

**Recognize  
Resist  
Rise up**



**The Limits of Tolerance – Experiences  
of Female Members of Parliament  
with Gender-Based Political Violence  
WP3: Country Report / Hungary**

Authors:

Keveházi Kata,  
Szél Bernadett PhD,  
Zorigt Burtejin PhD



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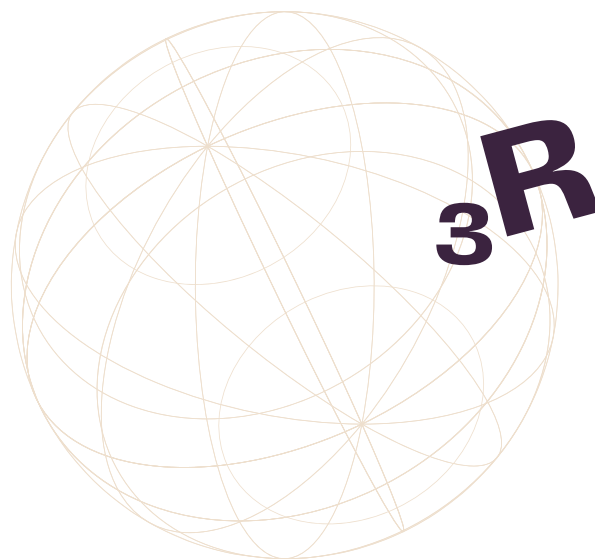
# Executive Summary

This country report was prepared within the framework of WP3 of the 3R project and examines the functioning of gender-based political violence in Hungary during the 2022–2026 parliamentary cycle. The analysis is based on 11 semi-structured in-depth interviews, an online survey, and document and social media analysis.

The research clearly indicates that gender-based political violence is not an isolated phenomenon but a structured and self-reproducing pattern, operating through six mutually reinforcing mechanisms: normalization of violence; delegitimization through personalization and depoliticization; operation across multiple arenas in a cumulative manner; structural and institutional embeddedness; organized perpetrator patterns; and the system’s self-perpetuating nature. These are not separate elements but mutually reinforcing dynamics present regardless of party affiliation, although their manifestations and institutional handling differ across political lines.

The phenomenon must be understood within a political environment shaped by illiberal governance based on the concentration of power. In this context, “gender” consistently appears as a tool for constructing enemies. This discursive framework reinforces a hyper-masculine political logic that emphasizes order, control, and hierarchy — while simultaneously portraying female political actors as deviations or threats. Consequently, gender-based political violence is not merely a series of individual attacks. It operates within a normative environment that actively contributes to the delegitimization of female politicians, making violence an implicit feature of political functioning. Violence, therefore, is not an exception but a pattern.

The research identifies four Hungarian characteristics: systemic media concentration as an infrastructure facilitating violence; the lack of institutional protection and the existence of a double standard (particularly regarding the non-ratification of the Istanbul Convention); severe underrepresentation in politics (15.6% compared to the EU average



of 33.6%); and the close interconnection between political polarization and gender-based political violence.

Document and social media analysis further reinforce this picture: the phenomenon of the “token woman” and the structures of patriarchal bargaining are determinative in the Hungarian political arena. The systematic silencing of female ruling-party MPs does not indicate the absence of violence, but rather that political loyalty and public expression are often mutually exclusive.

Overall, the research shows that gender-based political violence in Hungary is not merely a by-product of political polarization, but a phenomenon embedded in the functioning of the political system that actively shapes the boundaries of women’s public participation. The following recommendations emerged for improving the situation: establishing an independent, party-neutral complaint mechanism within the National Assembly; recognizing political violence against women as a distinct legal category; ratifying the Istanbul Convention; targeted training to enhance recognition, documentation, and resilience; and creating institutional conditions for a cross-party, shared approach to the phenomenon.

# 1. Introduction: Research Context

## 1.1. The Objective of WP3 within the 3R Project

The 3R — Recognize, Resist, Respond! — project aims to strengthen the recognition, management, and prevention of gender-based political violence within the European Union. The project is CERV-funded, involves multiple member states, examines the phenomenon at the national level within a unified methodological framework, and subsequently interprets the results in a comparative perspective.

