

# Online Violence Against Women in Politics in Ukraine: An IFES Assessment

November 2019



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## Executive Summary

This study examines online harassment, violence and abuse of political women in Ukraine from January 1, 2014-July 31, 2018. The study finds that that online harassment and violence against women in Ukraine is a pervasive and debilitating factor undermining women's political participation and preserving the male domain of political leadership. The content of online abuse reflects historically conditioned social and cultural stereotypes as well as prejudices and myths about women's social roles and civic and political participation. The study finds that instances of online harassment and violence often connect or coincide with salient events in politics and society, from the 2014 revolution to elections and other momentous political episodes. The study also indicates that different types of online violence emerge in Ukraine in different degrees. In Ukrainian online spaces, both female and male social media users most commonly experience various forms of socio-psychological violence. Sexual violence is the second most widespread type of online violence. About one in every 10 abusive posts targeting both men and women includes sexual connotations, images or accusations. Finally, the least widespread forms of violence include physical threats and economic based aggressions.

Although both political women and men are targeted by abusive and violent online content during the electoral period, female and male candidates face different types of online violence. Online sexual violence affects women and men in different ways. The sexual online attacks against women relate more to rape, sexual harassment, accusations of prostitution and sexism. In contrast, the sexualized posts targeting men relate more to homophobia that stems from heteronormative and hyper masculine beliefs.

Socio-psychological online abuse often involves gender-specific attacks. Abusive posts against women typically include allegations of moral misconduct, inadequate intelligence and professional incompetence as well as profanity and xenophobic rhetoric. In addition, political women also experience attacks on their close friends and family. This online violence against women emerges from patriarchal stereotypes about women's participation in politics. It disempowers women by disrupting their professional lives, inhibiting their participation and violating their rights. In contrast to attacks against women, aggressive posts against men mainly contain economic threats and accusations of separatism and connections with the Russian government. The study also found that harassment against men tends to include the same reoccurring accusations and the posts are more uniform in content compared to the diverse set of threats that women receive.

## Legal Framework and Political Context

The representation of women across elected office in Ukraine has been critically low since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Women and men alike were eager to enjoy political rights that did not exist under the Soviet Union. However, women's political ambitions were quickly tampered by deep-rooted cultural barriers that were carried into the new institutional frameworks of democracy. Ukraine's first post-Soviet parliamentary elections saw only 2.3 percent women elected<sup>1</sup> and little progress has been achieved since. The Orange Revolution in 2004 and Euromaidan Revolution in 2014 were opportunities to renew focus on increasing women's political stature, but many of these hopes remain unrealized as of 2019.

In 2010, Viktor Yanukovich was elected president in part due to his stance on maintaining more cordial relations with the Russian Federation and his embrace of traditional social values. Yanukovich's late-2013 decision to deprioritize an association agreement with the European Union triggered massive protests in Kyiv and around the country, threatening the regime. After episodes of violence in Kyiv at the hands of government forces, the Euromaidan Revolution saw the removal of Yanukovich and the Parliament calling for new elections in May 2014. Petro Poroshenko, having run on a pro-European and reform platform, definitively won the presidency without the need for a runoff election.

Poroshenko's ascension to the presidency potentially set the stage for a new era in Ukrainian politics. However, in the four years since Euromaidan, a number of electoral and political reforms have stalled or have been slow to full realization. Women's political engagement post-revolution has largely followed this same dynamic, hampered by deep-rooted stereotypes that reinforce gendered roles in society, including skepticism of women's political leadership abilities, high levels of domestic violence and victim-blaming in response to incidences of sexual violence.<sup>2</sup>

While there have been several notable examples of high-profile women in politics, women are significantly underrepresented in Ukrainian politics. In its convocation, there were only 47 women representatives in the *Verkhovna Rada*, Ukraine's Parliament, making up approximately 12 percent<sup>3</sup> of the legislative body. After the 2019 parliamentary election, this number increased to 20.3 percent. While this is an historic high for Ukraine, it still falls behind international and regional targets of 30 or 40 percent.

Women are similarly underrepresented in other areas of public leadership. Though women make up a large number of lower-level roles in the CEC, women are underrepresented in leadership and decision making across institutions and ministries. A broad women's movement within Ukrainian civil society organizations is stymied by institutional and political challenges but is active, though there is little activism surrounding advocacy for gender quotas. There is reason for optimism in terms of the general population's beliefs: according to a recently conducted nationwide sociological survey, 77 percent of all respondents irrelevant of their gender believe that women and men should be treated on equal terms.<sup>4</sup> While most respondents recognize that Ukrainian politics is dominated by men, only 36 percent find this situation acceptable.

<sup>1</sup> Trach, Nataliya. "Parliament has record number of women" <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/parliament-has-record-number-of-women-374872.html>

<sup>2</sup> "Modern Understanding of Masculinity: Attitudes of Men to Gender Stereotypes and Violence Against Women," [https://ukraine.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf, Gender equality in political life on the local level and gender concept in local policies in Ukraine https://rm.coe.int/-/16808a2a51; All-Ukrainian Network of Gender Education Centers: complex approach to gender equality policy implementation https://genderindetail.org.ua/season-topic/osvita-i-prosvita, Natalia Makaruk. Gender Equality in Ukraine https://ukraine.ureport.in/story/392/](https://ukraine.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Gender%20equality%20in%20political%20life%20on%20the%20local%20level%20and%20gender%20concept%20in%20local%20policies%20in%20Ukraine%20https://rm.coe.int/-/16808a2a51;All-Ukrainian%20Network%20of%20Gender%20Education%20Centers%20complex%20approach%20to%20gender%20equality%20policy%20implementation%20https://genderindetail.org.ua/season-topic/osvita-i-prosvita,Natalia%20Makaruk.Gender%20Equality%20in%20Ukraine%20https://ukraine.ureport.in/story/392/)

<sup>3</sup> "Women in Parliament," January 1, 2019, Inter-Parliamentary Union <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm><sup>1</sup> Trach, Nataliya. "Parliament has record number of women" <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/parliament-has-record-number-of-women-374872.html>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Although significant institutional obstacles to full political participation persist, there have been several important legislative achievements within the last several decades. In 1980, Ukraine ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Ukraine has also since adopted the following legislation on equality of women and men: “On ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men” and “On principles of prevention and combating discrimination in Ukraine.” In 1998, Ukraine established criminal liability for crimes against the will, honor and dignity of a person (Part 3, Articles 146,147,148, 149 and 150 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code).<sup>5</sup> Ukraine has also ratified the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals laid out by the General Assembly on September 25, 2015. The fifth goal states that achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is a prerequisite of ensuring decent life in a country.

In December 2017, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted a “Law on Amendments to the Criminal and Criminal and Procedural Codes of Ukraine” to implement provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Article 126-1 defines domestic violence as “intentional systematic physical, psychological or economic violence against a current or ex-wife/husband or a person, whom an abuser has (had) familial or close relationships with, that results in physical or psychological sufferings, health issues, disability, emotional dependence or decreasing of life quality of a victim.” Despite these legislative achievements, however, the enforcement and implementation of these laws remains inconsistent. Beginning in 2017, gender equality has become one of the stated priority areas in the governmental reform agenda. The position of governmental commissioner for gender equality was created in early 2018. Establishment of this institution is crucial to conducting in-depth, expert review of laws and sublaws and mainstreaming gender and gender equality throughout all state policies, strategies and action plans. According to the government commissioner for gender equality, around 80 percent of all central executive bodies have already appointed specially designated people working on internal gender mainstreaming as gender advisers or coordinators for equal opportunities between women and men.

