

Gender-based hate in the Slovak pre-election period

Are publicly known women and men being attacked on social platforms to the same extent and in similar ways?



Introduction

With early elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NR SR) set for the end of September, Slovakia faces a stark gender imbalance in its top legislative institution. The data is clear: women currently make up just 21% of the parliaments' membership,¹ and the approaching elections are unlikely to alter this reality significantly. One key factor contributing to this gender gap is the limited number of female candidates fielded by most political parties. On average, women constitute only a quarter of all candidates on the electoral lists of political entities seeking seats in the parliament.²

This underrepresentation of women in Slovak politics has not gone unnoticed, as civil society has responded during this pre-election period. One noteworthy initiative aimed at addressing this issue is the "Circle the Woman" campaign. It seeks to promote a more balanced representation of women and men in Slovak politics by supporting female candidates in the 2023 parliamentary elections through the strategic use of preferential votes.³

Despite their limited presence in the political arena, women, not just female politicians, face more frequent attacks and criticism than men. This insight emerges from the present pre-election analysis of the Slovak information space conducted between June 1 - and September 1, spanning across various social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, and TikTok. The analysis, carried out using tool by Gerulata Technologies, focused on two distinct groups: men and women who, by the nature of their work, occupy more prominent political and societal roles during the pre-election period. These include the highest constitutional authorities, politicians, and journalists who report on political parties and their representatives. The study's primary emphasis

was on quantifying and categorizing the attacks directed at specific individuals within the target group. In total, 76 selected women and 46 selected men were subjects of this analysis.

We have examined gender-based hate directed at politically and socially prominent individuals, both men and women, through an analysis of 300 posts. The posts, comprising 150 focused on women and 150 on men, were selected based on the highest number of interactions (encompassing reactions, comments, and shares) and were generated by the Gerulata monitoring tool utilizing a query containing the names of the group of women and men being monitored.

For the purposes of our report, we scrutinized the textual content of these posts, as well as any video or visual material they contained. Additionally, we analyzed the individuals responsible for hate speech, attacks, or criticism that transcended the boundaries of respectful political discourse. Through this monitoring effort, we sought to identify the most prevalent gender-based narratives and determine the intended recipients of these narratives, shedding light on the dynamics surrounding such discourse.

For more details on monitoring and specific names, see the methodology on page 10.

The report is part of the project Pre-election Monitoring of Slovak Information Space. All previous monitoring reports can be found at: <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/projects/parlamentne-volby-2023-monitoring-informacneho-priestoru>.

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1 <https://sita.sk/viac-ako-polovica-populacie-na-slovensku-tvorja-zeny-v-parlamente-vsak-maju-zastupenie-len-21-percent/>

2 <https://sita.sk/rodovo-vyvazenu-kandidatku-maju-len-progresivci-najhorsie-je-na-tom-smer-sd/>

3 <https://www.zakruzkujenu.sk/>

Key findings

The monitoring shows that **women are attacked in 88% of the most popular posts in the monitored sample, compared to 66% for men.** The difference is thus up to 22 percentage points, but it also reveals the high rate of attacks across both monitored groups.

Among the attacks observed, those rooted in moral criteria dominated. These attacks encompass narratives that touch upon serving interests of third parties, media manipulation, the sacrifice of the entire nation for the benefit of some, and anti-LGBTI narratives. Interestingly, this type of criticism was prevalent among both women and men, with differences emerging in other types of attacks.

For women, attacks on their intellectual abilities were more common, while men faced criticism more often regarding their experience and skills. To a lesser extent, both groups encountered attacks and mockery related to their appearance, gender stereotypes, age, and through the use of sexism and misogyny.

Among the **most targeted female figures** during the monitored period were journalist **Monika Tódová** and President **Zuzana Čaputová**, while in the male group, current Prime Minister **Ľudovít Ódor** and former Prime Minister **Eduard Heger** took the lead. However, these male figures experienced a significantly lower number of attacks compared to the two most prominent female figures. This not only indicates a greater diversification of targeted individuals among men but also highlights a higher concentration and coordination of attacks directed at specific individuals in the female group.

