

FINDINGS ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS DURING THE 2025 ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN



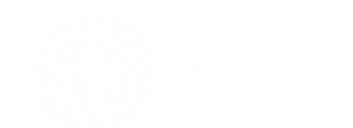
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Findings on Gender-Based Violence in Media and Social Media Networks during the 2025 Electoral Campaign

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMA	Audio-visual Media Authority
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEC	Central Election Commission of Albania
GADC	Gender Alliance for Development Center
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GBVP	Gender-Based Violence in Politics
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
NDI	National Democratic Institute
ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPAK	Special Structure against Corruption and Organized Crime
StopVAWP	Platform for Reporting Gender-Based Violence in Politics (by GADC)
VAWP	Violence Against Women in Politics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Media Monitoring Report: Gender-Based Violence in Politics – Albania, Parliamentary Elections May 2025

This report provides an analysis of gender-based violence in political contexts during the campaign for the parliamentary elections held in Albania during the April–May 2025 period, focusing on concrete cases of violence against women in politics. Through a multi-layered media monitoring approach encompassing traditional media, social media platforms, and direct reporting mechanisms, the study identifies trends, forms, and institutional responses related to violence against women in politics (VAWP).

The report, led by the “Gender Alliance for Development Center” (GADC), in cooperation with Pikasa Analytics and with the support of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, aimed to highlight the forms, intensity, and impact of gender-based political violence in traditional and social media.

Findings show that women candidates, politicians, journalists, and activists are subjected to hate speech, sexism, stereotypes, delegitimization, and coordinated attacks that often involve violent and sexual content. These forms of violence undermine genuine gender equality in public life and hinder the participation of women in politics as equal and safe actors.

The “StopVAWP” platform and the technological tools used for this monitoring provided reliable and measurable evidence of cases of violence against women in politics in Albania, strengthening access to verifiable and accessible reporting of such violence.

Meanwhile, the report highlights the lack of institutionalized mechanisms for protection and response, as well as legal and administrative gaps in overseeing the implementation of gender quotas and rules for fair representation.

The report also identifies that the presence of gender quotas in electoral lists is not sufficient to guarantee the qualitative and safe representation of women in politics. The absence of institutional protection and accountability from political and institutional actors negatively affects the democratic climate and strips women’s participation of dignity and real political influence.

Main findings:

- Gender-based violence in politics remains a **widespread** and often **normalized** phenomenon, both in physical and digital spaces. Despite increased visibility, many cases go unreported due to fear, stigma, and lack of institutional response.
- Media platforms contributed to the increased visibility of gender-based violence in politics, but coverage was not always ethical or gender-sensitive. Sexist narratives, body-shaming, and the underrepresentation of women candidates were common.
- Political parties generally did not demonstrate a meaningful commitment to addressing gender-based violence during the campaigns. Women candidates experienced symbolic exclusion, verbal attacks, and digital harassment, often without institutional protection or support from their political parties.
- Institutions such as the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA), the Central Election Commission (CEC), and anti-discrimination bodies showed weak or delayed responses

to incidents of gender-based violence in politics, relying primarily on women's organizations that monitored and denounced such cases during the 2025 electoral campaign.

- AI-generated disinformation and digital attacks specifically targeted women, reinforcing hostile digital environments and undermining their participation in public life.

The report includes several key recommendations outlined below:

- **Strengthening the legal and institutional framework**, including the recognition of VAWP (Violence Against Women in Politics) as a distinct form of violence and its integration into the Law on Gender Equality and the Electoral Code.
- **Establishing a sustainable institutional mechanism** for reporting, monitoring, and sanctioning cases of VAWP.
- **Engaging media and regulatory authorities** (such as AMA) to set clear standards for gender-sensitive campaign coverage and to penalize hate speech.
- **Building an alliance of institutional and civil society actors** to ensure that the reporting of violence against women in politics does not remain isolated but becomes part of sustainable state structures.
- **Developing public awareness campaigns** that destigmatize women in politics and promote their equal and safe participation.

In conclusion, the report calls for **a new political and institutional approach** to women's participation in public life. Without safety, participation is mere exposure, not empowerment. Representation without protection is not a full democracy.

INTRODUCTION

The 2025 Parliamentary Elections in Albania took place in a context of increasingly digitalized political communication, deepening polarization, and persistent gender gaps in media representation in politics. Traditional media and social networks play a critical role in shaping public opinion, influencing political narratives, and determining the visibility of parties and candidates. However, these platforms also serve as environments where gender-based violence, disinformation, and hate speech are propagated.

To ensure an informed, inclusive, and accountable electoral process, it was necessary to analyze:

- The dynamics of media and social media content related to the elections,
- The representation of political actors,
- The dominant themes and narratives in public discourse,
- The visibility of women in politics and the way gender-based violence issues are addressed in the media and social networks.

GADC's commitment to reporting media attacks, primarily against women in politics during the 2025 Parliamentary Elections, stems from years of continuous work on this issue. In 2022, with the support of WFD, GADC developed the online platform <https://stopvawp.al/> as a mechanism to report and document cases of gender-based violence in politics. Despite its promotion in media and social networks, the platform recorded no reported cases, raising serious concern that even though the violence was visible and documentable, women in politics hesitated to report their experiences.

This absence of reporting raised a red flag for GADC, prompting the organization to undertake a more structured initiative: drafting this analytical report and developing digital monitoring methodologies to identify and highlight concrete cases of violence. These cases, documented through media and social media monitoring, are presented below as evidence of the real challenges faced by women in public and political life.

The monitoring and the report cover the period from April 1 to May 31, 2025.

The report aims to analyze the extent to which VAWP emerged as a political issue and a matter of public concern during the election period, including its presence in political platforms, campaign rhetoric, media narratives, and online discourse. It provides evidence-based insights into how political actors and institutions responded to VAWP, how victims and women's rights activists were portrayed, and whether media coverage adhered to ethical and victim-centered standards.

Definition of gender-based violence in politics

Gender-based violence in politics (VAWP)¹ refers to any act of violence or threat of violence directed at individuals based on their gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation, with the

¹ According to the European Commission, "Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender, or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately." This means that men can also be affected.

aim or effect of excluding them from political participation, hindering their freedom of expression, or undermining their authority and credibility in public life.

This form of violence disproportionately affects women, non-binary individuals, and LGBTQI+ persons and is often normalized or minimized within political discourse. It may originate from political opponents, colleagues within the same political party, media actors, or the general public and manifests in several forms, including:

Verbal Violence:

- Use of sexist, offensive, or threatening language in speeches, interviews, debates, or public forums.
- Mocking or discrediting women's abilities or qualifications based on their gender.
- Public shaming, intimidation, or humiliation through insults with sexist or gendered undertones.

Online/Digital Violence:

- Organized harassment campaigns on social media (e.g., mass attacks, doxing², use of deepfakes³).
- Threats of sexual or physical violence through comments, messages, or fake accounts.
- Manipulated images or disinformation, harming the reputation of women candidates.
- Threats targeting their children.

Symbolic Violence:

- Erasure or marginalization of women's presence in campaign materials or public events.
- Portrayal of women primarily in emotional, familial, or aesthetic roles rather than as leaders or experts.
- Use of male-dominated environments and imagery to convey authority.

Physical or Sexual Violence:

- Explicit threats or physical assaults during electoral activities or public appearances.
- Invasion of privacy or targeted stalking intended to intimidate.

However, the appropriate term in this context may be Gender-Based Violence Against Women, since this is the specific focus of the current analysis.

² Amnesty International. 2020. Troll Patrol Findings: Using Crowdsourcing, Data Science & Machine Learning to Measure Online Abuse Against Women. Online: <https://www.amnesty.org> Definition used by Amnesty International for doxing: The act of publishing previously private personal information about an individual without their consent, often with malicious intent – such as to intimidate, harass, or threaten them.

³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (n.d.). Deepfake. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deepfake>. A deepfake is an image or recording that has been convincingly altered and manipulated to depict someone doing or saying something they did not actually do or say. This definition highlights the deceptive intent behind deepfakes, which use artificial intelligence to create false but highly realistic content.

- Sexual harassment or assault during political meetings, media engagements, or within party structures.

These actions aim to intimidate, silence, delegitimize, or exclude women and gender minorities from the political sphere, directly undermining democratic participation and equality.

Media monitoring methodology on cases of violence against women in politics

This report follows a comprehensive and hybrid media monitoring methodology, aiming to capture and analyze gender-based violence in political discourse during the April–May 2025 parliamentary election period in Albania. The methodology combines real-time digital analysis by Pikasa Analytics, participatory monitoring through the www.stopvawp.al platform coordinated by GADC, and qualitative assessments from civil society actors and experts.

The monitoring approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to identify, categorize, and interpret incidents of violence against women in politics (VAWP) across traditional and digital media. The methodological framework is based on international guidelines related to media ethics, gender equality, and digital safety, aligning with Albania's commitments under the Istanbul Convention, CEDAW, and the EU Gender Equality Strategy.

Data sources

The data were collected from a wide range of sources to ensure comprehensive coverage of the phenomenon:

- Pikasa Analytics: Processed and analyzed content from over 90 Albanian online news portals, including more than 4,000 published articles and daily monitoring of thousands of Facebook pages and profiles, TikTok videos, Instagram accounts, and YouTube channels.
- GADC's reporting platform www.stopvawp.al: For the first time, enabled the submission of two direct reports of violence against women in politics during the campaign, offering unique qualitative insights into unreported or invisible forms of VAWP.
- Data from independent institutions and the Task Force on Women in Politics, led by the "Equality in Decision Making Network."
- Manual Media Observation: Continuous monitoring of audiovisual and print media to identify specific incidents, their context, tone, and framing..

Types of monitored media

During the period from April 1 to May 31, 2025, online media and social media networks were intensively monitored to analyze how violence against women and girls in politics was addressed in public discourse.

Monitoring Capacity:

- 90+ active Albanian online media portals and a total of 100+ digital sources (including blogs and platforms) were regularly monitored.
 - Approximately 3,874 articles were published daily by these sources.
 - These articles generated around 2.1 million daily interactions (comments, shares, likes).
- A total of 3,562 social media channels (including Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X/Twitter) were monitored.
 - Around 11,000 posts were published daily on these platforms.
- Continuous monitoring and analysis of content were conducted on Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter).