The pay gap between women and men in Ukraine in some specific economic areas sometimes reaches up to 20 percent. Yet, at the beginning of 2018 the outdated Order of the Ministry of Healthcare #256 was canceled, allowing women to occupy around 450 professions and occupations traditionally attributed to men. This initiative became a significant step forward in eradicating gender discrimination and lifting certain obstacles for women in attaining equal rights and opportunities; however, women often still struggle to achieve leadership and decision-making roles across the board.

Current Ukrainian legislation provides for several mechanisms meant to ensure balanced representation of women and men in the Rada as well as in representative local government bodies. A gender quota for inclusion in political party lists for parliamentary elections is written into the Political Party Law, though it is not enforced or implemented in most cases due to a lack of sanctions for noncompliance. It also does not specify the placement of women on party lists, meaning that they could be listed at the bottom of the list with low likelihood of election. The Political Party Law also provides that party charters must specify the size of quotas determining the minimum level of women and men’s representation on the lists of candidates to local councils in multi-member election districts at no less than 30 percent. However, it again does not have penalties for those who fail to comply. In addition, the peculiarities of the system used for local elections result in an electoral system that is more like a majoritarian system in practice; candidates on party lists are assigned to

<sup>5</sup> Ukrainian Criminal Code (Verkhovna Rada VidomostiUkrainy (BBP), 2001, No. 25-26, page131).“Crimes against will, honor and dignity of a person” Article 146. Unlawful imprisonment or kidnapping. Article 146-1. Forced disappearance. Article 147. Seizure of hostages. Article 148. Child substitute. Article 149. Human trafficking or another unlawful collusion against a person. Article 150. Children exploitation. Article 150-1. Exploitation of an underage child for begging. Article 151. Unlawful placement into a psychiatric institution. Amendments have been in force since August 28, 2018, <http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2341-14>

particular districts (meaning voters vote for a single candidate) and parties may place women in unwinnable locations. There is also a “gender bonus” under the 2015 Political Finance Reform Law that allocates 10 percent of the overall annual state funding of political parties to those parties whose share of representatives of any gender elected to the Parliament is no more than two-thirds of the number of the party’s elected members of Parliaments (MPs); however, only one party qualified for this funding after the last election. Overall, while the current legislation provides for certain instruments to increase the representation of women in Parliament and in local elections, lack of implementation continues to undermine impact.

## What is VAWE?

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) recognizes that violence against women in elections (VAWE) is a threat to the integrity of the electoral process – it can affect women’s participation as voters, candidates, election officials, activists and political party leaders, and it undermines free, fair and inclusive democratic processes. Through increased attention to women’s participation and women’s voices in democracy assistance, narratives of VAWE in their homes, politics and public spaces have become more visible. VAWE is defined as the following:

Any harm or threat of harm committed against women with the intent and/or impact of interfering with their free and equal participation in the electoral process during the electoral period. It includes harassment, intimidation, physical harm or coercion, threats, and financial pressures, and it may be committed in the home or other private spaces, or in public spaces. These acts may be directed at women in any of their roles as electoral stakeholders (e.g., voters, media, political actors, state actors, community leaders, electoral officials).<sup>6</sup>

In addition to occurring in physical spaces, VAWE also permeates online platforms. A report released by the United Nations Broadband Commission found that globally 73 percent of women online have been exposed to or experienced some type of cyber violence. It is imperative that electoral stakeholders analyze and address VAWE online not only to prevent cyber violence from occurring but also to prevent it from translating into physical violence.

<sup>6</sup> IFES, “Violence Against Women in Elections: A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring and Response,” 2016, page 2. <http://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections>

## Methodology

### Scope

IFES conducted analytical data mining and sentiment analysis of social media data to map trends in VAWE online in Ukraine. IFES uses the term “violence” as an umbrella for multiple behaviors including direct threats and criminal behaviors, abuse, harassment and intimidation. These behaviors may include physical threats and socio-psychological, sexual and economic violence. Using a powerful data scraping machine learning software called Foresight (formerly known as Crimson Hexagon), IFES developed algorithms to monitor content according to an extensive list of violence-related keywords and phrases. Through this tool, IFES identified and analyzed 1,214,441 social media posts from January 1, 2014-July 31, 2018. IFES subsequently conducted a limited analysis of online violence from June 21, 2019 to August 20, 2019 in order to more closely examine the parliamentary elections. During this period IFES analyzed a total of 17,659 posts.

For both time periods the study exclusively examined publicly available data. The social media outlets examined in this study include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google+ and Tumblr. Other popular social networks such as VKontakte and Odnoklassniki were not analyzed because they have been officially banned in Ukraine since 2016.

The machine learning algorithm was subject to human “training” through an iterative process, until it was more effectively able to interpret and cull relevant social media data. At the end of data collection, manual verification checks took place. Data validity for this type of analysis varies and is often lower than other forms of research due to its new and experimental nature further details can be made available upon request.

Based on the four global categories of VAWE, multiple subtypes were identified in the Ukraine research:

Types of Violence	Subtypes Identified in Ukraine
Physical	Direct harm to principal target
	Implied harm to principal target
	Direct harm to a proxy
	Implied harm to a proxy
Sexual	Sexual harassment
	Prostitution
	Sexual blackmail
	Homosexuality
Socio-psychological	Marital-related (marital infidelity/respect for marital duty, motherhood, etc.)
	Competence/intelligence
	Appearance

### Selection Criteria and Sampling Methodology

For the analysis of content from 2014 to 2018, IFES monitored social media posts related to the following groups: members of the Central Election Commission, members of the Ukrainian Parliament, members of the Cabinet of Ministers, journalists, politically active celebrities and popular figures. According to these categories, 183 people were selected as potential targets of online violence (see Annex 1, Table 1).

The underrepresentation of women in elected and nominated positions impacted selection. There are 52 female MPs out of 423 members, totaling 11.8 percent. Only four out of 24 appointed members of government are women. To ensure the representation of women in the sample, this study included all female MPs and the same number of male MPs. The sample includes the main parliamentary parties and blocs of the Parliament of Ukraine of the eighth convocation. Male MPs were chosen according to quota sampling by age groups (see Annex 2, Table 2.1). In the selection of men, this study considers their political affiliation and the position of their party in the Verkhovna Rada. This study also endeavored to use a sample of men and women similar in influence and responsibility (see Annex 3).

The journalists were sampled from the highest-ranking TV channels: TRK Ukraina, Inter, STB and 1+1. Each of the above channels is affiliated with the largest media holdings in Ukraine: Media Group Ukraina, Inter Media Group, Star Light Media and 1+1. The sample also includes journalists from other popular news channels that are not part of the above holdings: 112 and News One. News One expresses more independent political and ideological views that are frequently at odds with official government positions. The sample includes 20 TV journalists in total (10 women and 10 men). In addition to TV journalists, the sample also includes five female and five male internet journalists. This sample was drawn from a list of the top 15 electronic periodicals in Ukraine. The list considers five criteria: number of visits, quotation, coverage of references, traffic and Facebook interaction. Lastly, the sample includes 10 politically active celebrities and public figures (five women and five men). These individuals are actively engaged in civil activities as nonstate actors and are widely known in Ukraine as opinion leaders.

For the analysis of content pertaining to the parliamentary elections, the sample included six political parties which either cleared the five percent electoral threshold in the Rada elections or had a good chance of clearing the threshold: Servant of the People (Sluga Narodu), Opposition Platform for Life (Opozytsiyna Platform – Za Zhyttia, European Solidarity (Evropeiska Solidarnist), Motherland (Batkivshchyna), Voice (Golos) and Strength and Honor (Syla I Chest). A total of 36 potential targets (18, female parliamentary candidates and 18 male parliamentary candidates) were observed (see Annex 1 Table 2). The study included candidates from majoritarian constituencies. For single mandate constituencies, candidate selection was based on a basic analysis of their level of activity on social networks. This portion of the sample focused primarily on those with no less than 5,000 followers. Ultimately, sixteen candidates (eight women and eight men) in majority constituencies were chosen (see Annex 1, Table 3).