Within the WP3 work package, the goal is to empirically explore gender-based political violence among female members of national parliaments. The situation in Hungary is particularly relevant within the EU: the proportion of women in parliament is among the lowest of member states, the legal protection framework is incomplete, and the political environment creates especially complex conditions both for the research and for understanding the phenomenon.

This analytical country report is based on qualitative research and constitutes a direct outcome of the project's activities.

## 1.2. The Concept and Relevance of Gender-Based Political Violence in Hungary

Gender-based political violence (Violence Against Women in Politics — VAWP) encompasses actions and structures that restrict, punish, or prevent women's political participation because of their gender. The concept ranges from physical violence to online harassment and psychological pressure, extending to institutional forms of structural exclusion, and includes both individual incidents and systematic patterns.

Its relevance in Hungary arises from several factors. First, women's political underrepresentation—which has persistently stagnated around 10–15% since the regime change — indicates that barriers to entry and retention operate at a systemic level. Second, the general brutality of political discourse, distortions in the media system, and deficiencies in legal protection create an environment in which gender-based violence can become normalized and invisible. Third, difficulties in accessing research participants themselves reflect the structural embeddedness of the phenomenon: those most affected are the least able or willing to speak publicly.

International and domestic literature highlights that gender-based political violence cannot be understood merely as a series of individual attacks, but is embedded in a political and discursive environment that actively shapes the meaning and legitimacy of such attacks. “Anti-gender” discourses function as central mobilization tools in illiberal political systems<sup>1</sup>: within this framework, “gender” acts as a “symbolic glue” connecting various societal fears and hatred-fueled political narratives, while legitimizing the rollback of equality norms.

The present research examines this system of relations in the Hungarian political context, with particular attention to how the identified forms and mechanisms of violence are embedded in the structural and discursive conditions of political functioning.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Pető, Eszter Kováts. Anti-Gender Movements in Hungary. A Discourse without a movement?. *AntiGender Campaign in Europe*. Eds. Roman Kuhar, David Paternotte., pp.117-131, 2017. <hal-03204911>

## 2. Overview of the Hungarian Political and Institutional Context

This chapter provides the contextual background necessary for understanding the experiences of female politicians in Hungary. It briefly presents the structure and functioning of the Hungarian National Assembly, reviews the current state of women's political participation, and highlights the structural and cultural factors that shape the opportunities and constraints of female MPs.

The chapter also outlines the various forms of gender-based harassment and violence experienced by women active in political life, drawing on public data, media coverage, and the findings of previous research.

### 2.1. A Brief Introduction to the Hungarian Parliamentary System

The Hungarian National Assembly consists of 199 members of parliament (MPs). Hungary uses a mixed electoral system, which operates on two levels: 106 MPs are elected in single-member constituencies through a relative majority system, while 93 MPs obtain their mandate through a proportional system based on party or minority lists.

This research focuses on the composition and political environment of the 2022–2026 parliamentary cycle, during which the ruling Fidesz–KDNP coalition held a two-thirds majority (67.84%) with 135 mandates. The remaining 63 mandates were held by the following opposition parties: the Democratic Coalition (DK), Jobbik – Movement for a Better Hungary, LMP – Politics Can Be Different, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), Momentum Movement, Dialogue (Párbeszéd), and Mi Hazánk Movement. The German national minority representative held one mandate.

During the 2022–2026 parliamentary cycle, a total of nine parliamentary groups were formed in the National Assembly. These included the governing parties (Fidesz and KDNP), opposition party groups (DK, Momentum, MSZP, Dialogue, Jobbik, Mi Hazánk, LMP), as well as independent MPs and the minority representative.

Parliamentary groups are key organizational units within the National Assembly, as they determine not only speaking time and committee representation, but also access to state resources and influence over legislative processes.

### 2.2. Women's Political Representation in Hungary

Women's political underrepresentation is a globally recognized phenomenon: only 27.4% of national parliamentarians (counting both chambers) are women. In most countries, however, the proportion of women in parliament has been steadily increasing, and more countries are electing female prime ministers or presidents. In contrast, Hungary is an exception in the European context, as this trend has not materialized. Women's parliamentary representation in Hungary has remained critically low, stagnating around 10% over the more than 32 years since the regime change.