Coding categories

Incidents of VAWP were coded using a structured framework that included the following elements:

- Type of violence: verbal, online/digital, symbolic, physical/sexual.
- Target of violence: candidate, journalist, activist, public figure.
- Gender of the perpetrator and victim.
- Platform and scope: public speech, media, viral post, etc.
- Severity level: from mild offensive comments to direct threats.
- Frequency and recurrence: whether it was an isolated case or part of a recurring pattern.
- Response: public condemnation, silence, support, or legal action.

Technological and analytical process

- Automated content analysis: Pikasa used artificial intelligence-based classifiers and algorithms, trained to identify political narratives containing gender-based harassment, discriminatory language, exclusionary practices, or symbolic violence.
- Filtering through keywords and sentiment: The system filtered content using a gender-based hate speech lexicon and a political labeling ontology, specifically adapted for the Albanian language and political context.
- Anomaly detection and trend analysis: Analysts interpreted spikes in harmful content through narrative and political context analysis, comparing and verifying data generated by algorithms.
- Manual verification: Each flagged post underwent a secondary verification by Pikasa's research team to assess contextual significance, tone, and potential for political manipulation.

Stopvawp Platform

The platform www.stopvawp.al developed by GADC enabled:

- Anonymous and secure reporting through an online form.
- Monitoring via a toll-free phone line (0800 18 18) for voice-based reports (though no cases were received via phone during this cycle).

- Classification of cases into different categories (verbal, symbolic, digital, institutional) based on a feminist and victim-centered approach.
- Further verification by GADC staff in coordination with political parties or independent institutions, when necessary.

Data Integrity and Ethics

- All data were collected by the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of the European Union.
- Media content was assessed using standardized criteria for gender sensitivity, victim dignity, and political neutrality.

Limitations

- Certain offline incidents or those occurring in rural areas may have gone unreported due to a lack of access or digital literacy.
- AI-based algorithms may fail to identify indirect or coded gender-based violence that does not contain direct hate speech keywords.
- Institutional responses were difficult to verify due to the lack of public documentation or clear accountability mechanisms.

Validation and interpretation

- All analytical results were validated by analysts from GADC and Pikasa, who combined automated insights with human expertise to ensure contextual accuracy.
- Analysts provided qualitative assessments to interpret significant spikes or anomalies in data trends, verifying findings generated by algorithms through narrative and contextual analysis.

POLITICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

Summary of media dynamics during the May 2025 Parliamentary Elections

The 2025 general elections in Albania took place in a highly polarized and dynamic media environment. The media cycle highlighted two parallel narratives: one emphasizing government achievements and aspirations for EU integration, and the other focusing on electoral irregularities and systemic corruption.

According to monitoring by Pikasa, public engagement with media peaked between April 28 and May 11, reflecting high societal interest in campaign developments and allegations of electoral manipulation. Traditional platforms such as Syri.net led in terms of content volume and public engagement, often reinforcing narratives around election fraud, vote buying, and institutional failures. In contrast, Euronews, Top Channel, and Vizion Plus generated high per-article engagement through more policy-oriented and optimistic economic content linked to the European integration process. TikTok, meanwhile, emerged as the most engaging platform, particularly among young voters.

Topics such as **corruption**, **SPAK investigations**, and the credibility of the **Central Election Commission (CEC)** emerged as key themes, while socio-economic issues such as **pensions and the minimum wage** were strategically addressed and generated significant engagement. On social media, themes like **SPAK** and **corruption** drove high user interaction. **TikTok**, despite its official ban, proved to be the most effective platform for user engagement.

New political figures like Agron Shehaj and Arlind Qori leveraged digital platforms to amplify reformist narratives, suggesting growing space for alternatives to the traditional PS–PD duopoly. However, the elections also exposed a toxic digital climate: hate speech notably increased, especially against prominent political figures and women in senior positions.

Hate speech became a disturbing feature of the digital space, revealing the deep tensions within Albania’s polarized political climate. Overall, the media landscape played a central role in defining the challenges of the elections, with both traditional and online media serving as arenas of confrontation and tools of influence.

Gender quotas and representation statistics

Albania has progressively institutionalized gender quotas to promote women's political representation, in line with its constitutional, legal, and international commitments, including:

1. Law No. 9970/2008 “On Gender Equality in Society”
2. The Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania, amended in 2020 (Law No. 101/2020)
3. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
4. The Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention
5. Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 – Gender Equality

Key quota provisions include:

- Article 67 of the Electoral Code: Requires that at least 30% of candidates on party lists for parliamentary elections be from the less represented gender.
- A 2020 amendment increased this quota to 50%, introducing a gender alternation system in lists (known as the “zipper” system).
- Failure to comply with quotas leads to the rejection of candidate lists by the Central Election Commission (CEC).
- In July 2024⁴, the Albanian Parliament adopted a package of amendments to the Electoral Code. The changes introduced a mixed list system: 1/3 of the candidate list is closed, determined by party leadership without preferential vote, while 2/3 are open, allowing for individual preferential voting. The amendments also introduced a gender quota stipulating that at least one in every three candidates (30%) on both the closed and open lists must be from the less represented gender.

⁴ Amendments adopted on 26 July 2024 (Law no. 81/2024 “On some additions and amendments to Law no. 10 019, dated 29.12.2008, ‘Electoral Code’”)

Existing legal protection and political commitments for gender equality and violence against women in politics (at national and international level)

Albania has made significant progress in aligning its national legislation with international standards on gender equality and the elimination of violence against women in political and public life. Despite this progress, gaps remain in the effective implementation of laws, political accountability, and protection mechanisms for women facing violence in political spaces.

National Legal Framework:

Constitution of the Republic of Albania: Article 18 guarantees equality before the law and prohibits any form of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination; Article 45 guarantees the right to vote and equal participation in public affairs.

Law No. 9970/2008 “On Gender Equality in Society”:

- a. Enshrines the right to equal participation in all areas of public life;
- b. Obligates public institutions to promote balanced representation in decision-making bodies;
- c. Provides for the integration of the gender perspective into all public policies.

Law No. 9669/2006 “On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations” (as amended):

a) Initially focused on the family environment, this law is part of the broader framework for combating gender-based violence and establishes institutional obligations for the protection of victims.

Electoral Code (amended by Law No. 101/2020):

- a. Introduces mandatory mechanisms for gender quotas in candidate lists (50% with a gender-alternating “zipper” system);
- b. Grants legal authority to the Central Election Commission (CEC) to reject lists that do not comply with gender quotas;
- c. Establishes a legal basis to address indirect discrimination in candidate selection.

Criminal Code of Albania:

- a) Criminalizes hate speech, threats, and violence, including those targeting individuals based on gender or public office;
- b) However, it still does not recognize or criminalize violence against women in politics as a specific criminal offense, leaving many forms, such as online harassment or symbolic violence, unaddressed, even though they are common in political contexts.

National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030:

- a. Includes specific objectives to increase women’s participation in decision-making and to combat gender-based violence;
- b. Calls for the development of policies to protect women in politics and public life.

International and Regional Commitments

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Albania ratified the Convention in 1993. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23 calls for the removal of barriers to women's participation in political and public life. The CEDAW Committee has consistently recommended that Albania strengthen protections for women in politics against harassment and intimidation.

Council of Europe Istanbul Convention (ratified in 2013)

Recognizes all forms of violence against women as violations of human rights. Article 4 requires protection against violence in all contexts, including public life. GREVIO reports on Albania have emphasized the need for specific measures against political and media-related violence targeting women.

Beijing Platform for Action (1995)

Calls for gender-equal participation in politics and the elimination of stereotypical representations in the media. Albania has reaffirmed its commitment through periodic reporting.

Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 (SDG 5) – Gender Equality

Sub-target 5.5: Ensures women's full and effective participation in political and public life, at all levels of decision-making.

OSCE and ODIHR Guidelines on Women's Political Participation

As an OSCE participating State, Albania has adopted commitments to ensure equal participation and to create safe electoral environments for women. Election observers in 2025 reiterated the need to address violence against women candidates and journalists in political discourse.

Institutional Mechanisms and Political Commitments

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP) – Leads national efforts in implementing gender equality strategies and providing support services for survivors of violence.

The Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination – Monitors gender-based discrimination in the public sphere, including political parties, electoral campaigns, and the media.

The Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data – Ensures the protection of individuals' personal data, monitors the implementation of relevant legislation, handles complaints, conducts inspections, and raises public awareness on data privacy and security.

The People's Advocate Institution (Ombudsperson) – An independent constitutional body responsible for protecting the fundamental human rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, laws, and international instruments ratified by Albania.

The National Council for Gender Equality is an inter-institutional structure established under the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, serving as a coordinating mechanism for gender equality policies at the national level. This council plays a key role **in building cross-sectoral cooperation**, strengthening institutional mechanisms, and monitoring Albania's international commitments to gender equality and the elimination of violence against women in political life.

Gaps and Weaknesses

Although Albania has adopted a comprehensive legal framework on gender equality and ratified international instruments for the protection of women's rights, the implementation in practice remains partial, inconsistent, and often fragmented.

- **Lack of specific legislation on GBVP (Gender-Based Violence in Politics):** Currently, there is no legal provision that clearly recognizes or penalizes violence against women in politics as a distinct form of gender-based violence. This creates significant gaps in addressing and sanctioning such cases.
- **Insufficient protection against digital violence:** The legal framework remains limited in addressing emerging forms of violence, such as online harassment, coordinated disinformation campaigns, and sexist attacks on social media-forms of abuse that particularly target women in politics and the public sphere.
- **Reactive rather than preventive institutions:** Responsible structures often act only after incidents occur and lack effective mechanisms for preventing violence or sanctioning perpetrators, including political parties that enable or tolerate such behavior.
- **Absence of dedicated reporting and protection mechanisms:** There are no structures specifically designated for reporting, supporting, and protecting women who face violence in the context of their political or public roles. Existing mechanisms are not tailored to the context and specificities of GBVP.