## Research Findings

### Online Abuse Parallels Political Events

Cyberspace in Ukraine is rife with abusive and harmful expressions of violence. The ebb and flow of gendered abuse often reflects temporal or situational events in the country's political life. Spikes in online violence against women often coincide with four major events: 1) scheduled releases of annual government data, 2) electoral cycles, 3) salient political events and 4) highly visible or controversial actions taken by women in the public eye.

In each of the years analyzed, from February to April there was an increase in critical online commentary in connection to the annual release of reports from the government and other research institutions that summarize the public outlook for the previous calendar year. Such reports include successes and failures in the government's economic performance, legal reforms, policy implementation, etc. These readouts often spark criticism from opposition parties regarding the performance of incumbent parties. In contrast, December through January tended to be a much quieter period on social media, possibly due to the holiday season.

It is also worth noting that when it comes to unpopular reforms, online dissatisfaction and aggression primarily focused on the person responsible for the implementation of reforms rather than a party or an institution, and the aggression expressed against an individual is frequently deeply personalized. For example, dissatisfaction with medical reforms that took place at the beginning of 2017 led to many posts targeting the minister responsible for said reforms. The fact that critiques tend to focus on individuals rather than political parties put women at a great risk for VAW online.

In addition to the calendar year, it is also important to consider the impact of electoral cycles. During the electoral period in 2014 there was a clear increase in online political violence against men and women in both ruling and opposition parties. The average number of violent posts against all women surveyed per month, including during the electoral period, was about 170 during 2014. But during the electoral period from August to October 2014, the monthly average of VAW online posts increased to about 300. Men also experienced higher levels of online violence during this period. This trend exists not only for politicians but also for politically active citizens and voters. The average level of aggressive online content peaked in the days leading up to the election and on Election Day. These increased levels of online violence continued for the two weeks following the end of the vote, while votes were being counted and results of exit polls were discussed. Afterward, the intensity of online violence gradually decreased.

Online violence also coincides with prominent political events. For Ukraine, 2014 was a particularly unique year, during which a series of historic events likely influenced the heightened online traffic and increased online violence. Major events that sparked an increase in political tension and online violence include the annexation of the Crimea by Russia, the military conflict in the Donbas and the internally displaced persons crisis. At the dawn of the revolution, Ukrainians expected positive changes and were optimistically engaged in civic life. But gradually, positive aspirations transformed into feelings of dissatisfaction, disappointment and irritation due to unfulfilled expectations. As a result, social media became a much more politicized space in which the public frequently and aggressively aired its grievances to assuage feelings of helplessness regarding attempts to affect political change.

In 2015, there were high levels of online aggression during the first anniversary of the Maidan and the second round of the Minsk Agreements. The Ukrainian public also responded with outrage when special status was granted to the Donbas through an amendment to the Ukrainian Constitution on August 31, 2015. Dissatisfaction increased during the reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the fall of 2015.

Trends in online violence seem to show that when female public figures take an action that is highly visible or controversial, it seems to spark a reaction of online abuse and harassment. For example, on April 21, 2015, Yulia Tymoshenko created a working group and website on tariffs and social media users responded with an onslaught of online violence. Similarly, on May 25, 2016, Nadiya Savchenko, a leader in the Tymoshenko bloc, returned from Russian captivity and appeared in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Immediately afterward, online aggression intensified in response to her statements. There was also a spike in online aggression when Liliia Hrynevych and Ulana Suprun accepted their posts as minister of education and minister of health, respectively. The same phenomenon occurred yet again when Nadiya Savchenko created her own party, “Public platform,” and announced her candidacy in 2017 and there was a large increase in VAWE online.

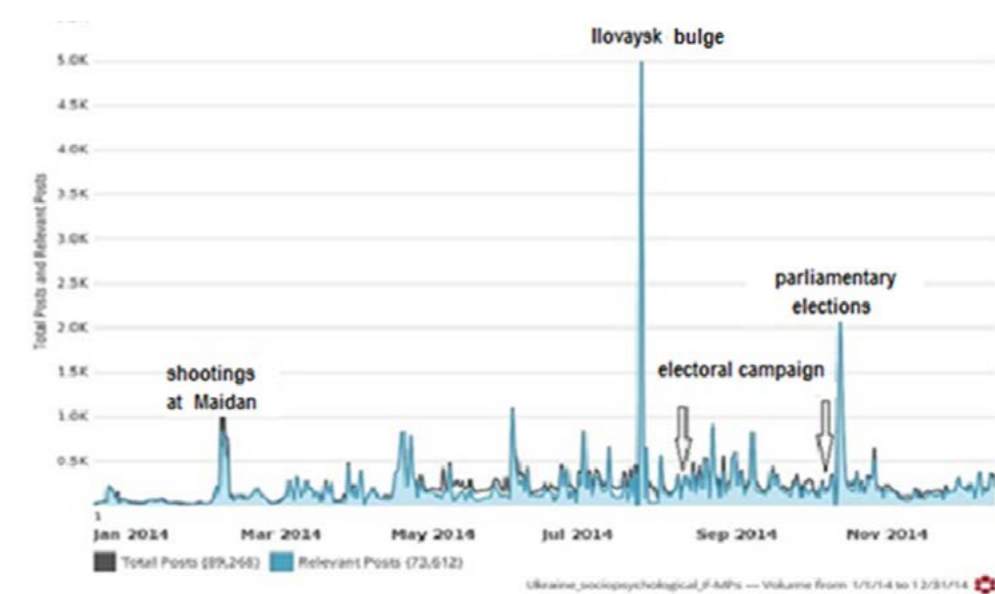
During the 2019 parliamentary elections, peaks in online violence continued to coincide with key political events. For both men and women there were major surges during the candidate registration period, during court cases where the CEC refused to register certain candidates and on election day. Additionally, Mikheil Saakashvili’s withdrawal from the race was major topic of online discourse as well. It is also worth noting that following the announcement of the party candidate lists, there were several attempts by various online users to discredit certain candidates online. For example, Natalya Balasinovich eventually dropped out of the race after a video from several years ago regarding her husband’s infidelity in their marriage. In an interview with local media Balasinovich shared that she believes this was a deliberate attempt to destroy her political career.<sup>7</sup>



#### Timeline of Key Events 2014

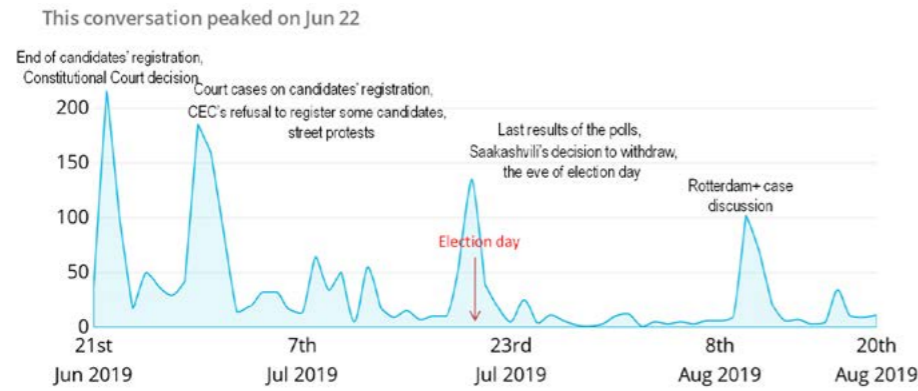
- February 18-20, 2014 – The tragic events on the Maidan, political upheaval and the flight of the president.
- March 1, 2014 – The emergence of Russia’s armed forces in the Crimea.
- March 16, 2014 – The pseudo-referendum in the Crimea.
- April 2014 – Siege of the Donetsk Regional State Administration and the city of Sloviansk.
- May 11, 2014 – The pseudo-referendum of the Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic.
- May 25, 2014 – Presidential elections in Ukraine and election of President Petro Poroshenko.
- May-June 2014 – Truce and Normandy Quartet.
- July 1, 2014 – The beginning of the war.
- August 2014 – Ilovaik Bulge.
- September 5, 2014 – The truce and the start of the Minsk Agreements.

