive comments, which sometimes may make it possible to identify the addressee, the dataset will not be made public and will not be handed to the third party.
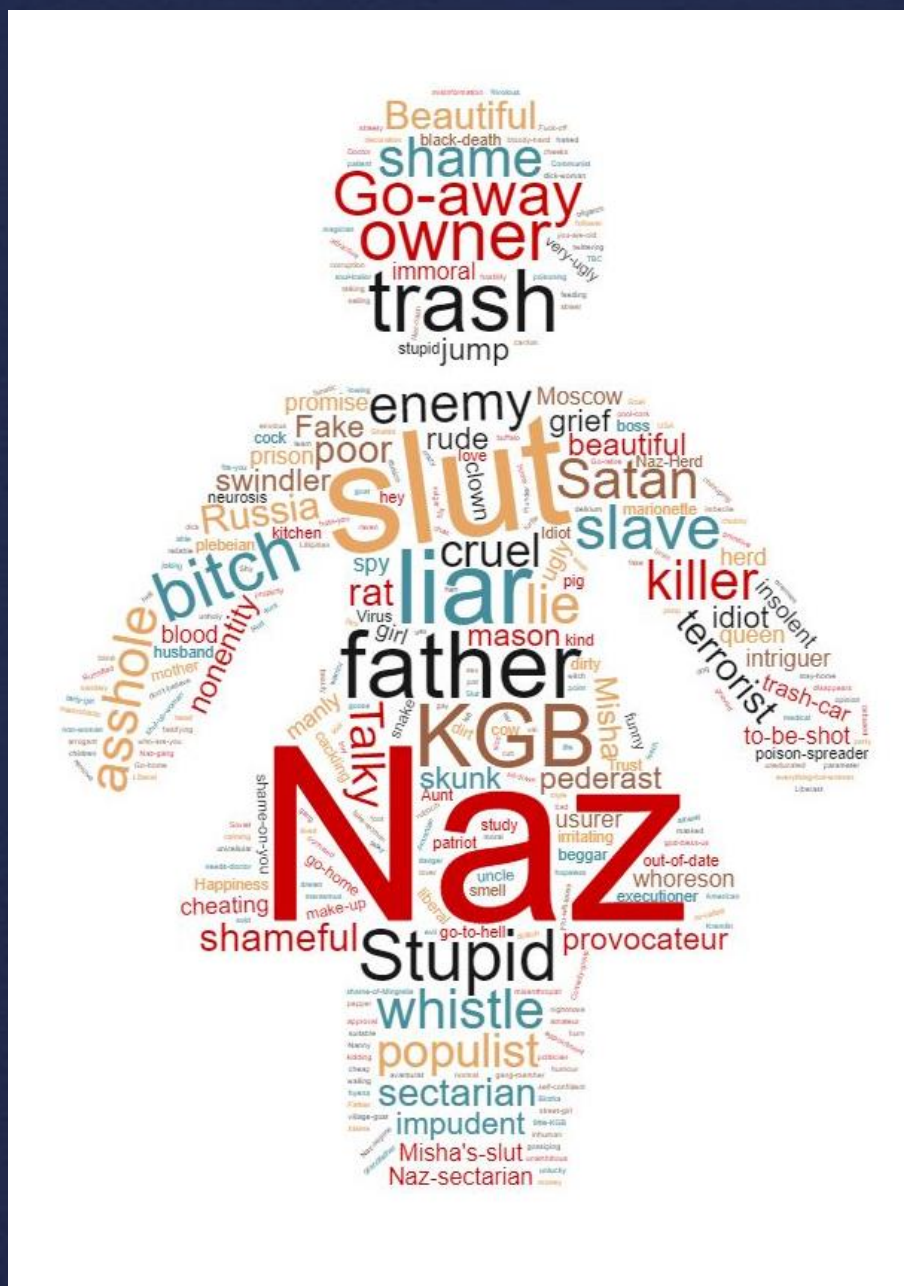
CODING

The coding of data was done by two monitors manually, according to the categories developed by the team of researchers and the gender expert. Meeting with women majoritarian candidates and their social media teams preceded the process. At those meetings women politicians and their support team shared with their experience about real life and social media attacks, their focus and nature. The monitoring proceeded with coding according to the following categories:

- Abuse related to age,
- Appearance,
- Family/personal life,
- Gender roles,
- Intelligence,
- Objectification,
- Trust, reliability,
- Misogyny, general offence,
- Abuse related to parties,
- Pseudo compliments.

In addition, monitors were instructed to take notes about keywords in abusive comments.

ANNEX 2: WORDCLOUDS

WORDCLOUDS BASED ON KEYWORDS PICKED FROM VIOLENT COMMENTS AGAINST WOMEN AND MEN MAJORITARIAN CANDIDATES.

WORDCLOUDS BASED ON KEYWORDS PICKED FROM HATEFUL-MISOGYNIC COMMENTS AGAINST WOMEN MAJORITARIAN CANDIDATES