Opportunities for Strengthening Protection

Despite progress at the normative level and international commitments, Albania still has significant room to improve the protection of women in politics from gender-based violence. One key step is the adoption of a specific legal definition of Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) and its inclusion as a criminal offense in Albanian legislation, in line with the recommendations of CEDAW⁵ and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)⁶. A clear and enforceable legal definition would not only enable the prosecution of perpetrators but also ensure institutional recognition of the structural violence that women face in public life.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) and relevant structures within political parties must be further empowered to play a proactive role in monitoring and sanctioning sexist and violent language, which is often normalized during campaigns or within public discourse. This would

⁵ **UN CEDAW Committee**, through **General Recommendation No. 35 (2017)** and **Recommendation No. 23**, emphasizes that: *Violence against women in public and political life constitutes a violation of human rights and requires immediate legal and institutional action to prevent and punish it.*

⁶ **IPU**, in its landmark report "Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians" (2016), defines violence against women in politics as: *"Acts of gender-based violence – physical, sexual, psychological, or symbolic – directed at women in politics with the aim of excluding them, silencing them, or undermining their authority and credibility."*

require not only the introduction of clear administrative regulations but also the political will to establish new ethical standards in institutional and electoral life.

In parallel, continuous training for judges, journalists, and political staff is essential to enhance their capacity to identify and address forms of gender-based violence in political contexts. Many forms of symbolic or indirect violence remain invisible and unaddressed precisely due to the lack of professional and institutional awareness of their discriminatory nature.

Finally, to ensure a coordinated and effective response, cooperation between civil society organizations, media regulatory authorities, and law enforcement institutions must be strengthened. Only through an integrated and inclusive approach can political violence against women be prevented and punished, protection ensured for victims, and a more inclusive and equal political culture built for all women and girls who choose to be active in public life.

MONITORING FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings from the monitoring of the 2025 electoral campaign, including observations from international actors regarding the political climate and media environment. The preliminary report of the OSCE/ODIHR noted that the 2025 parliamentary elections were competitive and professionally conducted but took place in a highly polarized environment where contestants did not enjoy equal opportunities. Although candidates were generally able to campaign freely, some reported facing intimidation⁷. In this context, gender-based violence in politics (GBVP) emerged as a persistent and alarming pattern, disproportionately affecting women candidates, activists, and journalists.

This section presents the key findings of a comprehensive media monitoring process carried out during the April–May 2025 electoral period, aimed at documenting how gender-based violence manifested in the political sphere, both online and offline.

Through the analysis of over 4,000 media articles, 600 social media posts, and direct reports from the field, the monitoring revealed a wide spectrum of harmful behaviors—from symbolic and verbal violence to organized campaigns of digital harassment. These findings highlight not only the legitimization and normalization of hostility towards women in politics but also the cultural and institutional dynamics that allow such violence to persist unaddressed.

The monitoring also identified serious shortcomings in institutional accountability, unequal treatment of women in traditional media, and the lack of clear inclusion of gender-based political violence (GBPV) in political parties' electoral agendas. However, despite these challenges, instances of civic and institutional resilience were also observed, including public reactions denouncing hate speech.

Overall, these findings provide a realistic and sometimes grim but necessary picture of the state of gender participation in Albanian politics. They highlight the urgent need for political, institutional, and cultural reforms to create a fairer and safer environment for women in public and political life.

⁷ International Election Observation Mission to Albania – Parliamentary Elections, 11 May 2025: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions. Online: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/7/590685.pdf>

Women Candidates and Politicians

During the election period, women engaged in politics were particularly targeted by online violence. Throughout April and May 2025, numerous social media posts and comments focused on women candidates' appearance, character, or capabilities, bypassing discussions about their political views and portraying them as sexual objects.

A particularly serious case involved a flagrant incident of **gender-based violence directed at Ms. Sara Mila**, a new Socialist Party candidate for parliament in Elbasan District. A derogatory term used to demean her physical appearance circulated widely on social media and was amplified by commenters, influencers, and political analysts. Notably, analyst Andi Bushati used this term during the TV show "Të Paekspozuarit" on May 22, 2025, on MCN TV⁸. Instead of discussing her ideas or political positions, his comment aimed to humiliate and mock her on gendered grounds, reinforcing the perception that women in politics are fair game for personal and sexist attacks.

This kind of digital misogyny is deeply harmful, not only to the targeted individual but also to the broader political and social climate. Misogynistic discourse contributes to a hostile environment that discourages women's participation in public and political life. This case clearly shows how gender-based insults are normalized in Albanian political discourse, particularly during election campaigns when women are more visible in the public sphere.

Media coverage of this sexist episode mostly focused on condemning the offensive language and amplifying Sara Mila's response⁹. However, the tone and focus of the media varied, and coverage often lacked a consistent and gender-sensitive approach. Different media outlets adopted differing perspectives on how the case was reported.

For example, Gazeta Dita, which first reported the incident, highlighted the inappropriate word in its headline and described the intense backlash Sara Mila experienced on social media. Although the article did not directly condemn Mr. Bushati, it pointed out that the comment was sexist and degrading, implicitly criticizing the harsh tone of public debate.

By contrast, Gazeta Tema focused more on Sara Mila's reaction, portraying her as a young candidate facing online misogyny. Tema quoted Mila calling the analyst a "frustrated harasser."¹⁰ and defending her right to participate in politics without being subjected to gender-based insults and stereotypes. This article amplified her narrative, framing the incident as part of a broader pattern of gender-based hostility against women in politics.

In both cases, the reporting was more empathetic and supportive of Ms. Mila than neutral or critical. Although Andi Bushati's name was not always directly mentioned or widely condemned, the overall framing leaned toward defending Ms. Mila's dignity and underscored the inappropriateness of degrading insults directed at women in political discourse. In this way, the media played an important role in exposing the problem, even if not all outlets openly challenged the culture that normalizes such language.

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUSozg2exBw>

⁹ [javanews.al/](https://www.javanews.al/)

¹⁰ <https://www.gazetatema.net/politika/nje-buallice-sara-mila-i-kthehet-andi-bushatit-nje-bullizues-i-frustuar-i496049>

Another example is the case of **Democratic Party MP, Ms. Albana Vokshi**, who publicly denounced gender-based violence in political life. In various speeches and media appearances, she emphasized that women in politics are not only excluded from decision-making processes but are also actively subjected to threats and harassment. In particular, during her speech at the Assembly of the Centrist Democrat International (IDC-CDI), Ms. Vokshi described how both she and her daughter were personally targeted with threats by criminal groups, which she alleged were linked to the ruling political party. She described this as part of a broader pattern of electoral intimidation, in which women candidates are disproportionately exposed to coordinated attacks.

In her statement, Ms. Vokshi said: *"I was insulted, intimidated, and continuously threatened. My family, my daughter were threatened by the same individuals I had reported to the special mechanism established to prevent violence and electoral crime. But not only did they fail to protect me and my family, they also failed to prevent any electoral crime, because the patronage network and drug cartels were the ones deciding the vote. The police did nothing. SPAK did nothing. The Central Election Commission pretended to see nothing."*

In media coverage, headlines such as "Vokshi speaks at the CDI assembly: "Democracy was overthrown by crime"¹¹ and "Vokshi at the IDC-CDI Assembly: In the May 11 farce, democracy was overthrown by crime and violence"¹² emphasized that her testimony highlighted how women's political participation is being undermined not only by institutional failures but also by gender-based intimidation.

Albana Vokshi, Member of the Albanian Parliament and Chair of the Democratic League of Women, has been a strong voice in the fight against gender-based violence. In articles such as "Violence against women – Vokshi calls for harsher penalties for perpetrators: We will fight for their safety"¹³ and "Untouchable" – Vokshi voices concern over rising cases of violence against women in Albania", she described a tragic incident in which a woman was injured by her husband as a reflection of a deep societal crisis. She emphasized the need for a serious state response to end impunity and the fear many women live with. Vokshi declared that the Democratic Party is committed to uncompromising protection of women and proposed: Harsher penalties for perpetrators of violence; Protective measures free of bureaucratic obstacles; Concrete support for shelters and organizations assisting victims.

"Her statement was a strong call for immediate institutional action and an end to the climate of violence against women and the impunity of perpetrators."¹⁴ She called for harsher penalties for perpetrators of violence and emphasized the need for stronger institutional protection measures for women in public life.

During the 2025 electoral campaign, an attack was directed at **Ms. Elisa Spiropali, Speaker of the Albanian Parliament** and a leading figure of the ruling Socialist Party. During a tense parliamentary session on May 29, 2025, Democratic Party MP Gazment Bardhi accused Spiropali of organizing the Conference of Chairpersons "to take pictures," dismissing the institutional nature of the event as mere vanity rather than a legitimate act of governance. He

¹¹ Syri.net [SYRI TV / May 11]

¹² BoldNews.al

¹³ Sot.com.al

¹⁴ Syri.net

went further, alleging that she was collaborating with a criminal gang¹⁵. Although Bardhi's comments did not include overtly sexist insults, his multifaceted attack carried gender-coded elements, questioning Spiropali's credibility, implying her association with male-dominated criminal structures, and reducing her institutional role to a superficial performance.

The article on the syri.net¹⁶ platform and the way the verbal attack against Elisa Spiropali was framed represent a typical example of gender-coded political violence. This form of violence is not expressed through explicit sexist insults but through insinuations and symbolism that systematically target a woman's public persona. The attack aimed to minimize the institutional role of women in politics. By accusing Spiropali of organizing a session "to take pictures," Bardhi assigned her a meaningless role, tied to appearance rather than substance. This is a well-known tactic of gendered delegitimization that reduces women's political contributions to superficial and valueless aspects, denying them authority, competence, and their official status. Additionally, the reference to a connection with a criminal group is not merely a political accusation; it implies that a woman cannot be part of governance without being linked to powerful, and in this case suspicious, men, thereby denying her decision-making power and legitimacy.