<sup>7</sup> “Normal human reaction: scandalous official about spitting and mats” July 20, 2019 <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/styler/normalnaya-chelovecheskaya-reaktsiya-skandalnaya-1561020753.html>



#### Timeline of Key Events 2019

- June 20 is the last day of registration with the Central Election Commission (CEC).
- June 20 - The Constitutional Court finds the President’s order to dissolve the Verkhovna Rada legitimate.
- June 20-21 – The end of candidates’ nomination process.
- June 23-26 - CEC refuses to register 25 candidates, protests.
- June 26 - Court of Appeal orders CEC to register Mikhail Saakashvili.
- July 8 – Final day for the nominations.
- July 10 - The CEC registers 36 candidates.
- July 11 - Adoption of the new Electoral Code; discussions on the network, despite the delay until 2023.
- July 19 - Active day before the Day of Silence and political party leaders participate in talk shows on television channels.
- July 21 - Election Day; high level of online aggression against leaders of the Opposition Platform for Life; the party’s leader announced his resignation due poor results.
- July 22 - Election results. Poroshenko vows to cooperate with Zelenskyy. Possible Tymoshenko premiership being discussed. Eight people voted for Savchenko. Razumkov commented on whether he could become Speaker.
- August 5 - The CEC does not have time to announce official election results.
- August 7 – Zelenskyy speaks with Putin; land market creation statement in 2020;
- August 10 - Poroshenko to Rotterdam; Poroshenko requires a lie detector; Zelenskyy simplifies procedure for granting Ukrainian citizenship to Russians.
- August 14 - Rabinovich refuses to speak the Ukrainian language in the Rada; statement on reducing the number of committees in the Verkhovna Rada to 23
- August 17 - First rehearsal of Independence Day celebrations; scandal over coercion of state employees and participation of Badoev.



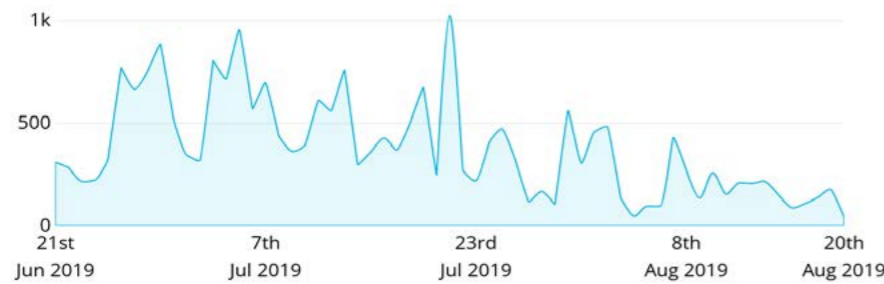
Ukraine\_Parliamentary elections\_Women

Date range: Jun 21st, 2019 to Aug 20th, 2019

Volume

The total volume of the conversation is 23,260

The volume of this conversation is variable



Ukraine\_Parliamentary elections\_Men

Date range: Jun 21st, 2019 to Aug 20th, 2019

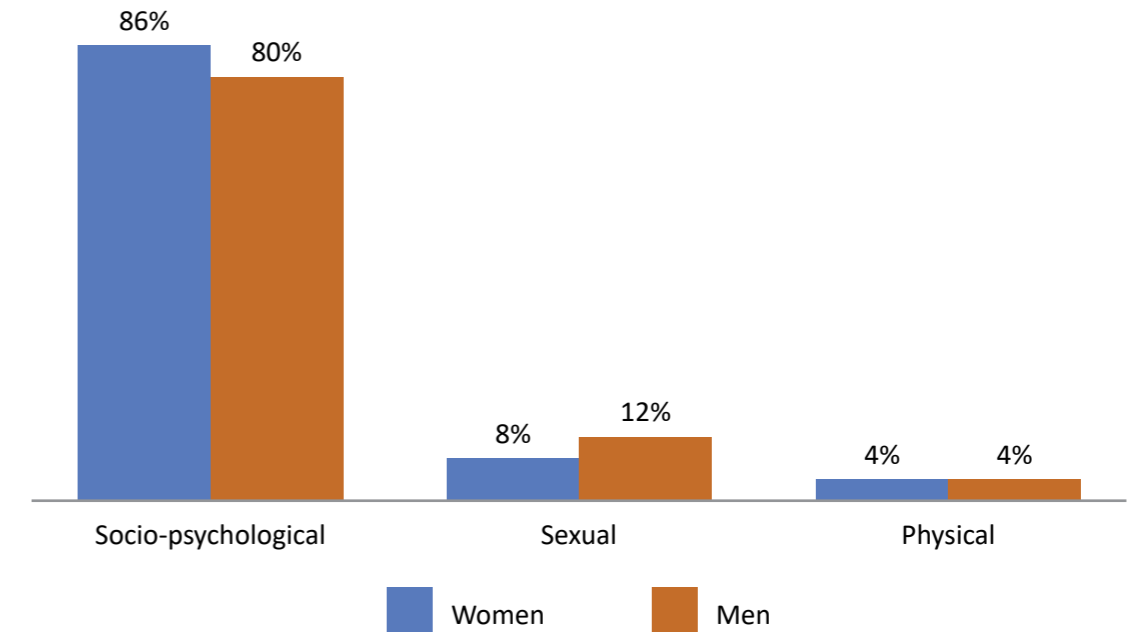


### Online Violence Takes on Distinct Forms

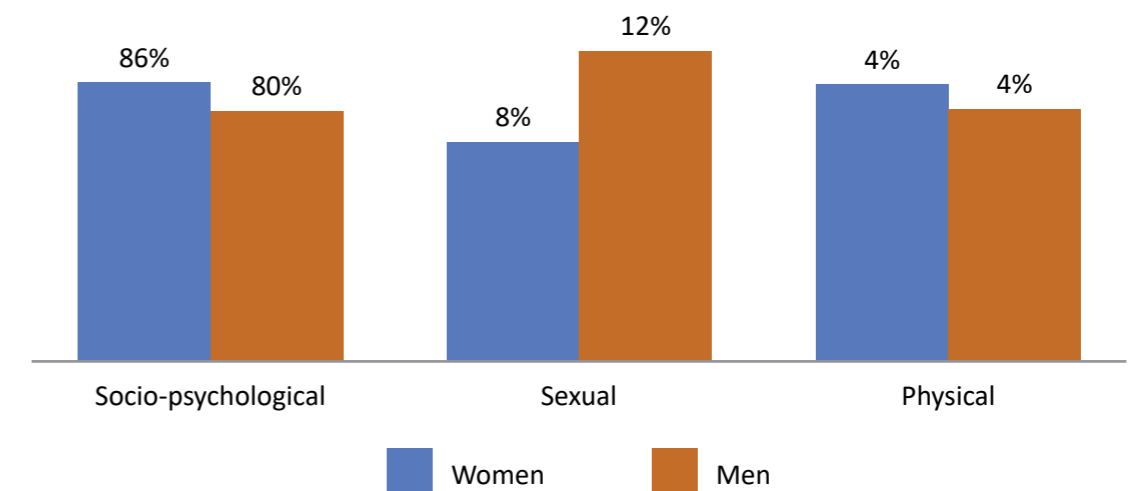
This study analyzed three different types of violence: socio-psychological, physical and sexual. From 2014 to 2018 socio-psychologically violent discourse constituted the overwhelming majority (about 80 percent) of all violent posts identified. The same was true for the 2019 parliamentary electoral period. From 2014 to 2018 sexual violence was the second most prevalent, followed by physical violence. In contrast, in 2019 physical violence was much more prevalent than sexual violence. Nevertheless, physical violence continued to more negatively impact women than men in 2019. In contrast to the proportionally adjusted 2014-2018 results, the 2019 parliamentary electoral period revealed is that male MP candidates received higher volumes of online abuse (15,062 posts) than female MP candidates (2,057). There are a few potential explanations for this. Firstly, the difference in types of targets and the shortened timeframe likely had an effect. The 2014-2018 analysis was more expansive in that it took place over the course of 4 years and included a wider variety of political actors (Executive/ cabinet officials, CEC officials, journalists and celebrities in addition to members of parliament.) In contrast, the 2019 analysis took place over a period of just three months and focused solely on parliamentary candidates. Secondly, political parties in Ukraine are primarily led by men.