The attacks primarily focus on moral criteria, intellect, and competencies

During the observed period, we noted that within the monitored sample of the most viral posts, a significant 88% of posts contained attacks and criticisms beyond the bounds of proper political competition when it came to women. In contrast, in the group of monitored men, this figure was notably

lower at 66%. However, the data also underscores the fact that a majority of the most popular social media posts mentioning prominent politicians and journalists include attacks and hate directed at both men and women.

Types of attacks

Monitoring divided the attacks into several categories:

Type of attack/mockery	Example
Misogyny and sexism	Hysterical woman; missy; sobbing woman
Attacks based on moral criteria	Soros puppet; anti-LGBTI narratives; liberal mafia led by...; has taken over media, NGOs, courts; Soros-nominated spiritually homeless person; sacrificed an entire nation for U.S. goodwill; pro-American henchman; seeks inspiration in how Nazis burned leftist books; narrow-minded chaos-makers
Attack/ mockery based on intellectual capabilities	this “expert”; mentally deficient; known to be the brains and economist of the government; her delusions; clueless Dora at the chalkboard; smarty; the delusional candidate
Attack/ mockery based on skills, experience, and competencies	Elite ladies; “expertly skilled”; one of the biggest political non-talents; a symbol of primitiveness in our politics; inactive amateurs; bunglers
Attack/ mockery based on appearance	This beauty; symbol of tackiness
Attack/ mockery based on gender stereotypes	Parliament is no place to raise a child
Narratives of ageism, stereotyping and discriminating based on age	This youngster; a deliberate reference to them being a young politician

During the observed period, attacks that targeted moral criteria were most prominent within the sample of women, constituting 67% of the monitored posts. Subsequently, attacks on their intellectual abilities accounted for 12%, followed by criticism of their skills, experience, and competence at 10%. Men also predominantly faced attacks centered on moral criteria, representing 50% of the posts, which was, conversely to women, followed by critiques of their skills, experience, and competence at 20%. Therefore, women not

only experienced a higher prevalence of attacks based on moral criteria than men but were also predominantly targeted for their intellectual abilities, a phenomenon occurring in only a small fraction of posts related to men (4%). Conversely, men encountered a more significant number of attacks focused on their skills, experience, and competence. Additionally, attacks rooted in misogyny and sexism were also found in the group of women, accounting for 6% of the posts.

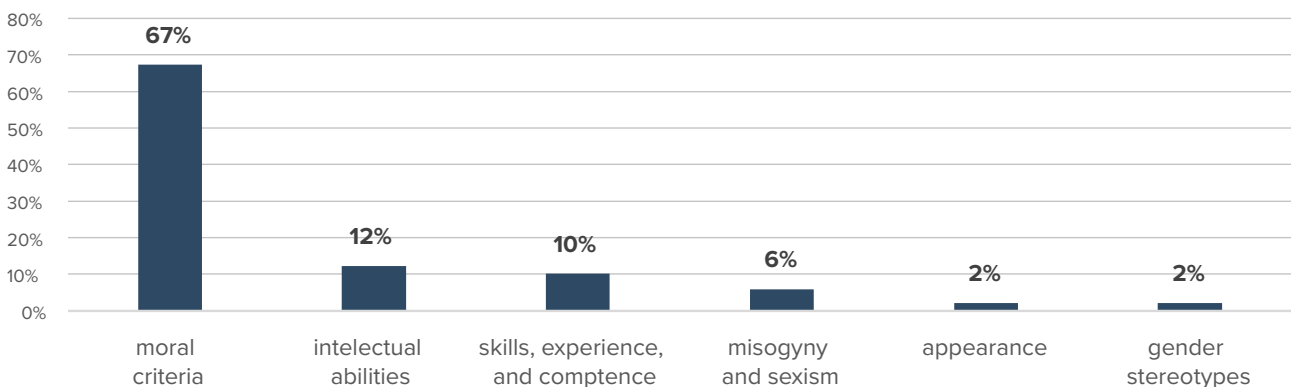
The most common narratives in attacks based on moral criteria against women often included claims that they were acting on someone's orders or for compensation, with some expressions veering into the realm of conspiracy theories. This type of attack was prevalent in many posts related to the "Tatragate" affair,⁴ as it was dubbed by some political figures. For instance, there were allegations that Monika Tódová was writing on someone's orders and, in return, had purchased a flat in downtown Bratislava. Similar accusations were frequently made against President Čaputová, such as claims that "President Čaputová obediently follows the orders of the Progressive Slovakia party" or "Millionaires from ESET financed Čaputová. ESET owns Denník N, and thus also Tódová."