Ms. Milva Ekonomi, a high-profile MP from the Socialist Party and former minister, was generally not a target of overt gender-based attacks during the 2025 electoral campaign. However, certain media narratives reflected more subtle forms of delegitimization and gendered framing, particularly through metaphors and selective erasure of her political voice. In a televised panel covered on the YouTube platform titled "Flamur Noka clashes with Milva Ekonomi: You are Rama's soldier,"¹⁷ opposition MP Flamur Noka repeatedly referred to Ekonomi as "Rama's soldier," a rhetorical expression often used to delegitimize women in politics by implying subservience to male authority. While not explicitly misogynistic, this language reflects entrenched gender biases that diminish women politicians' autonomy and reinforce patriarchal hierarchies in political discourse. The gendered dimension of the term "soldier" is crucial to understanding its diminishing effect: when applied to men, "soldier" typically carries positive connotations such as loyalty, discipline, and dedication to a cause or leader. In contrast, when used for women, "soldier" often implies a lack of autonomy, portraying them as blind followers of a male leader rather than independent political actors with their voice and agency.

Additionally, in the article "Economist MPs in Parliament, from Milva Ekonomi to Arbi Agalliu,"¹⁸ Ekonomi is listed among other MPs based on their profession, but her achievements or political platform are not mentioned. This is an example of how women are often sidelined by professional labels in media coverage, without the in-depth analysis that is more frequently afforded to their male counterparts. This lack of representation contributes to a form of symbolic erasure—another dimension of gender-based political marginalization.

Finally, in broader coverage of newly elected MPs, such as "Final list of new PS MPs"¹⁹ Ekonomi's name is mentioned without any individual focus or reference to her electoral

¹⁵ <https://gijotina.com/>

¹⁶ <https://www.syri.net/politike/>

¹⁷ A2 CNN, 31 maj 2025

¹⁸ Telegraf.al, 6 maj 2025

¹⁹ Syri.net, 14 maj 2025

contribution, again suggesting that her presence was perceived as formal rather than a reflection of meaningful political influence.

While Ekonomi was not the target of overt harassment or hate speech, the way she was portrayed, or omitted, in some media sources highlights how gender bias can manifest through underrepresentation, language that diminishes women's roles, or delegitimizing metaphors. These strategies form part of a broader pattern of symbolic violence that undermines women's full participation in politics.

Ms. Iris Luarasi, a prominent media figure, journalist, and human rights activist, as well as a new candidate from the Socialist Party, has actively brought forward issues related to gender-based violence and the role of civil society in protecting this category in Albania. In several media appearances, Luarasi emphasized that civil society organizations defending women's rights are subject to harsh criticism and operate in a hostile social environment. Notably, in the article "Candidate for MP from the Socialist Party! Iris Luarasi: Civil society is under heavy attack"²⁰, she openly addressed the backlash civil society receives for its stance in support of gender equality and the fight against domestic violence.

Similarly, media coverage such as the article "A voice for women in Parliament, Iris Luarasi on the SP list: Domestic violence has no justification"²¹ portrayed her positively, highlighting her strong commitment to combating domestic violence, while implicitly acknowledging the resistance Luarasi and other activists face in society over these issues.

During political debates, as described in "Opinion – Rama or Berisha, who is dominating..."²², Luarasi was met with subtle yet disparaging criticism that questioned her credibility and political judgment, reflecting deep-seated gender bias in political discourse.

Moreover, positive support from civil society groups, including the Partners Albania campaign #30yearsofcivilsociety #rights... (April 7, 2025), underscored her longstanding dedication to fighting gender-based violence, while also highlighting the significant societal resistance faced by advocates like her.

Overall, media narratives surrounding Iris Luarasi reflect a pattern where women who actively advocate for women's rights and gender equality are often met with attempts at delegitimization and strong opposition from society.

Women Activists and Journalists

Beyond women candidates, women activists and journalists who raised their voices against gender-based violence (GBV) also faced online hostility, a troubling trend that continued throughout the 2025 electoral period. Activists who promoted GBV awareness or publicly criticized the lack of political platforms addressing GBV were subjected to attacks, defamation, and, in many cases, the doxxing of their personal information by anonymous accounts on social media.

²⁰ <https://lexo.al/2025/04/>

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iB7kT1SsUJ0>

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aizSyrhj8z8>

A concrete example is **Ms. Sidorela Vatnikaj**, a women's rights activist, who spoke openly on a national television program about the state's failure to address rising rates of domestic violence and divorce. During the interview, she emphasized the need for institutional reforms and supportive services for women. Following her appearance, Vatnikaj was targeted by a wave of harassment and disparaging online comments, illustrating how women who speak out are often punished with digital abuse. The case was reported by Syri.net on May 28, 2025.

Online Hate Speech Comments Related to Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

During the monitoring period, across all articles addressing violence against women or women in politics, out of more than 38,000 analyzed comments, approximately 660 were categorized as containing hate speech.

Figure 1. Topic and Comments Containing Hate Speech



The analysis shows no significant difference in the prevalence of hate speech when comparing male and female politicians. When a female politician is mentioned in an article or post, hate speech comments appear at a similar rate as when their male counterparts are mentioned.

Figure 2. Top Thirty Politicians in Albania Mentioned with Hate Speech Comments (April–May 2025)

Comments
1,621,215

Hate Speech
107,262

Hate Speech %
7%

Search:

Competitors	Hate Speech Comments	Hate Speech %	Comments	Social Posts
 Sali Berisha Sali Berisha (16642/242490), Euronews Albania (2221/12578), Syri Tv (1887/14364)...	34,272	10	360,478	3,543
 Edi Rama Edi Rama (3848/236897), Euronews Albania (2131/10346), Ora News...	21,533	6	360,471	4,354
 Taulant Balla Taulant Balla (6103/73868), Report TV (262/746), Euronews Albania (187/764)...	7,026	9	77,778	615
 Flamur Noka Flamur Noka (1392/15428), Euronews Albania (594/2901), Ora News (357/1634)...	3,473	13	27,373	602
 Belinda Balluku Belinda Balluku (1007/33273), Euronews Albania (725/3423), News24 (182/1059)...	2,611	6	43,913	579
 Belind Këlliçi Belind Këlliçi (1282/15073), Syri Tv (192/978), Dritare TV (152/989), Ora News...	2,224	10	27,506	466
 Elisa Spiropali Elisa Spiropali (1178/22765), Dritare TV (113/539), Euronews Albania (84/316)...	2,090	7	27,918	356
 Erion Braçe Euronews Albania (536/2134), Erion Braçe (336/6087), Ora News (209/666), Syri Tv...	1,984	15	12,916	199
 Agron Shehaj Agron Shehaj (986/26570), Euronews Albania (256/2117), Lapsi.al (77/610), Bledi...	1,839	5	34,940	494
 Ilir Meta Ilir Meta (393/10046), Euronews Albania (312/1602), Top Channel (146/849), Gazet...	1,576	9	19,246	529

Competitors	Hate Speech Comments	Hate Speech %	Comments	Social Posts
 Xhelal Mziu Xhelal Mziu (1228/17782), Euronews Albania (81/780), Gazeta TemA (76/459)...	1,609	8	2,927	919
 Lulzim Basha Lulzim Basha (1227/22900), Faktor.al (51/432), Gazeta TemA (31/240), Euronew...	1,565	6	2,501	455
 Fredri Beleri Euronews Albania (377/1275), Gazeta TemA (140/583), Φρέντης Μισέλης - Fredi Beleri...	1,176	19	1,088	136
 Gazment Bardhi Gazment Bardhi (561/11711), Shqiptarja.com (123/1166), Euronews Albania (74/676)...	1,036	6	1,449	428
 Erion Veliq Erion Veliq (242/11959), Belind Këlliçi (114/938), Euronews Albania (102/540)...	997	6	1,812	548
 Jozefina Topalli Jozefina Çoba Topalli (259/4120), Euronews Albania (181/1241), Syri Tv (93/718), Gazet...	916	9	1,627	240
 Tomor Alizoti Shqiptarja.com (128/607), Tomor Alizoti (116/3916), Gazeta TemA (115/944), Top...	855	9	1,183	235
 Adriatik Lapaj Euronews Albania (171/1464), JOQ Albania (97/817), Bledi Mane (80/1037), Gazeta...	820	10	1,269	214
 Jorida Tabaku Jorida Tabaku (501/19602), Euronews Albania (56/607), Gazeta TemA (45/537)...	709	3	2,972	447
 Olta Xhaçka Euronews Albania (410/1547), Ora News (125/444), Jugulajm (22/89), Lapsi.al...	703	17	1,190	147

Competitors	Hate Speech Comments	Hate Speech %	Comments	Social Posts
 Endrit Shabani Dr. Endrit Shabani (673/16206)	673	4	1,549	242
 Ilir Metaj Ilir Meta (272/5460), Erisa Xhixho (70/1248), Ora News (34/185), Petrit Vasili...	664	7	1,465	232
 Benet Beci Benet Beci (175/12667), TV Rozafa (69/348), ShkodraWeb (52/364), Sprint.al...	664	4	1,235	403
 Fatmir Mediu RTSH Radio Televizioni Shqiptar (112/385), Euronews Albania (77/323), Gazeta...	641	13	1,029	193
 Monika Kryemadhi Euronews Albania (127/673), Dritare TV (83/412), Gazeta TemA (79/332), Opinion T...	603	17	1,949	107
 Blerina Gjylameti Blerina Gjylameti (354/6612), Euronews Albania (51/236), Tirana News (26/110), Or...	598	7	1,360	193
 Ilirjan Celibashi Syri Tv (158/606), Euronews Albania (117/558), Ora News (94/426), Tvklan...	576	17	1,755	400
 Arlind Qori Dritare TV (143/1268), Bledi Mane (68/439), Lapsi.al (52/408), Argjiroja.net (41/236)...	553	10	1,639	113
 Ulsi Manja Ulsi Manja (276/8194), Euronews Albania (38/152), Ora News (33/147), Opinion TV...	511	5	1,049	401
 Sara Milla JOQ Albania (140/1134), Shqiptarja.com (34/312), News24 (33/224), Sali Berisha...	586	15	1,660	44

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Qendra Aleanca Gjimore për Zhvillim

It is worth noting that the overall information environment during the elections was highly polarized and prone to manipulative content, as also highlighted by the OSCE/ODIHR election observers. They emphasized that the active use of social media by candidates and their supporters “further intensified the divisive and confrontational discourse” and that no public authority was designated to detect or curb manipulative or harmful online content.²³ The absence of official oversight allowed much of the hate speech and disinformation targeting women to spread unchecked.