Of the six parties included in the 2019 analysis, five are led by men. The only political party led by a woman is Motherland (Batkivshchyna). The fact that men occupy higher longstanding political positions in party systems increases their name recognition and the volumes at which online users discuss them. In contrast, many women who make it onto political party lists or run as candidates in majoritarian constituencies tend to be newer to politics and thus less recognizable to voters.

**Types of Online Violence Toward Women and Men in Ukraine 2014-18 (Unadjusted Raw Percentages)**

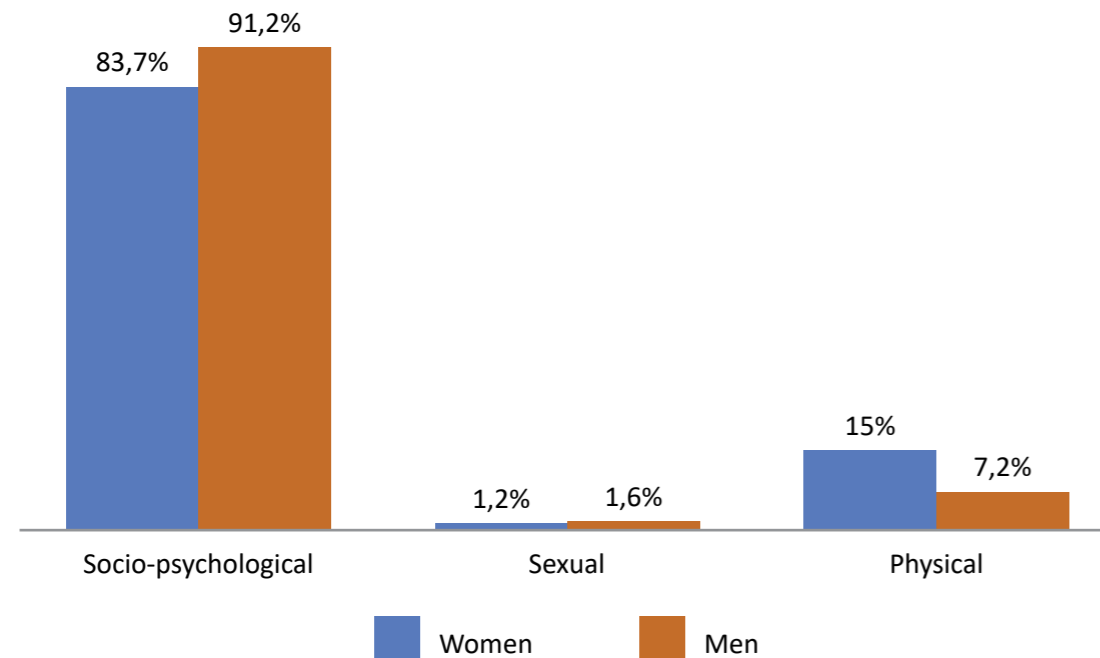


**Types of Online Violence Toward Women and Men in Ukraine 2014-18 (Percentages Proportionally Adjusted for Gender Parity)<sup>8</sup>**



<sup>8</sup> Women were underrepresented in the study because they made up only 44.3 percent of the sample. Comparative percentages presented here have been adjusted by the use of proportional multipliers for women and men (1.13 and 0.90 respectively).

Types of Online Violence Toward Women and Men in Ukraine 2019



**Socio-Psychological Violence**

Socio-psychological online attacks in Ukraine typically include accusations of moral deficiency and lack of intelligence. In many cases, perpetrators attacking politicians endeavored to degrade victims by questioning the targets’ abilities as civil servants. The 2014-2018 analysis showed that women were more susceptible to socio-psychological harassment. The graph below shows that the top four spikes in online socio-psychological violence targeted female MPs. The fifth highest spike was in attacks on male MPs but the sixth to 10th highest spikes were in attacks on female MPs. In contrast, during the 2019 parliamentary elections men received more socio-psychologically abusive content. However, the ways in which women and men experienced socio-psychological violence online were unique throughout both time periods.

Women tend to be very harshly critiqued for their appearance, age or clothes. Ukrainian women primarily face attacks on their physical appearance, intelligence and professional competence. Word clouds depicted below show that online violence seems to heavily target high profile women such as Yulia Tymoshenko, Nadiya Savchenko, Ulana Suprun, Oleh Lyashko, Ihor Kolomoisky and Arsen Avakov. Deputy Interior Minister Anastasiia Dieieva has been attacked for her age. Deputy Justice Minister Natalia Sevostyanova has been attacked for her hair color and age; internet users relentlessly called her “blonde-in-law” and “nanny” to signify that she belongs in domestic rather than public spheres of life and is not intelligent enough for politics. Acting Deputy Mayor of Dnipro Yana Meril was targeted online for wearing a swimsuit in public and photos of her were widely shared on social media with negative commentary. Ukrainian Ambassador to Great Britain Natalia Halibarenko was accused by critics of wearing an “inappropriate” hat. The ex-head of the National Bank of Ukraine Valeriya Hontareva was attacked for wearing white “UGG” boots. In addition to critiques on clothing choice, female Ukrainian politicians also get targeted by ageist remarks. Overall it appears that often that oftentimes, instead of engaging meaningfully with women’s policy contributions and platforms, many internet users opt to demean and delegitimize women by commenting only on their external looks.



Який же ж, скляний погляд та огидна, хиж посмішка! Гидко дивитись! А щоб голосувати за ОЦЕ, то треба, думаю бути таким самим збочинцем та шахраєм.

**Translation:**

What at glass look and disgusting, hut smile! It is disgusting to look at! And to vote for IT, one should, I think, be the same criminal and swindler.



Фу. Чого вона така обвисла? Вот страшно завжди, а тут прям капець. Ще й макіяж під очима поплив

**Translation:**

Fy. Why is she so drooping? It is ugly always, and there is drip. In addition, make up under eyes swimmied.



На зм1ю схожа

**Translation:**

She looks like snake



Від її погляду молоко кисне

**Translation:**

From her looks milk becomes sour



15 ч. Нравится Ответить

она уже такая

10 ч. Нравится Ответить

Тимошенко ахуенная баба чтоб бухать с ней ночью на кухне и говорить о жизни  
Но бля как политик она заебала уже))  
11:30 PM - Jul 4, 2019 - Ukraine

**Translation:**

Tymoshenko is a banged grandma to bang with her in the kitchen and talk about life . But as a politician screwed up already

For male Ukrainian politicians, online aggression greatly intensifies when they are portrayed using images of women. Perpetrators use this tactic to try to humiliate and ridicule the target as much as possible. These feminized images are used to signify that certain male targets are “weak” and “unintelligent,” which reinforces societal beliefs that politics is reserved for “strong” hyper masculine men.