Furthermore, in attacks based on moral criteria, a narrative was often present about a liberal mafia supposedly controlling Slovakia, including the police force ("at the head of the liberal octopus stands Čaputová with her poodle Ódor"). The third narrative that emerged in attacks based on moral criteria was related to the media, which were seen as covering the most frequently targeted women, President Zuzana Čaputová and Monika Tódová.

Similarly, in attacks based on moral criteria against men, narratives frequently revolved around the idea that the recipients of these attacks were acting on someone else's orders or directives. Examples include statements like "Ódor and Heger are carrying out tasks as instructed", "henchman Ódor is eliminating the opposition", "Mr. Ódor behaved exactly according to Soros and Čaputová's instructions" and "Heger blindly served Matovič". Furthermore, these posts often contained narratives suggesting that their actions were not in the best interest of Slovaks or that they had sold out the country ("Heger's government, led by Čaputová, has emptied our warehouses and is ready to acquiesce to any demand coming from Brussels or Washington"). Attacks on former prime ministers for their decisions during the pandemic, such as accusing them of "terrorizing the nation during the pandemic" were also prevalent.

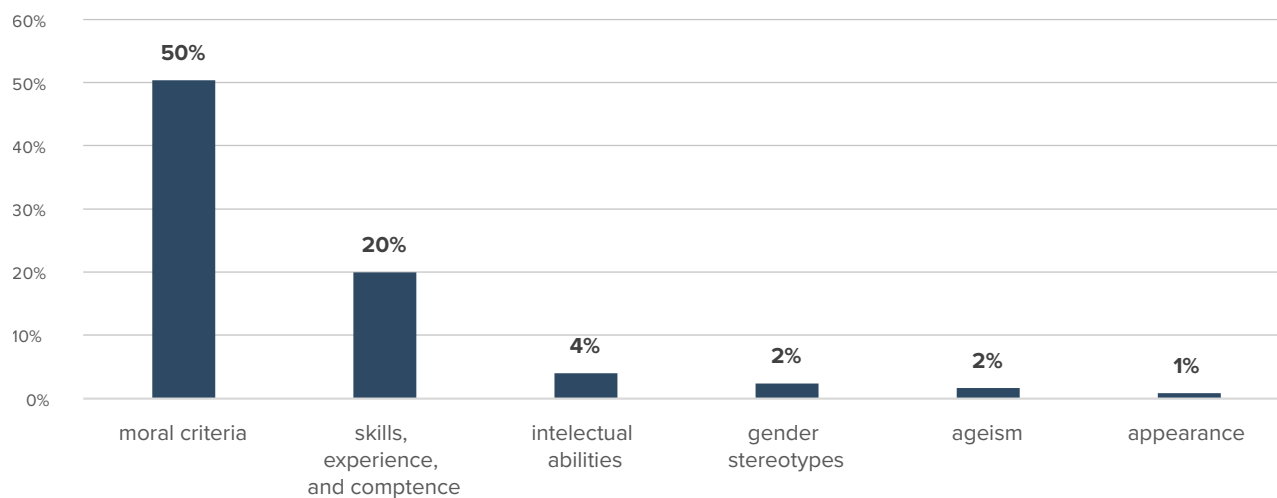
In a significant portion of posts mentioning the most targeted men, namely Ľudovít Ódor and Eduard Heger, there is a clear connection to President Zuzana Čaputová. Therefore, even in posts where the current or former prime minister are criticized, the posts often conclude with an attack on President Čaputová, such as references to "Čaputová's government" or "Čaputová's orders."

% of posts in the monitored sample that included attacks on women based on:



⁴ "Tatragate", as referred to by problematic sources and some political actors, concerns a paparazzi-like video posted by controversial journalist Martin Daňo, in which he recorded prominent investigative journalist Monika Tódová from Denník N ale Specialized Court Judge Pamela Záleska on a private vacation in Slovak High Tatras. By these actors, both women were accused of conflict of interests due to them investigating and prosecuting high-level political corruption cases involving many political actors. Both denied these allegations, also adding Tódová stepped down from investigative journalism before the issue became public. Privacy of journalist has been a sensitive issue after the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancé in 2018.