Although Facebook and Instagram theoretically have standards against hate speech (including gender-based hate speech), enforcement of these standards in the Albanian language context was weak. Few users reported abusive posts, and when they did, the content was not always removed promptly. There were repeated reports of women candidates choosing to limit or disable comments on their posts to avoid waves of harassment, a temporary solution that unfortunately also restricts genuine public engagement.

Gender-Based Violence in the Digital Sphere

Gender-based violence in the digital sphere continues to be an inseparable and harmful part of political discourse, especially during election campaigns. During this year’s parliamentary elections, women candidates, public figures, and MPs were exposed to online hate speech, including threats, sexualized insults, and efforts to delegitimize them. These attacks were not only intended to undermine their political credibility but also aimed to intimidate, silence, and exclude them from the public space.

A significant case involves **Luljeta Bozo**, a retired professor and Member of Parliament, who became the target of a series of hate speech comments on social media platforms. The attacks, made in the comments sections of well-known media pages, included violent, misogynistic, and ageist language. In many instances, Bozo was attacked not because of her policies or public statements, but because of her gender, age, and political affiliation.

The following section presents concrete cases illustrating the intensity and nature of online hate speech, including attacks on women such as Elisa Spiropali, Olta Xhaçka, Jozefina Topalli, Belinda Balluku, and others. These examples highlight a pattern of gender-based attacks tied to public exposure, which often escalate into vulgar insults, humiliation, and direct threats. Such comments reflect the structural misogyny that continues to hinder women’s full participation in political life in Albania.

The Facebook page of A2 CNN clearly illustrates the intersection between political disinformation and gender-based hate speech. Numerous users referred to **Olta Xhaçka** using overtly misogynistic and dehumanizing language, portraying her as a moral and political threat. Some comments went as far as calling for her arrest or even physical punishment, signaling a troubling normalization of punitive ideas toward women in public office.

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https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/f/590598_4.pdf#:~:text=plurality%20of%20neës%20sources%2C%20along,new%20coordination%20mechanism%20among%20institutions

These attacks were not limited to her political role but encompassed broader narratives against women and democracy itself, implying that Xhaçka and other women like her are part of a corrupt elite that deserves punishment. Such examples do not merely represent individual hostility but point to an organized culture of gender-based digital violence, where women in politics are delegitimized not for their policies, but for their gender and public presence.

The digital abuse directed at **Belinda Balluku, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Energy**, is another example of how gender-based hate speech intersects with political dissatisfaction. In a Euronews Albania post about the opening of the Llogara tunnel, Balluku became the target of a flood of sexist insults, misogynistic slurs, and delegitimizing language, despite the article itself having a neutral focus on an infrastructure project.

In the comments section, Balluku was labeled as part of a broader network of corruption and was frequently described as "property of Edi Rama." The comments included offensive sexual references, reducing her professional role to crude metaphors and violent language.

Former Speaker of Parliament Jozefina Topalli also faced a wave of harsh online attacks and verbal abuse following her claims of widespread electoral manipulation, especially in the comments section of Syri TV posts on Facebook. Many of these comments went beyond political disagreement and entered the realm of gender- and age-based attacks, undermining her credibility as a woman in public life. Users used expressions that combined misogynistic insults with ageist slurs to delegitimize her political participation.

Other comments suggested she was part of a "dangerous gang" or "with the killers," reinforcing the stereotype of the manipulative or corrupt women politician, particularly aimed at women with long-standing political careers. These attacks reflect a broader trend in Albanian digital spaces where women in politics are not only opposed for their views but are also vilified through deeply personal and misogynistic language.

Elisa Spiropali, Speaker of the Albanian Parliament, a well-known MP from the Socialist Party, and a prominent public figure, has also been the target of continuous online attacks characterized by misogynistic, dehumanizing, and politically motivated hate speech. During the 2025 election monitoring period, a series of analyzed Facebook posts revealed an extremely problematic discourse in the comments sections, where Spiropali was disproportionately targeted because of her gender and political role.

Among the most frequent patterns of attacks identified were:

- **Misogynistic insults and sexist comments**, aimed at undermining her dignity through direct gender-based humiliation and the use of degrading metaphors.
- **Language laden with threats and suggestions of violence**, including comments implying her removal from public life or encouraging her arrest.
- **Attacks on her role as a mother and her upbringing**, with sarcastic comments attempting to discredit her morality and suitability for holding public office.
- **Gendered political delegitimization**, where accusations of corruption were accompanied by sexualized language intended to diminish her authority.
- **Victim-blaming and moral control**, with comments accusing her of disgracing Albanian women and mothers through her political engagement.

These examples illustrate a hostile and deeply patriarchal environment in the public and digital spheres, where women with high political exposure continue to be targets of symbolic and verbal violence reinforced by gender stereotypes.

Albana Vokshi, a well-known MP from the Democratic Party and one of the most prominent figures in Albanian political life, became the target of a significant wave of verbal abuse online during the 2025 election campaign. This wave was particularly evident in Facebook comments under a post by RTSH – Albanian Radio and Television, which included Vokshi's statements regarding the political situation. The comments reflected a discourse saturated with hate speech, misogyny, and severe insults, surpassing the boundaries of political debate and entering the realm of gender-based violence.

Many of the comments aimed to delegitimize Vokshi not through criticism of her political views or stances, but through sexist insults that reduced her to her gender and sexuality. Rather than engaging with her political role, commenters used degrading labels and insinuations, which were not merely personal attacks but represented a deliberate strategy to shame and silence women active in public life. This is a classic form of gender-based violence in the digital space. Beyond sexist insults, the comments often contained dehumanizing and hateful language. There were references to acts of violence, rape, incest, and humiliation, sometimes extending to her family members. The metaphors used sought to strip Vokshi not only of her authority as a politician but also of her dignity as a woman.

Moreover, many comments revealed a complete disregard for legal and ethical norms. Threats and incitement to violence were direct, violating not only the community standards of social media platforms but also Albanian laws prohibiting hate speech, defamation, and the incitement of violence. This points to a serious lack of control and accountability regarding verbal violence online, especially when directed at women in politics.

The cases of Elisa Spiropali and Albana Vokshi are not isolated incidents. They reflect a deeply rooted culture of digital misogyny that punishes women politicians in public life simply for daring to speak out and participate. This reality calls not only for institutional attention but also for a strong societal response to ensure that women's participation in politics is not accompanied by violence, but by respect and equality.

Erisa Xhixho, a Member of Parliament from the Freedom Party, faced a continuous and coordinated wave of hate speech and gender-based delegitimization during the 2025 electoral campaign, particularly on the Facebook platform. The dominant rhetoric against her centered on two recurring frames: (1) accusations of being complicit in corruption; and (2) a misogynistic narrative targeting her morality and professional competence.

In posts analyzed from her official page and media outlets covering her activities, the comments revealed an extremely hostile tone. Dozens of users directed insults, crude labels related to her physical appearance, and degrading language, including references to her family members. Unlike the attacks against some other candidates, which focused more on criticism of political platforms, the attacks on Xhixho were highly personalized and tied to moral judgment, reflecting a gendered double standard against women politicians, where misogynistic language is used to question their professional performance. Furthermore, her age and physical appearance were used by commenters to suggest that her political achievements were based on looks rather than merit.

Sara Mila, a young candidate running in the Elbasan region, was also the target of a wave of misogynistic and degrading language on Facebook, particularly after a post in which she emotionally expressed gratitude for the support of 18,000 voters. Although her post was a message of thanks and resilience, the comments contained a high level of online hate speech, primarily tied to gender-based prejudices, her physical appearance, and her political affiliation.

Many of the comments aimed to diminish her success through insults about her appearance, using dehumanizing and sexist language that sought to portray her as unfit and unworthy of a public role. Other comments questioned her legitimacy as a candidate, suggesting that she had won votes only because of ties to criminal networks, reinforcing the stereotype that women in politics are merely tools of male political or criminal structures.

Beyond gendered insults, a persistent theme was class-based contempt. Users mocked her emotional expression, implying she lacked the “proper background” for public office, both in terms of education and social status. These scornful comments reinforced the narrative that women like Sara Mila, young, emotional, and perceived as socially upwardly mobile, should not be taken seriously in politics.

In some cases, commenters also used indirect sexual humiliation, implying that her electoral success came from submission to powerful men, reinforcing a stereotype that denies women’s capability and achievements. This aligns with broader patterns of gendered disinformation, where women’s political participation is undermined by narratives portraying them as morally or sexually corrupt.

What makes this case particularly telling is the intersection of misogyny with skepticism toward the media. Commenters not only directly attacked Sara Mila, but also extended their hatred to journalists and television hosts who reported on her, accusing the media of being propaganda and “lying to the public.” This multi-pronged attack reflects an ecosystem of distrust, where both women politicians and women journalists are viewed as collaborators in a corrupt system.

Institutional and Civic Reactions

Recently, the monitoring also recorded events that did not necessarily constitute acts of violence, but were linked to the prevention of or response to gender-based violence, essentially, the “positive side” of the coin. These included public awareness campaigns, civic actions, and institutional measures that signal increased engagement toward gender justice.

One notable example was the media coverage of the signing of the Code of Conduct for Digital Campaigns, aimed at curbing hate speech and ensuring ethical communication in online spaces during the electoral campaign. Although not directly related to violence, this initiative, cited in articles such as “Code Signed for Online Campaigns: Ethics in Communication and Prohibition of Hate,”²⁴ was connected to the creation of a safer digital environment, especially for women candidates and activists facing online misogyny.