Тимошенко со своим хи-хи-Путиным увлекаются ботоксом. А может и чем похлеще, типа подтяжек лица с помощью хирургических вмешательств... Но шея всё говорит сама за себя. Баба Юля разлагается. Пора на пенсию) [twitter.com/tabloukrpravda...](https://twitter.com/tabloukrpravda...)

tabloid.pravda @tabloukrpravda  
Спортивна Юлія Тимошенко показала ранкову себе без фільтрів [tabloid.pravda.com.ua/lounge/5d17574...](https://tabloid.pravda.com.ua/lounge/5d17574...)

**Translation:**

Tymoshenko with her hee-hee. And Putin. Interested in Botox and maybe face lifting. But the neck speaks for itself. July is decaying. It's time to retire

Jun 21st, 2019 11:53 AM

posted

Comment on video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLiaZDT1mC8>

Не тільки стара баба Тимошенко а Кужільтреба спокійно і гордо.піти з політики.Лізе випендрюється підтягається уже майже як дід путин весь наколотій ботоксоом ще Вітренко виповзає германша Анна богословська.Опомніться дайте дорогу молодим і розумним

**Translation:**

Not only Tymoshenko, but Kuzhel it is time to proudly and quietly retire. Lize is showing off, doing suspenders already almost as Putin all in Botox. In addition, Vitrenko appears, Germansha Anna, Bogoslovska. Come round, give way to the young and smart.



In addition to the sexist practice of photo-shopping men's faces on to women's bodies to make them look weak, the analysis of the 2019 parliamentary elections also revealed that ableist attacks are also apart of online violence. Some male candidates were harshly mocked for how they speak.



МЕНЯ  
тоже поражает тот факт, когда  
взрослый человек, ещё и  
состоявшийся, не может  
поработать над своей речью.

**Translation:**

I am also impressed by the fact that when adult person, moreover one that made carrier, can't work on his speech

і як там ми же навчилися літеру Р  
вимовляти ...сракаупсік пороха ?

**Translation:**

And how there we learned to pronounce R letter...assholesnavel of poroh?

Есть контакт знакомого логопеда,  
могу дать

**Translation:**

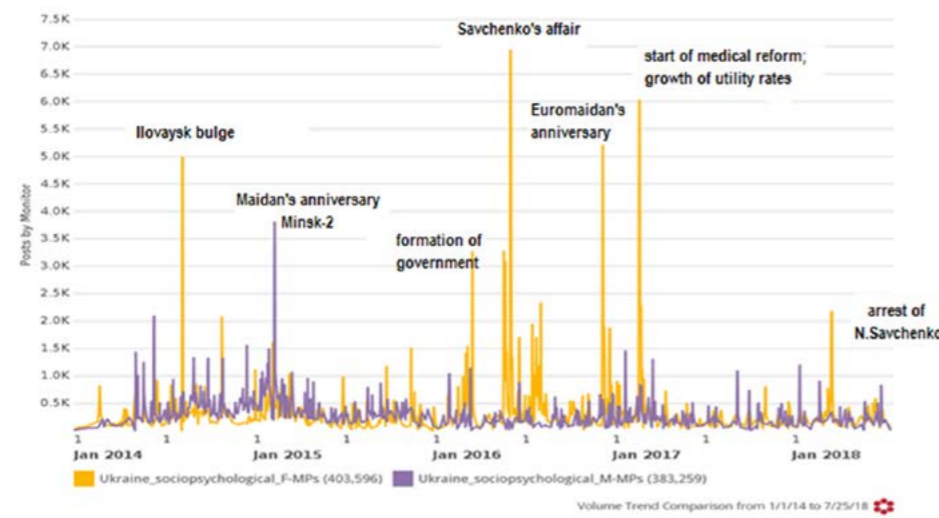
I have contacts of familiar speech therapist, I can give

**Prevalent Words in Online Socio-Psychological Violence Overall**



Ukraine\_Sociopsychological Violence... — Words from 1/1/14 to 8/2/18

**Socio-Psychological Violence Against Female MPs Versus Male MPs 2014-18**



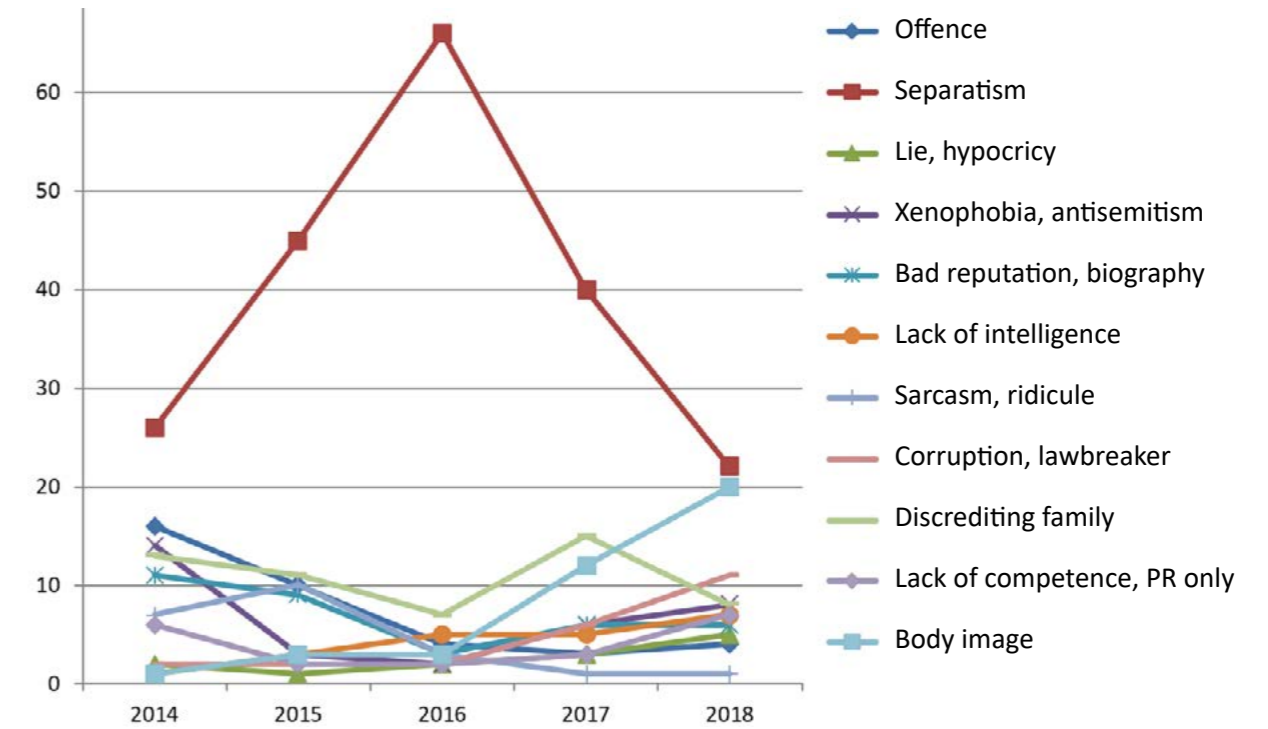
Volume Trend Comparison from 1/1/14 to 7/25/18

There was a diverse range of content within socio-psychological posts, which included the following themes: offense, separatism, lies or hypocrisy, xenophobia or anti-Semitism, bad reputation or biography, lack of intelligence, sarcasm or ridicule, corruption or lawbreaking, discrediting of family and body image. It is important to note that in 2014 accusations of separatism, betrayal and support for Russia dominated posts targeting both women and men. The remaining types of accusations made up about only 10 percent of posts. Data from 2018 presents a completely different picture: almost all kinds of socio-psychological violence are more common than accusations of separatism. This is attributed to the fact that Ukrainians have become more accustomed to military action with each passing year. As a result, internet users may place less emphasis on this issue.