% of posts in the monitored sample that included attacks on men based on:



This connection arises from the fact that the most prominent posts with a high level of engagement belong to parties and politicians from the former opposition, particularly parties like Direction – Slovak Social Democracy (SMER-SSD), Republic (Republika), Slovak National Party (SNS), and their candidates or figures like Eduard Chmelár, who works as an advisor to Juraj Blanár of SMER-SSD. President Čaputová, representing values of liberalism and liberal democracy in the political landscape, becomes a target for political actors aiming to criticize and distinguish themselves from the aforementioned figures. These coordinated attacks on President Čaputová were already observed in the narrative monitoring during the period from May 1st to June 19th, 2023, and continue to be a prominent theme in online discourse.⁵

Actors under attack

Among the female figures, attacks in more than half of the monitored posts were directed at journalist Monika Tódová, primarily in relation to information about her close relationship with Judge Pamela Záleská. These attacks predominantly revolved around narratives based on moral criteria, specifically alleging the disclosure of information

from Judge Záleská’s files, manipulation of cases through public opinion, or connecting her to the special prosecutor Lipšic (“Tódová is talked about as Lipšic’s little monkey, Monchichi”, “organized group”).

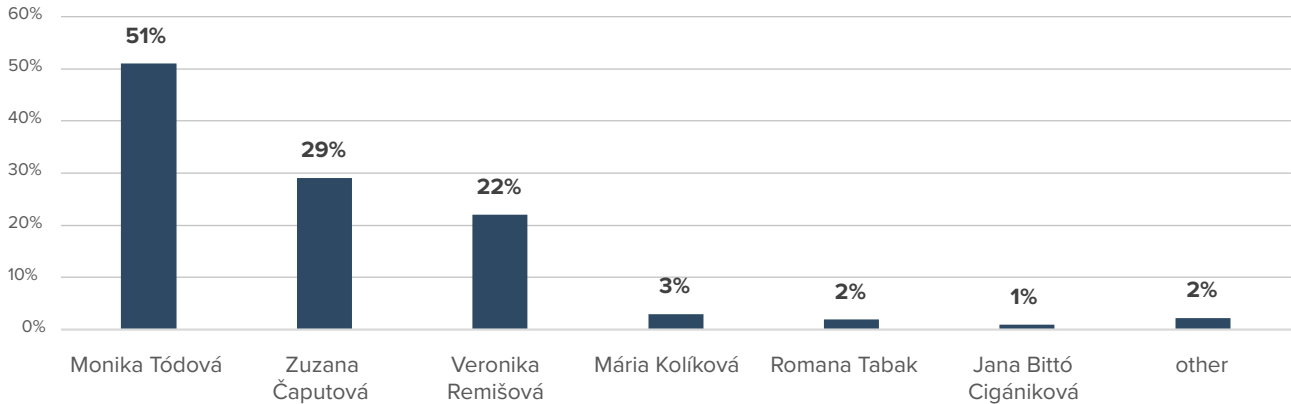
A significant number of posts automatically escalated their relationship into the realm of partnership, leading to anti-LGBTI narratives (“two hateful mistresses and their dirty entertainment”, “Tódová and Záleska ended up in the same bed at Tatry pension”, “Tódová is eliminating the opposition directly from her bed”). Given that this topic dominated pre-election discussions in August, it is extensively analyzed in the pre-election monitoring of Facebook for this month.⁶

During the observed period, the second most targeted figure was President Zuzana Čaputová, criticized in 29% of the monitored posts. Once again, attacks were primarily based on moral criteria (“Soros’s puppet”, “obediently executed her masters’ orders”, “liberal mafia led by Čaputová”). However, there were also attacks on president’s intellectual abilities (“she acts like a clueless Dora at the chalkboard”) and her competence (“one of the biggest political non-talents”).