²⁴ Top Channel, 18 prill 2025

All major political parties signed this voluntary code, committing, among other things, to “promote civil debate and avoid hate speech in digital communications.” This initiative, supported by the Central Election Commission with assistance from international organizations such as International IDEA and NDI, aimed to set a positive tone for the May 2025 elections and counter online abuse.

The Code of Conduct was welcomed as an important step, signaling political will to reduce the worst behavior in online spaces. However, its impact depended on how parties would monitor the content shared by their supporters. During the campaign, there were still many violations of the spirit of the code, particularly from unofficial party supporter pages or partisans, whose posts could not be easily attributed to official campaign channels.

The Central Election Commission and several civil society monitoring organizations conducted limited social media monitoring and noted some flagrant instances of hate speech during the campaign. These cases were publicly denounced, but no legal actions were taken, as the Code of Conduct was voluntary and did not foresee any penalties.

The media also reported on the statements made by Robert Gajda, the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, who raised concerns about the language used by politicians during the election campaign in Albania. He emphasized that hate speech and prejudicial rhetoric pose a serious threat to equality and inclusion in public life.

In mid-May, some events organized by civil society gained media attention. A peaceful youth protest in Tirana, covered in an article titled “Youth Against Gender-Based Violence: Peaceful Protest in the City Center”²⁵, conveyed strong messages against violence toward women, through signs with slogans such as “No Violence Against Women.” These symbolic gestures expressed a profound desire for change at the roots of society.

The Albanian Women Empowerment Network and other civil society actors played a key role in amplifying public reactions, through messages such as “Don’t Be Silent: Violence is a Crime, Not Passion” and “Change Starts with Us – Response to Femicide.” Likewise, organizations like the Albanian Helsinki Committee responded with public statements denouncing the language used during the campaign and institutional silence.

Although smaller in number, these responses play a crucial role in the broader narrative. They shift the focus from victimization toward collective responsibility and civic engagement, demonstrating that despite cycles of violence, there is a persistent effort by institutions, civil society, and citizens to build a fairer and safer society for all.

GBV in Political Party Campaign Programs and Materials

A society’s commitment to addressing GBV is reflected in how prominently the issue features on the political agenda. An analysis of the 2025 electoral campaign materials, including political party manifestos, official program documents, and campaign speeches, shows that the prevention of and response to GBV received limited attention from Albania’s main political parties. This section tracks what, if anything, the parties promised or mentioned regarding GBV during the campaign.

²⁵ Publik tv, 15 maj 2025

The Governing Party – Socialist Party (PS), which had been in power for three consecutive terms until 2025, primarily ran its campaign on its governing track record and future economic plans. In its published program and campaign rallies, explicit references to gender-based violence were minimal. The PS platform highlighted “women’s empowerment” as a value, citing, for example, the government’s gender representation (at the time, women held half of the ministerial positions, showcasing progress).

The program mentioned the continuation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030 and support for women entrepreneurs. However, on the specific issue of domestic or sexual violence, the program offered only vague assurances such as “we will continue to support measures against domestic violence” without clarifying any specific programs or actions. No new flagship initiatives or funding commitments were announced to strengthen the response to domestic violence (such as new shelters or offender programs). For instance, the phrase “we will continue to support measures against domestic violence” appeared in a general section, without detailing budget increases, shelter expansion, or systemic reforms.

Campaign coverage such as “Rama: Let’s focus on the economy and gender equality in employment”²⁶ emphasized jobs and representation, while leaving domestic violence virtually unaddressed. Furthermore, PS candidates largely avoided raising the issue of domestic violence unless directly asked. When a journalist asked in an interview about the rising number of femicides, a PS representative defended the government’s record by citing improvements in the legal framework (e.g., changes to the domestic violence law) and the existence of referral mechanisms (“PS responds to femicides: The law exists, but it needs to work”), where the speaker defended the status quo without pledging new action and shifted away from the topic when pressed. Thus, the ruling party treated domestic violence as a solved issue under existing policy, rather than a campaign priority requiring innovation or further resources.

The United Opposition (Democratic Party – PD and allies): Similarly, the opposition did not foreground domestic violence (DV) in their campaign promises. The opposition’s messaging focused on criticizing the government’s corruption and economic mismanagement. In their program documents, public safety issues were discussed—such as promises to reduce crime and strengthen the rule of law—but these were broad and not gender-specific. Domestic violence was not singled out in PD’s security or social policy sections. At some regional campaign stops, opposition candidates, responding to local voters, acknowledged concerns about community safety, including cases of domestic violence, and promised “zero tolerance” for violence in general. However, these remarks were isolated and not part of a cohesive policy proposal.

For instance, in a televised campaign debate, a PD candidate stated: “Domestic violence is part of the insecurity we face across society,” but offered no concrete proposals. Articles such as “Basha Promises Justice, But Silent on Abused Women”²⁷ highlighted this absence, suggesting a missed opportunity for the opposition to challenge the government’s record on violence against women.

However, there was no evidence that the opposition had launched a dedicated initiative against violence toward women, such as pledging to establish more one-stop crisis centers or introducing educational programs on gender-based violence. While tactically, the opposition

²⁶ Top Channel

²⁷ Syri.net

could have attacked the government for its failure to protect women (given the ongoing incidents), they did not appear to have any specific program on the issue. A possible reason is that neither the ruling nor the opposition parties perceived addressing violence against women as yielding significant electoral benefit. As a result, this topic remained a blind spot for both political sides during the May 2025 parliamentary elections. It is also plausible that the opposition preferred not to draw attention to GBV, since solutions to this issue require systemic investment, which they were not prepared to detail. Instead, they focused on areas where they believed the government was more vulnerable.

New Parties: Some small new political parties and independent candidates had specific platforms, a few of which touched on family and social issues. For example, one small party focused on “family values” and framed domestic violence within those values, implicitly suggesting that women’s roles within traditional family structures were part of the solution. This was reflected in statements like “The family is the foundation of society: Let’s build on values.”²⁸ Such a framing reflects a lack of understanding of GBV dynamics and a more conservative worldview. Another new movement led by young activists, as seen in “We Represent the Silent Voice,”²⁹ included a call for safe environments for women and girls, citing outrage over recent femicides. However, this movement had very limited reach and was not featured in mainstream media coverage. Overall, none of these smaller actors gained enough traction to make GBV a visible campaign issue.

A review of campaign materials found practically no references to domestic violence. Political parties typically produce materials highlighting their key promises; in these, issues such as jobs, infrastructure, EU integration, and anti-corruption dominated. There was no evidence of a broad commitment to addressing domestic or gender-based violence.

One exception came from Democratic Party MP Albana Vokshi, who publicly called for “harsher punishments for violence against women,” as reported in Tirana Today and Sot News. These were isolated voices, not platforms of the major parties. The absence speaks volumes: despite GBV being a serious societal concern, it was missing from the 2025 political marketing.

This lack of focus is not unique to Albania, as observers have noted that in many elections, including in neighboring countries, domestic violence and similar issues are rarely debated unless there is a very specific scandal. For example, in a comparable context, media noted that in a recent campaign, “domestic violence wasn’t mentioned at all, despite rising figures.” Albania’s 2025 campaign followed that pattern.

This suggests that political parties may view domestic violence as part of the social policy domain typically addressed by NGOs or as a non-political issue. It may also reflect a persistent stigma or hesitation around publicly discussing domestic violence, out of fear that it could alienate some voters or expose candidates to personal attacks (especially if members of their party have troubled histories) indeed, both major parties have had members accused of domestic violence in the past, which may be one reason they avoid the topic.

²⁸ Telegraf

²⁹ Exit.al

Political and Social Implications

The near-total absence of gender-based violence (GBV) from the electoral discourse left concerned voters with very little information about where political parties stood on the issue, or whether any of them treated it as a priority. This also means that whichever party won (in this case, the Socialist Party, which secured another term) could not claim to have received a clear mandate from voters to implement new measures against GBV, since the topic was not a subject of broad debate during the campaign.

The only commitment made, however general, was the pledge to enforce the law and ensure public order, which may include laws against domestic violence. Yet in the absence of concrete proposals, there is little basis for demanding accountability. This gap was highlighted by civil society; women's organizations noted that political leaders tend to speak about gender equality mostly in the context of quotas and representation, but rarely in terms of violence and safety for women. They have called for political parties to explicitly and concretely include GBV prevention in their platforms in future elections, treating it as a political priority rather than a private or secondary issue.

In summary, the 2025 electoral campaign was characterized by limited engagement with GBV in both political party programs and public communications. No major new commitments were made, and the issue remained largely sidelined in political debate. This represents a missed opportunity to inform the electorate and to build broader support for stronger measures to prevent violence against women. As a result, the protection of women's rights and safety remains a matter of post-election advocacy, in the absence of a clear stance expressed through the ballot box. Looking ahead, the meaningful integration of gender-based violence issues into political platforms is a key task for Albanian parties if they aim to address a widespread problem affecting thousands of women and girls across the country.

Cases Reported on the stopvawp.al Platform

During the electoral campaign period for the parliamentary elections of May 11, 2025, a total of two cases of violence against women in politics were reported through the online platform www.stopvawp.al. These reports were submitted via the electronic form available on the website. Despite the abovementioned public cases and others that may have remained hidden, no reports were submitted via the free hotline 08001818, which was available to citizens throughout the entire period.

Case 1: Public Violence with Personal and Political Content

In March 2025, a politically active woman serving on the Municipal Council of Dibra became the target of a defamation campaign on social media, which included insults, slander, and direct attacks aimed not only at her political identity but also at her family life. The violence was emotional and psychological, including sexist remarks, age-based comments, and attacks on her husband. The victim reported the case to her party structures, and the opposition councillor group issued a public statement in support. However, despite a formal request for review by the Ethics Committee, no official institutional response was given. She sought help through trusted individuals and professionals, but felt a serious lack of functional mechanisms for institutional protection and redress. The violence hurt her emotional well-being and created significant tension within her family, including bullying of her children at school due to the online content.

She made a clear request for the removal of images and content violating her integrity from social media.