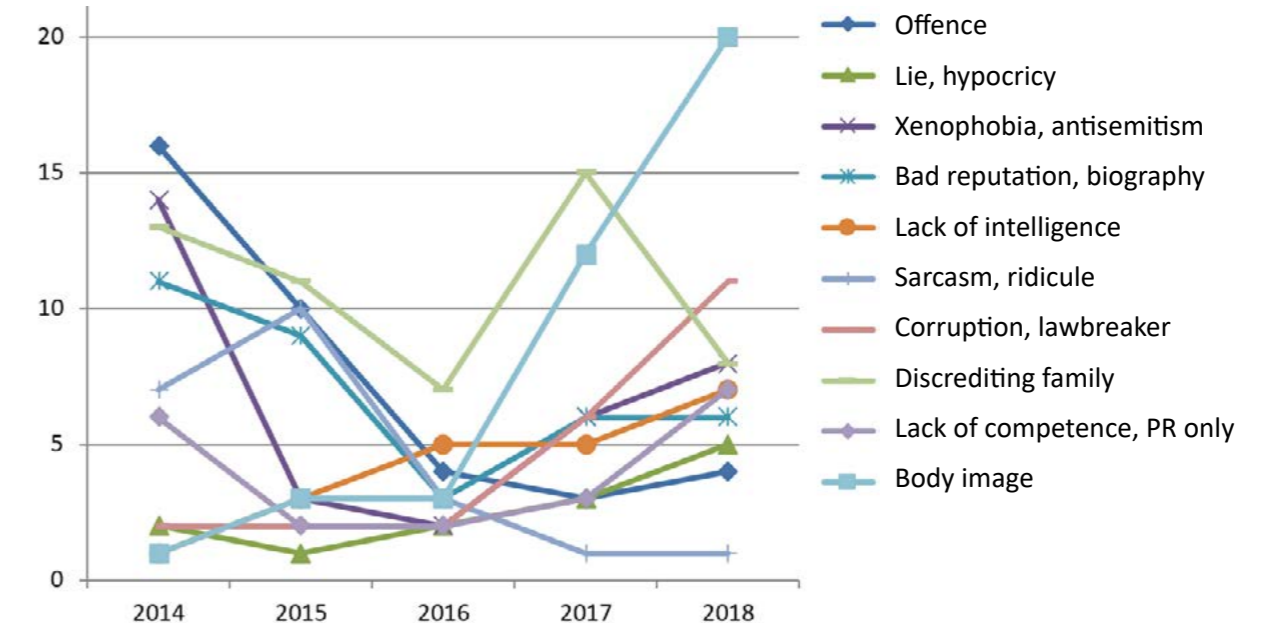
To examine the dynamics of socio-psychological violence in more detail, IFES also analyzed the trends that emerge in these subcategories when separatism and ties with the Kremlin are excluded from the data. This analysis revealed that from 2016-18 there was a major surge in negative online content on

body image, an issue that disproportionately affects women. There have also been modest increases in online content on both lack of intelligence and corruption. This is an interesting finding because it highlights how contradictory patriarchal beliefs can be. On the one hand, people are inclined to accuse politically active women as conniving and corrupt, which requires some level of strategic thinking, even though it is a negative quality. On the other hand, there is still a tendency to perceive women in politics as unintelligent. There was a steep decline in xenophobic and anti-Semitic content from 2014-15 but posts on this subject matter have been slowly climbing since then. Accusations of incompetence have trended in a U-shaped curve but remained relatively low overall compared to other issue areas.

**Subcategories of Socio-Psychological Violence Against Women 2014-2018**



**Subcategories Socio-Psychological Violence Against Women 2014-2018 (Separatism and Ties with Kremlin Excluded)**



**Physical Violence**

Online abuse that contains mention of physical harm can pose an extremely dangerous threat to victims because of the heightened chances of it translating into offline violence and vice versa. Such attacks are particularly detrimental when targeting women because they are so marginalized and silenced in public spaces. Such an instance occurred during the parliamentary when Natalia Korolevskaya faced both online and offline attacks after results announcements in district 52. During the incident, one man pelted Korolevskaya with cooking flour while another physically restrained her. Afterwards multiple, social media users applauded these men’s actions and demanded that she be further assaulted with not only flour but acid and feces.



МОЛОДЦІ!! правильно зробили треба було кислотою!

**Translation:**

well done. Correctly done. It had to be acid

Молодці правильно зробили треба було ще відро лайна на неї вилити. Повилазили гадюки

**Translation:**

.... let us not only crumble the flour

Будем вас падлюк не тільки борошном обсипати, перевертні.

**Translation:**

.... let us not only crumble the flour

нипонял. королевской не разрезали живот? не выкинули в реку?

**Translation:**

I didn't understand. Korolevskoj was not cut in the stomach, not thrown into the river?

According to IFES’ findings from the 2014-2018 analysis, Ukrainian women (52.3 percent) received slightly more content containing physical violence than their male counterparts (47.7 percent). This finding held true for the 2019 analysis wherein women received almost twice as much online abuse mentioning physical harm than their male counterparts. Additionally, the data in the 2014-2018 analysis also showed that Ukrainian women received more explicitly negative online content than their male counterparts. The net sentiment balance for men was only -5 percent (14 percent positive and 19 percent negative), whereas the net sentiment balance for women was -14 percent (12 percent positive and -26 percent). This is important to highlight because it means that even though women receive only slightly more physically violent content than men in quantitative terms, in qualitative terms these attacks are more negative in nature and thus significantly more detrimental to women’s online engagement and political participation.

**Net Sentiment Comparison of Physical Violence Against Women and Men**

Jun 11th, 2019 1:27 AM

posted

Comment on video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxFN83CtYwM>

Тимошенко ведьма. Ее давно нужно посадить на кол, обложить вокруг дровами и сжечь!!!!!!

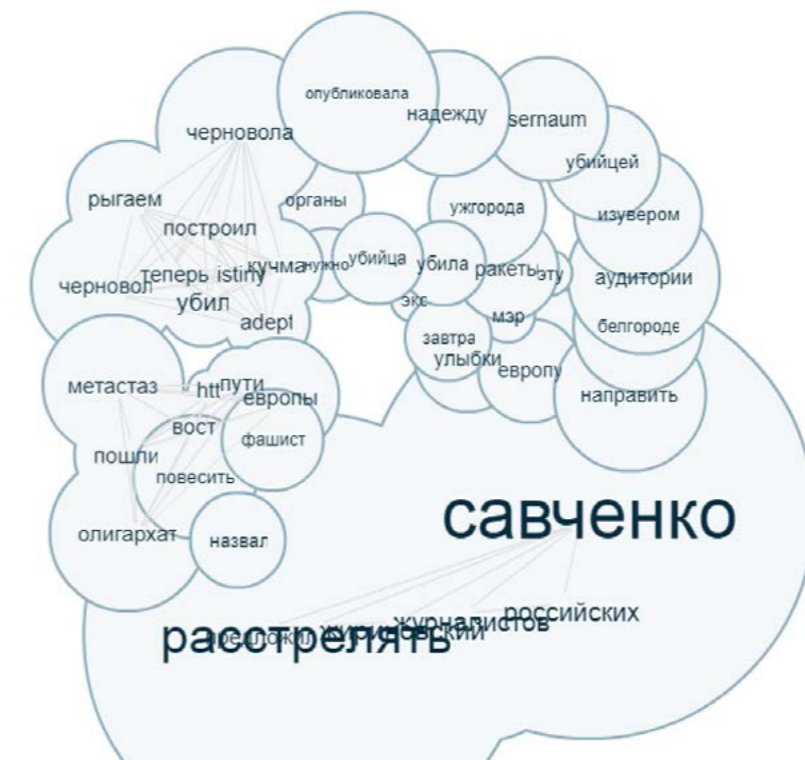
**Translation:**

Tymoshenko is witch. She should be long time ago put on a pike, lay firewood all around and burned!!!!!!