⁵ <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/monitoring-narativov-o-volbach>

⁶ <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/pre-election-monitoring-facebook-slovak-information-space-what-dominated>

In what % of the monitored posts was the female actor attacked/criticised?

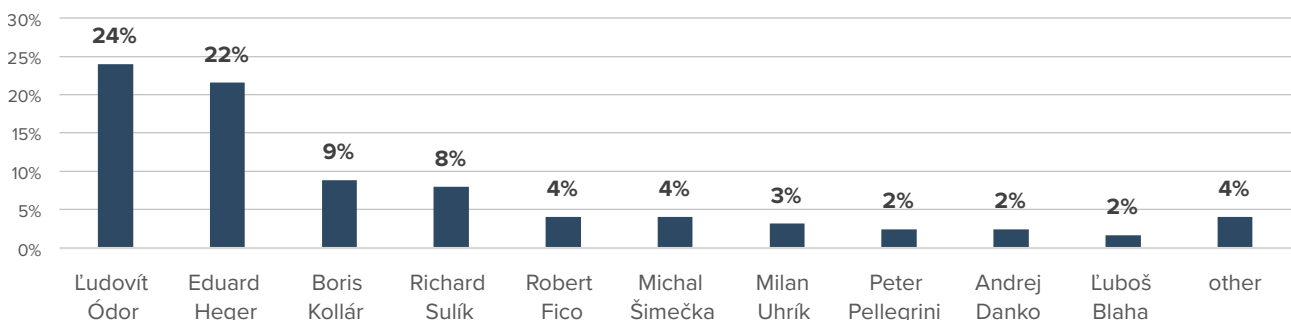


The third most frequently targeted figure was Member of Parliament and former Minister of Investment Veronika Remišová (22% of posts), with a significant portion of attacks focusing on her intellectual abilities. Some posts about the MP, which exceeded the bounds of polite political discourse and ventured into the realm of attacks, concerned controversies related to donated electronics to marginalized groups from the Ministry of Investment project during her tenure as the head of the ministry. Some of this equipment was given to pawnshops by the members of marginalized communities to receive a financial amount rather than electronics.

However, in the majority of posts, Veronika Remišová was mentioned only in passing, usually accompanied by derogatory comments (“[shouted like a hysteric at the market](#)”, “[mentally deficient](#)”, “[Remišová’s delusions](#)”, “[Kazisvět Remišová](#)”).

Among the group of men, the targeted figures were more diversified than among women. However, the most prominently criticized individuals were the current Prime Minister Ľudovít Ódor and former Prime Minister Eduard Heger, mentioned in 24% and 22% of the posts, respectively. This number of attacks is comparable to the share of attacks on Veronika Remišová.

In what % of the monitored posts was the male actor attacked/criticised?



In the case of Prime Minister Ódor, narratives often revolved around his alleged appointment or influence by other individuals (“he behaved exactly according to Soros and Čaputová’s instructions”, “Čaputová and her puppet Ódor”, “Soros-nominated spiritually homeless person”). Similar to the situation with President Čaputová, these narratives sometimes veered into the realm of conspiracy theories.

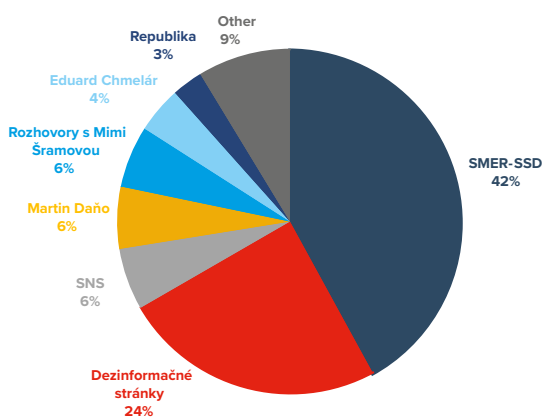
While attacks based on moral criteria prevailed in the case of Ľudovít Ódor, there were significantly more attacks on Eduard Heger’s competence, with references to his time as prime minister (“inactive amateurs”, “blindly served Matovič for three years”). Current Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Boris Kollár, faced criticism in 9% of the posts, but in most cases, these posts were thematically linked to his former coalition partners, with his name mentioned in passing. The case

of physical violence by Kollár against his former partner⁷ was primarily addressed by the media, reporting on the facts without displaying signs of attacks. This fact was mentioned with a slightly critical undertone in only one of the monitored posts, coming from SMER-SSD.