Case 2: Verbal Assault During a Public Campaign Event

In April 2025, another politically active woman experienced verbal and degrading abuse during a public campaign event. The incident took place in a public setting where she was attacked with offensive and humiliating comments by a political opponent, aiming to undermine her authority and image in front of the audience. Although there was no physical violence, the incident had a profound emotional impact and exposed her to psychological consequences. She reported the incident to her party leader, but the party's women's forum did not take any public action or offer support. She sought emotional support from close contacts and trusted professionals, but expressed that the lack of institutional response deepened her sense of abandonment. Despite her desire to confront the incident, she noted that the lack of trust in political institutions and the justice system is a key reason why women hesitate to report such cases. She described violence against women in politics as widespread and normalized, both in digital and physical spaces, present in the daily lives of many women who do not dare to speak out.

Cases from the Task Force – “Equality in Decision-Making” Network

As part of the monitoring of the parliamentary elections of May 11, 2025, the Electoral Task Force, established and led by the Equality in Decision-Making Network, operated as an independent mechanism for tracking developments during the campaign, with a particular focus on political and gender-based violence. The Task Force consisted of a joint group of experts and civil society representatives. It tracked and documented incidents in real time through reports from local collaborators, monitoring of traditional and social media, and analysis of public discourse.

Below are the cases and observations identified as significant by the Task Force, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dimensions of violence against women in politics in the Albanian context:

Case 1 – Media Invisibility and Delegitimization of Elena Kocaqi

The Task Force condemned the systematic exclusion of Elena Kocaqi, Chair of the Albanian National Alliance, from media debates, opinion polls, and electoral analysis. Elena Kocaqi shared the Task Force's statement on her social media. The Task Force directly contacted Euronews Albania and Faktoje.al, requesting equal media representation. Both platforms responded positively and revised their content. A tangible result was Kocaqi's inclusion in the Euronews Barometer following the Task Force's intervention.

Case 2 – Online Insults, Harassment, and AI-Generated Manipulation

The Task Force noted an increase in unethical campaign strategies, including digital harassment, insults, and the use of AI-generated images to ridicule political candidates. Although not always explicitly gendered, these tactics disproportionately affected women, fostering a hostile online environment.

Case 3 – Electoral Integrity and Procedural Obstruction

Concerns were raised about the pressure and language used against Barbara Doda, Deputy Chair of the Opportunity Party, during one of the debates at counting centers in Tirana. This

behavior violated all ethical codes and represented a clear case of verbal violence against a woman in politics. Barbara Doda also shared the Task Force's statement on her social media.

Case 4 – Sexist Comments

A journalist and political analyst, Mr. Andi Bushati, publicly attacked a young female candidate with sexist remarks and comments about her physical appearance. This incident was reported to the Task Force by member Blerjana Bino (SCiDEV). The Task Force issued a statement calling on the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) to review the case under Law No. 97/2013 on audiovisual media.

Institutional and Media Responses

In Case 1, the Task Force contacted Euronews Albania and Faktoje, requesting a review and correction of their coverage to ensure fair visibility for Elena Kocaqi. Both platforms responded positively and updated their content accordingly.

Institutional Response: For Case 4, in the absence of an institutional reaction, the Task Force is in the process of formally reporting the incident to the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA).

Recommendations of the Task Force

Based on these incidents, the Task Force reaffirms that violence against women in politics remains largely invisible, not due to a lack of incidents, but due to a persistent culture of tolerance toward toxic behavior in politics. Such behavior is often used strategically to win elections, generate sensational headlines, and reinforce patriarchal mindsets that question women's legitimate place in leadership and public life.

To prevent and address this violence in future electoral processes, the Task Force offers the following recommendations:

Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms

- The Digital Campaign Code of Conduct in Albania, although voluntarily signed by political parties with the support of International IDEA, the Central Election Commission (CEC), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), is insufficient on its own.
- Journalists and political actors should face sanctions and disciplinary measures when involved in gender-based violence, whether symbolic, verbal, or digital.
- Regulatory bodies such as the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA), the Central Election Commission (CEC), and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination must serve as active oversight mechanisms. Currently, there is a perception that only civil society organizations consistently monitor and respond to hate speech against women in politics. This must change through enforceable institutional mandates and concrete sanctions.

Media and Platforms Most Active in Spreading Gender-Based Violence Content

During the monitoring period (April–May 2025), more than 4,000 articles and 600 social media posts across various platforms were identified for further and in-depth analysis related to gender-based violence.

Table 1: Number of articles/posts identified related to gender-based violence that were further analyzed

Row	Lab Links	Engagement	Views
article	4.030	93.432	0
youtube	248	7.474	1.185.809
instagram	195	195.703	0
facebook	166	46.799	3.747.014
tiktok	13	7.435	403.072
linkedin	3	20	0

Types of GBV-Related Events: Thematic Categorization:

GBV-related events recorded in the monitoring have been categorized into thematic types to understand patterns and areas of focus. Each category represents a different aspect of gender-based violence or related activism, observed in April-May 2025.

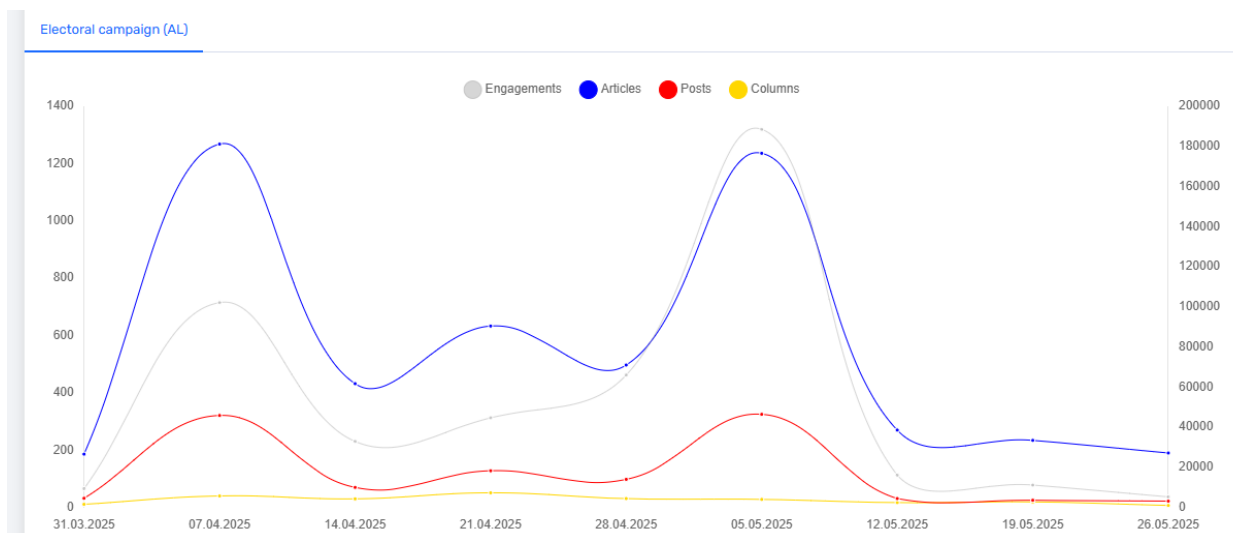
Table 2. Categories related to articles and posts

Category	Articles/ posts
Public Reactions / Statements	497
Violence in politics	361
Online Harassment / Digital Violence	344
Domestic Violence	211
Femicide / Attempted Murder	115
Advocacy / Awareness	51
Sexual Harassment / Assault	35

Articles Related to the Electoral Campaign

The electoral campaign proved to be a highly dynamic period, with a total of 4,000 articles and 600 posts that intertwined institutional messages, party identities, and efforts for public mobilization. Data from April and May 2025 show two clear peaks in campaign-related content: the first around April 7, and the second, more prominent, in the period just before election day, specifically between May 5 and 9. Both spikes were primarily driven by a surge in articles and posts covering large electoral rallies, speeches by party leaders, and last-minute political accusations.

Chart 1. Trend of issues



To better understand how digital media influenced the shaping of public discourse during the 2025 electoral campaign, the content and dominant themes that generated the highest online engagement were analyzed. The most engaging campaign-related articles focused on Berisha's public appearances and political promises, including symbolic moments such as wearing traditional costumes in Kruja or pledges to lower taxes and ease public debt. His association with prominent international figures like Chris LaCivita and endorsements tying him to the Trump political brand boosted engagement levels, especially among opposition-leaning audiences. Meanwhile, Rama's campaign messages were more technocratic, focusing on EU accession and minimum wage increases, receiving less viral reaction but maintaining steady visibility.

Among the 50 most engaging articles, conflict-based narratives prevailed: accusations of vote-buying, violence during the campaign (e.g., the Elbasan incident), and claims of institutional bias against the Democratic Party dominated the media tone. Content related to political platforms, such as housing subsidies for youth or energy development, appeared less frequently and usually generated fewer than 500 interactions per article. The role of international actors, especially the U.S. and the EU, also played a significant role in campaign dynamics. Stories reporting support or criticism from international partners strongly influenced perceptions of legitimacy, especially during the tense days surrounding the voting process.

Visually, the graph on campaign content confirms that while article volume peaked just before election day, audience engagement did not always follow a linear trend. Posts and columns were fewer but had a greater impact when tied to symbolic events or political statements. The second peak in early May coincided with heightened emotional appeals and intensified media coverage of rallies and opposition calls for institutional change.