Net Sentiment Comparison from 1/1/14 to 8/4/18

**Prevalent Words in Physical Violence Against Women**



Physical violence\_F\_Ukraine — Clusters from 1/1/14 to 8/4/18





was generated by private or state-affiliated accounts. Given identified patterns of Russian state sponsored influence in other areas of social media in Ukraine,<sup>11</sup> this data suggests that this effect may have been at work here. Russian use of gender-based hate speech, disinformation and violence contribute to political divisions and social intolerance. However, despite the significant impact of Russian-based content, it is important to note that from 2017-18 over half of online attacks analyzed originated in Ukraine. Online violence is very much a domestic issue and the misogynistic drivers are embedded in local culture.

**Global Geographic Distribution of Sources of Socio-Psychological Online Violence**



Ukraine\_Sociopsychological Violence... — Map from 1/1/14 to 8/2/18

**Domestic Geographic Distribution of Sources of Socio-Psychological Online Violence**



Ukraine\_Sociopsychological Violence... — Map from 1/1/14 to 12/31/17

<sup>11</sup> Helmus, T et al. RAND Corporation. “Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe” [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2200/RR2237/RAND\\_RR2237.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2200/RR2237/RAND_RR2237.pdf)

**Conclusion**

Ukrainian women and men in public life are regularly targeted by intense and aggressive abuse in online spaces. Social media content directed against women is largely socio-psychological and physical and registers higher levels of negative sentiment, including direct threats of bodily harm or injury and murder. In terms of socio-psychological violence, women in public life are regularly accused of exhibiting immoral or unfeminine behavior or of having limited intellectual ability. The social media posts targeting women aim to degrade and humiliate them and to delegitimize their ability to serve as political or civil servants.

Homophobic insults directed against Ukrainian men in public life are widespread. It is a common tactic to claim that high-profile men are engaged in homosexuality or feminized behaviors to discredit male politicians and reinforce the standards of heteronormativity and hyper masculinity that dominate Ukrainian politics. This contributes to a toxic and exclusionary environment of intolerance and exacerbates social cleavages along sexual orientation and gender identity lines.

The analysis also revealed that foreign actors, namely Russian internet users, are considerably engaged in online VAWE. Future research will reveal whether these Russian internet users are primarily made up of individuals acting alone or state actors with a concerted strategy. This will be useful for determining the extent to which Russian engagement in online VAWE serves a means of foreign meddling that weaponizes gender norms to promote authoritarian influence. Overall the findings of this report emphasize the ways in which undermining gender equality, engaging in sexism, spreading homophobia and promoting violence can build social intolerance and weaken support for both democracy and human rights.

## Recommendations

### Central Election Commission of Ukraine:

- Monitor and report data on presence of online harassment and violence, including gender disaggregated data.
- Hold meetings with civil society and women’s organizations to gather information and consult with those being impacted by gender-based violence in elections.
- Provide training and capacity building for CEC staff on VAWE.

### Policymakers:

- Evaluate how existing legislation addresses or fails to address hate speech, disinformation and defamation online; introduce measures to close gaps to address the specific forms and channels where gendered violations take place.
- Organize discussions with national governmental bodies that regulate disinformation issues, such as the Ministry of Information Policy in Ukraine, on specific measures that need to be applied.

### Political Parties:

- Include online behavior standards in party codes of conduct.
- Train and educate party members and candidates on appropriate online behavior, how to avoid incivility, violent or harassing online behaviors and how to engage positively to inhibit bad behaviors by other social media users.
- Monitor for online behavior, handle complaints seriously and define sanctions.

### Civil Society:

- Monitor and report on incidences of gendered cyber violence to report to authorities, including to the United Nations’ special rapporteur on violence against women.
- Engage tactics to intervene, inhibit and prevent online harassment and violence, including bystander intervention tactics and awareness-raising.

### Social Media Platforms:

- Respond quickly and efficiently to reports of abuse.
- Design and promote safeguards against online abuse including blocking functions, banning egregious offenders and publishing protection and security policies.
- Engage in myth-busting and fact-checking to counter disinformation spread by perpetrators of online abuse.
- Partner with national law enforcement to craft context-appropriate responses.

## Annexes

### Annex 1

Table 1

1.1. Elected officials (national level)	Verkhovna Rada (Parliament)	104	Men	52
			Women	52
2. Political appointees	Executive body (Cabinet of Ministers)	24	Men	20
			Women	4
3. Election management body	Central Election Commission	15	Men	10
			Women	5
4. Professional non-state	Journalists	30	Men	15
			Women	15
5. Private non-state	Entertainment celebrities	10	Men	5
			Women	5
Total		183	Men	102
			Women	81

Table 2

### Candidates from political party lists monitored for online violence

Women	Men
1. Irina Venediktova (also known as Venediktova)	1. Dmitro Razumkov
2. Galina Yanchenko	2. Mikhailo Fedorov
3. Anastasia Krasnosilska	3. Oleksandr Korninko
4. 4. Natalia Korolevskaya	4. Yuriy Boyko
5. Irina Gerashchenko	5. Petro Poroshenko
6. Sofia Fedina	6. Andriy Parubiy
7. Yana Zinkevich	7. Mustafa Dzhemilev
8. Ivanna Klimpush-Tsintsadze	8. Oleg Sinyutka
9. Yuliya Timoshenko	9. Sergiy Taruta
10. Olena Kondratyuk	10. Sergiy Sobolov
11. Yuliya Klimenko	11. Svyatoslav Vakarchuk
12. Kira Rudik	12. Yaroslav Zheleznyak
13. Olexandra Ustinova	13. Oleg Makarov
14. Solomiya Bobrovska	14. Yaroslav Yurchishin
15. Olga Stefanishina	15. Sergiy Rakhmanin
16. Olena Sotnik	16. Igor Smeshko
17. Olga Romanyuk	17. Ivan Miroshnichenko
18. Irina Sisoenko	18. Andriy Gaidutsky

Table 3

## Candidates running in majoritarian constituencies monitored for online violence

Women			Men		
Name, family name	Number of followers <sup>12</sup>	Majoritarian Constituency District	Name, family name	Number of followers	Majoritarian Constituency District
Olena Bondarenko	86,966	№131 (Mikolaev)	Borislav Bereza	172,185	№213 Kyiv
Nadiya Savchenko	45,686	№51 (Donetsk Region)	Sergiy Leshchenko	159,982	№220 Kyiv
Oksana Prodan	21,958	№201 (Chernivtsi)	Oleksandr Dubinsky	128,410	№94 (Kyiv Region, Vasilkiv City)
Viktoriya Ptashnik	9,076	№223 (Kyiv)	Sergiy Kaplin	36,355	№144 (Poltava region)
Valeriya Muraeva	7,660	№181 (Kharkiv Region)	Victor Baloga	32,749	№69 (Transcarpathian Region)
Viktoriya Voytsitska	6,301	№191 (Khmelnitsky Region)	Oleksandr Skichko	12,678	№197 (Cherkasy Region)
Svetlana Zalischuk	5,500	№199 (Cherkasy Region)	Volodimir Karplyuk	11,650	№95 (Kyiv Region, City Irpin)

<sup>12</sup> Note. Number of followers as of June 27, 2019