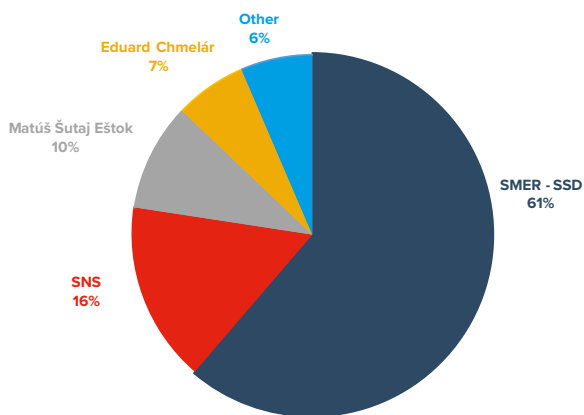
Who did the attacking and critiquing?

Looking at the distribution of actors who attacked the two most criticized individuals in both groups, the representatives of the SMER-SSD party top the chart of the monitored posts. The high number of mentions of the SMER-SSD party can be attributed to the methodology used, which focused on posts with the highest level of interaction. The SMER-SSD party, led by Robert Fico, has long been dominant in terms of interactions and virality on the social

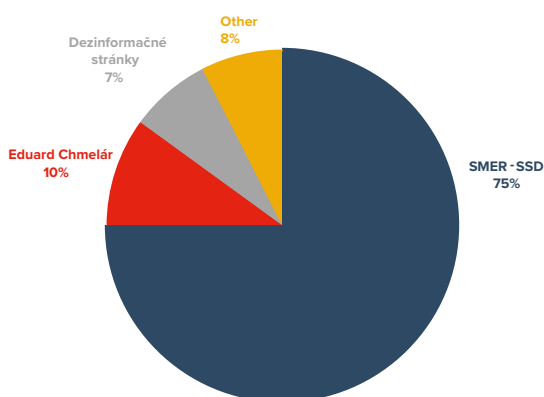
WHO WAS THE AUTHOR OF THE MOST POPULAR POSTS ATTACKING JOURNALIST MONIKA TÓDOVÁ?



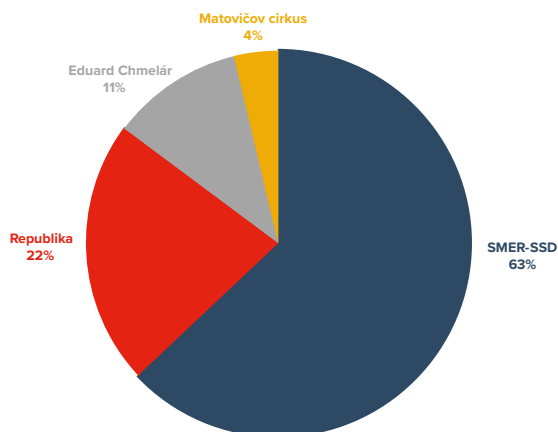
WHO WAS THE AUTHOR OF THE MOST POPULAR POSTS ATTACKING PM ĽUDOVÍT ÓDOR?



WHO WAS THE AUTHOR OF THE MOST POPULAR POSTS ATTACKING PRESIDENT ZUZANA ČAPUTOVÁ?



WHO WAS THE AUTHOR OF THE MOST POPULAR POSTS ATTACKING FORMER PM EDUARD HEGER?



7 <https://www.tasr.sk/tasr-clanok/TASR:2023062300000275>

network Facebook.⁸ In the applied methodology, posts were ranked based on the highest number of interactions, but statements were not considered attacks unless they crossed the boundaries of appropriate political competition.

Out of the 30 posts dedicated to President Čaputová by SMER-SSD and its political actors in the monitored sample, 20 belonged to Ľuboš Blaha's Telegram account. The frequent attacks from this politician confirm the findings of previous election monitoring, which also highlighted the politician's focus on the president in his posts.⁹ In the case of Ľudovít Ódor and Eduard Heger, attacks were also dominated by SMER-SSD politicians, which is consistent with the fact that these actors are often attacked together or in connection with President Čaputová.