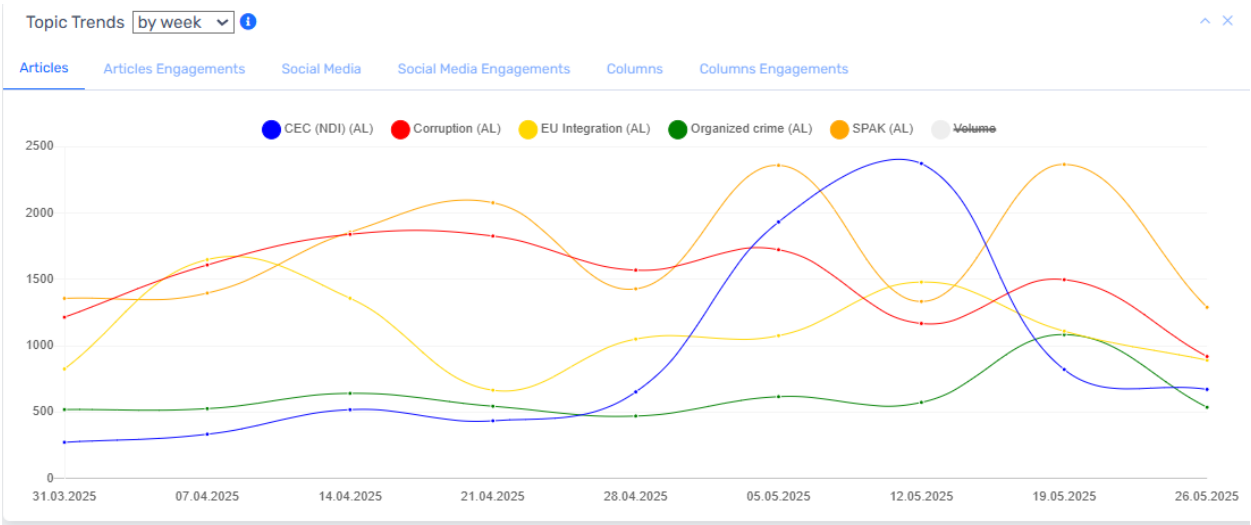
This shows that the electoral campaign, as a media topic, functions both through the axis of planned political actions, such as debates and rallies, and through the spontaneous flow of controversies. Party leaders serve as emotional and ideological anchors for their electorates, fostering identification and involvement. In this context, the digital landscape transformed into a real campaign arena, where engagement spikes closely aligned with narratives of division, promises, and political clashes.

These findings help illuminate the dynamics of citizen engagement in the digital space, shedding light on the role of political narratives, symbolism, and international actors in mobilizing or polarizing public opinion.

Thematic Trends in the 2025 Elections

The 2025 general elections in Albania sparked significant public interest and increased media attention, generating thousands of articles across various platforms and revealing clear thematic trends in the most highly engaged content. This thematic analysis summarizes the 50 most engaged media articles for each of the key topics: the Central Election Commission (CEC), SPAK (Special Anti-Corruption Structure), organized crime, corruption, and EU integration during the monitoring period of April–May 2025.

Chart 2. Topic trend during April-May 2025



Corruption was the most covered topic during the two months, with 13,370 articles and a total of 278,290 engagements, closely followed by SPAK, which generated 15,468 articles and the highest level of engagement at 307,440. It is worth noting that both topics, corruption and SPAK, maintained a consistently strong presence in the media, reflecting public concern over government accountability and the prosecution of political figures.

Table 3. Topic versus number of articles and interactions

Topic	Articles	Engagements
SPAK	15.468	307.440
Corruption	13.370	278.290
Eu Integratio	10.104	208.200
CEC	8.008	150.362
Organised C	5.509	104.816

During the 2025 electoral campaign, gender-based violence (GBV) was not a central theme in the public messaging of major political parties or candidates. Campaigns primarily focused on issues such as economic development, employment, corruption, and public services, while direct discussions of domestic or gender-based violence were noticeably scarce in rallies, debates, or electoral programs.

Monitoring of campaign speeches and media appearances revealed that explicit references to GBV or violence against women were rare. No party leader organized a major event dedicated to GBV, and when women's issues were mentioned, they were often framed in general statements about "family" or "social problems" rather than through concrete policy proposals to address GBV.

In the rare instances when candidates addressed gender-based violence (GBV), the tone was uniformly condemnatory and supportive of victims, as expected, but often formal and brief. For example, following a high-profile domestic murder case that became national news, several politicians posted statements on social media denouncing the act and offering condolences. These statements carried an empathetic tone ("violence against women is unacceptable," "our hearts are with the family"), but were short and lacked any indication of follow-up action. There is no evidence that any candidate downplayed the seriousness of GBV during the campaign; no one openly suggested, for instance, that domestic violence was a private matter or somehow justifiable. This indicates that overtly sexist or negative rhetoric around GBV was absent from the mainstream campaign discourse, a positive sign in terms of tone. However, the lack of sustained discussion is itself telling: parties treated GBV more as a troubling issue to be condemned when prompted by incidents, rather than a programmatic priority deserving proactive campaigning.

Engagement with content related to concrete GBV policies was extremely limited. None of the main parties, including the ruling Socialist Party and the main opposition, published detailed plans to combat GBV during the campaign. Political dialogue lacked substantive proposals, such as funding more shelters, strengthening police training on domestic violence, or educational programs to prevent gender-based violence. When questioned by journalists or activists, party representatives usually reiterated generic support for "women's rights" or referenced the existing legal framework (e.g., the domestic violence law or the national gender equality strategy). However, they did not articulate new initiatives or budgetary commitments. This suggests that GBV was treated as a non-controversial but also non-priority issue, something all candidates denounce, but few are willing to invest political capital in addressing.

The political agenda was saturated with other urgent topics, and GBV did not organically emerge as a voter concern during campaign events. Even women candidates largely stuck to party lines, focusing on the economy and governance, rather than highlighting GBV. This may

reflect a strategic calculation that, while GBV is important, it is not seen as a vote-winning issue; it could also signal that candidates lacked the expertise or concrete plans to address it and therefore avoided engaging deeply.

It is worth noting that, although direct discussion of GBV was minimal, parties did speak about women in another context: their political participation. There was public emphasis on meeting the 30% gender quota in candidate lists, and parties promoted the number of women running in the elections. For example, party leaders highlighted the fact that many women were candidates and pledged support for women's empowerment in politics. However, even in these discussions, the issue of violence against women in politics (VAWP), such as harassment of female candidates, was virtually absent, despite evidence of unequal treatment and harassment in Albanian media and politics. The UN and civil society had warned that parties should condemn gender-based harassment in politics, yet during the campaign, parties did not openly address the harassment their women members might face.

In short, political actors preferred to frame women's issues in terms of representation (quotas, leadership roles) rather than violence prevention or harassment protection. The tone toward women was generally positive in principle, but deep engagement with GBV remained superficial.

Conclusions: Women's Representation, Not Just Numbers, but Dignity and Safety

The 2025 parliamentary elections in Albania marked a critical juncture in the country's democratic trajectory, characterized by deep media polarization, institutional distrust, and a notable increase in digital engagement. The analysis reveals that the media environment acted both as a megaphone for political narratives and as a battleground for intense partisan conflict. Corruption, the integrity of the Central Election Commission (CEC), and the operations of the Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK) emerged as dominant themes shaping public discourse, underscoring persistent skepticism about the neutrality and effectiveness of key institutions.

Election coverage revealed a highly personalized campaign, centered largely on the contrast between Prime Minister Edi Rama and opposition leader Sali Berisha, mirroring the broader trend of personalization in Albanian politics. While Rama's technocratic, EU-oriented messaging maintained steady but restrained resonance, Berisha's emotionally charged, populist rhetoric demonstrated considerable mobilizing power, particularly through the strategic use of digital platforms like TikTok, despite government-imposed restrictions.

Political figures such as Belinda Balluku and Agron Shehaj, though less visible in traditional media, effectively leveraged digital platforms to generate engagement, indicating a quiet but meaningful shift toward a more diverse political communication landscape. However, this digital engagement was accompanied by alarming levels of hate speech, especially on Facebook. Violent and toxic comments were present both on politicians' posts and in content referencing them, targeting candidates and their opponents alike. This hate speech often contained racist, nationalist, sexist, gender-based, or religious elements, reflecting not only profound political polarization but also serious gaps in digital moderation and enforcement of ethical standards by the platforms.

Ultimately, the media landscape and its interaction with political processes during these elections exposed both vulnerabilities in Albania's democratic institutions and potential pathways for political renewal. The growing importance of digital engagement strategies highlights the need for more sophisticated and adaptive campaigning methods in the future. The 2025 parliamentary campaign reveals a troubling contradiction: while formal gender quotas have improved numerical inclusion, substantive participation grounded in dignity, safety, and voice remains elusive. The persistence of gender-based political violence (GBPV) undermines public trust, silences critical voices, and reinforces patriarchal control over political narratives.

Political participation without protection is not empowerment; it is exposure. Albania's political institutions must move beyond symbolic gender inclusion and recognize GBPV as a systemic crisis of democracy. Only then can the principles of equality, representation, and voice be truly realized.

Recommendations in Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Politics

Legal recommendations

- Draft and adopt a specific law on Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) that recognizes it as a distinct criminal offense and addresses forms such as online harassment, threats, symbolic violence, and sexism in public discourse.
- Amend the Penal Code to include provisions penalizing disinformation campaigns and hate speech targeted at women in politics.
- Review the Electoral Code to strengthen monitoring mechanisms for sexist and discriminatory language during campaigns, and to increase sanctions against political entities that fail to respect gender quotas or allow violent rhetoric.

Institutional Recommendations

- Enhance the capacities of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) to identify, monitor, and sanction violent or sexist speech on public platforms and during electoral campaigns.
- Establish an inter-institutional mechanism for the protection of women in politics, in cooperation with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, the judiciary, and civil society organizations.
- Develop a national reporting and tracking platform for VAWP cases, ensuring secure, encrypted access and a victim-sensitive approach.

Recommendations for Political Parties

- Adopt internal codes of ethics that prohibit sexist language and offenses against women, both within and outside party structures.
- Establish internal gender equality bodies in every political entity to oversee the implementation of gender quotas, protection from discrimination, and responses to violence.
- Implement mandatory training programs for party members and campaign staff to raise awareness about gender equality, hate speech, and ethical campaigning standards.

Recommendations for Media and Social Media Platforms

- Develop and promote ethical and gender-sensitive reporting guidelines, in collaboration with AMA and journalists' associations.
- Integrate gender sensitivity indicators in media analyses and train editorial teams on women's representation and gender issues.
- Establish partnerships with social media platforms (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram) to report and moderate content containing violent speech against women candidates or activists.
- Encourage safe online spaces for women in politics through educational campaigns and strengthened self-regulation in digital communities.



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