A specific case is the distribution of actors attacking journalist Monika Tódová, who are more diversified, with a representation across the problematic pages (24%), SNS party (6%) or Martin Daňo (6%) - the author of the video that brought Monika Tódová's close relationship with Pamela Záleská into the public.

8 <https://www.newschool.sk/politici-na-facebooku>

9 <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/monitoring-narativov-o-volbach>

Methodology

The monitoring results consist of data collected from June 1 to September 1, 2023, reflecting the period in which the political campaign of political parties began and took place before the early elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The data were collected using the monitoring tool by Gerulata Technologies and tracks the information space across social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, and TikTok in the Slovak language. Among the monitored actors, meaning the authors of the posts, all publicly accessible pages on the monitored social networks that publish content in the Slovak language were included.

The aim of this report is to compare the quantity and nature of criticism and attacks in the online information space directed towards individuals, based on the factor of gender. In the monitoring, two groups of individuals were created, one consisting exclusively of publicly known women and the other consisting exclusively of publicly known men. From these groups queries were subsequently created, consisting exclusively of the last names of these individuals. The lists include active female politicians, male politicians, female journalists, male journalists, highest constitutional officials, and members of the current caretaker government who, due to their prominence, are also frequent targets of attacks. Only those individuals who have a significant social presence in the online information space were monitored, as determined by the number of their followers across social media platforms.

The group of monitored women consists of 76 names, including all female members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, female members of the European Parliament representing Slovakia and the highest constitutional officials who held their positions as of September 1, 2023.

The list also includes female politicians who ranked in the top 30 positions on the candidate list of any party running in the upcoming parliamentary elections and had at least a 3%¹⁰ of predicted votes in the public opinion poll conducted by the Focus agency for the months of June, July, and August (SMER-SSD, Progresívne Slovensko, HLAS-SD, Republika, OĽANO a priatel'ia, KDH, SaS, SNS, Sme rodina, Aliancia, Demokrati). Female journalists who cover domestic news or investigative reporting for SME, [Aktuality.sk](https://www.aktuality.sk/), or Denník N were also included among the monitored individuals. The selection of these three media outlets corresponds to the fact that they are influential media with the highest risk of attacks, particularly during the pre-election period, due to their regular exposure of various scandals involving political representatives. From the list of names, individuals who have fewer than 1,000 followers on any of the monitored social networks were subsequently removed, indicating their lower level of public exposure.

Within the group of monitored male actors, the goal was to obtain a comparable sample to the female group. Given the significantly higher representation of men in political roles, including the National Council of the Slovak Republic, the first three male political candidates on the list of each party running in the early parliamentary elections with at least a 3%¹¹ of predicted votes in the public opinion poll were selected (SMER-SSD, Progresívne Slovensko, HLAS-SD, Republika, OĽANO a priatel'ia, KDH, SaS, SNS, Sme rodina, Aliancia, Demokrati). In the case of media, the same approach was used for selecting male journalists as for female journalists, reflecting a higher gender balance in these editorial teams. From the list of names, individuals who have fewer than 1,000 followers on any of the monitored social networks were subsequently removed, resulting in a list of 47 names.¹²

After entering the keywords for each group into the monitoring tool, the resulting posts were sorted

10 <https://domov.sme.sk/c/23207050/prieskum-politickych-stran-august-focus-2023.html>, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/23199219/prieskum-politickych-stran-jul-focus-2023.html>, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/23189016/prieskum-politickych-stran-jun-focus-2023.html>

11 Ibid.

12 Jaroslav Nad' from party Demokrati and former Minister of Defense was exceptionally excluded from the list, due to the fact that the algorithm of the monitoring tool showed results unrelated to the politician and thus would bring a high number of irrelevant posts to the sample.

based on the number of interactions (the sum of reactions, comments, and shares). Although interactions do not necessarily equate to the virality of a post in every case, they represent the most objective parameter for comparing the popularity of posts and narratives across social networks. In both groups, the top 150 most popular posts were subsequently selected and subjected to detailed analysis.

During the process of discourse analysis, the presence or absence of gender-related narratives was determined, along with the person to whom a particular statement was directed and the page or source that authored that discourse. Several narratives could be present in a single post, or none could be identified. Only posts and expressions that exceeded the bounds of political correctness were included among the attacks or criticisms.

The base list of narratives corresponds to the most frequently occurring narratives according to the Genderbarometer¹³ project's study and has been supplemented and adjusted to include narratives specific to the Slovak context:

- *Misogyny and sexism,*
- *Attacks based on moral criteria,*
- *Attack/ mockery based on intellectual capabilities,*
- *Attack/ mockery based on skills, experience, and competencies ,*
- *Attack/ mockery based on appearance,*
- *Critique based on gender stereotypes,*
- *Narratives of ageism, stereotyping and discriminating based on age.*

13 <https://genderbarometer.ge/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/UNDP-Final-report-ENG-28.01.pdf>

Examples of identified narratives:

Type of attack/mockery	Example
Misogyny and sexism	Hysterical woman; missy; sobbing woman
Attacks based on moral criteria	Soros puppet; anti-LGBTI narratives; liberal mafia led by...; has taken over media, NGOs, courts; Soros-nominated spiritually homeless person; sacrificed an entire nation for U.S. goodwill; pro-American henchman; seeks inspiration in how Nazis burned leftist books; narrow-minded chaos-makers
Attack/ mockery based on intellectual capabilities	this “expert”; mentally deficient; known to be the brains and economist of the government; her delusions; clueless Dora at the chalkboard; smarty; the delusional candidate
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Attack/ mockery based on appearance	This beauty; symbol of tackiness
Attack/ mockery based on gender stereotypes	Parliament is no place to raise a child
Narratives of ageism, stereotyping and discriminating based on age	This youngster; a deliberate reference to them being a young politician

Query for the group of females:

Čaputov* OR Marcinkov* OR Nicholsonov* OR Beňov* OR Lexmann* OR Nevedalov* OR Laukov* OR Ganovsk* OR Turčanov* OR Krišťúfkov* OR Kulifajov* OR Hanzelov* OR Angibaud* OR Jašurkov* OR Nagyov* OR Holečkov* OR Kolejákov* OR Gurbáľov* OR Šmehilov* OR Šebov* OR Hajšelov* OR Hudecov* OR Balogov* OR Orvisk* OR Letanovsk* OR Žitňansk* OR Nvotov* OR Svítkov* OR Miern* OR Bauer* OR Kramplov* OR Škopcov* OR Šimkovičov* OR Matečn* OR Cigánikov* OR Kolíkov* OR Halgašov* OR Zemanov* OR Kiššov* OR Jurinov* OR Andrejuvov* OR Leščákov* OR Milanov* OR Šofranko* OR Benov* OR Sakov* OR Dolinkov* OR Laššákov* OR Plavákov* OR Stohlov* OR Jaurov* OR Petrík OR Bihariov* OR Kosov* OR Jurík* OR Hanuliakov* OR Kleinert* OR Drábikov* OR Kozelov* OR Garstkov* OR Pleštinsk* OR Remiášov* OR Remišov* OR Tabák* OR Val'ov* OR Vaňov* OR Vorobelov* OR Záborsk* OR Žitňansk* OR Vašákov* OR Ballov* OR Gehrerov* OR Shemesh* OR Tódov* OR Hopkov* OR Kellöov*

Query for the group of males:

Fico* OR Blanár* OR Blah* OR Šimečk* OR Truban* OR Valášek* OR Pellegrin* OR Raši* OR Tomáš* OR Uhrík* OR Suj* OR Ďuric* OR Dušenk* OR Majersk* OR Čaučík* OR Sulík* OR Gröhling* OR Viskupič* OR Dank* OR Krišand* OR Kollár* OR Krajniak* OR Pčolinsk* OR Pandy* OR Heger* OR Kollár* OR Kostoln* OR Kern* OR Mikušovič* OR Obradovič* OR Šnidl* OR Struhárik* OR Sudor* OR Šimíček* OR Čikovsk* OR Bárďy* OR Oleš* OR Stančík* OR Filo* OR Tkačenk* OR Hlavatovič* OR Blašk* OR Havran* OR Lančarič* OR Horváth* OR Balík* OR Ódor*