In the most recent parliamentary election relevant to this study (April 2022), the proportion of women increased slightly to 14.1%, with 28 out of 199 MPs being female.<sup>2</sup> Most female MPs belonged to Fidesz (13). It is

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<sup>2</sup> The official website of the Hungarian National Assembly: [parlament.hu](https://www.parlament.hu) — <https://www.parlament.hu>

important to note that at the start of the cycle, the government had only one female minister, who later resigned, leaving an all-male government at the time of the research. In other parties, female representation was as follows: the Democratic Coalition (DK) had 4 women; the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), Momentum, Jobbik, and Dialogue (Párbeszéd) each had 2 women; and LMP, Mi Hazánk, and KDNP had only 1 female MP each.

Existing research identifies multiple interrelated factors behind the persistently low political participation of women. Cultural explanations point to traditional gender roles, negative attitudes toward feminism, and the legacy of quota systems from the communist-socialist period<sup>3</sup>, all of which have contributed to limited societal demand for greater female political representation.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, Hungarian civil society — particularly women’s organizations — is relatively weak and fragmented, with limited mobilization capacity on political representation issues and reduced ability to exert pressure on political actors.<sup>5</sup> As a result, a strong and sustained women’s movement demanding institutional change has not developed.

Institutional and party-level factors are also decisive. While the electoral system alone does not fully explain women’s underrepresentation, political parties play a key role as “gatekeepers” in candidate selection.<sup>6</sup> Party elites typically favor male candidates, particularly in single-member constituencies, while women are often placed in less favorable positions on party lists.<sup>7</sup> Candidate selection processes are highly centralized and closed, further limiting opportunities for women.

Research also shows that left-leaning parties generally nominate and elect more women to parliament than conservative parties. In Hungary, for example, socialist and liberal parties have typically fielded a higher proportion of female candidates and elected more female MPs than right-wing parties.<sup>8</sup> This often reflects a stronger commitment to gender equality and greater openness to measures supporting women’s political participation. Several parties implement voluntary quotas. However, despite these differing strategies, overall female representation has remained low, indicating that inter-party differences alone are insufficient to achieve significant changes in women’s parliamentary participation.

It is important to note that Hungary has no legally mandated gender quota, and previous initiatives in this direction have consistently failed due to a lack of political will and insufficient societal pressure.<sup>9</sup> Voluntary measures have also proven weak and ineffective, particularly in the absence of rules governing list placements. Overall, limited societal mobilization, party-level barriers, and the lack of quotas together explain women’s persistent underrepresentation in Hungarian politics.

During the parliamentary cycle under study, the gender composition changed only slightly, as some MPs resigned or left, and were replaced by others — not necessarily of the same gender. Compared to the beginning of the cycle, in later stages — at the time of this research (between December 2025 and March 2026) — the number of female MPs increased from 28 to 31, raising their proportion from 14.1% to 15.6%, mainly due to an increase in Fidesz-affiliated female MP’s.

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3 During the party-state era, despite holding 25–30% of parliamentary seats, women were almost entirely excluded from actual decision-making bodies, such as the Political Committee.

4 Ilonszki, Gabriella, and Montgomery Kathleen. 2002. ‘Több demokrácia, kevesebb képviselet?’ *Politikatudományi szemle* 11(3): 7–34.

5 Fábíán, Katalin. 2007. ‘Making an Appearance: The Formation of Women’s Groups in Hungary’. *Aspasia* (1): 103–27.

6 Ilonszki, Gabriella. 2012. ‘The Impact of Party System Change on Female Representation and the Mixed Electoral System’. In *Women and Legislative Representation. Electoral Systems, Political Parties and Sex Quotas*, ed. Manon Tremblay. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

7 Papp, Zsófia. 2017. ‘Candidate Features and Candidate Selection Patterns in Hungary, 1994–2010’. *International Journal of Sociology* 48(1): 76–93.

8 Tóth, Adrienn, and Gabriella Ilonszki. 2015. ‘Pártok Vagy Választók? A Női Jelöltek Esélye Az Egyéni Választókerületekben, 1998–2010’. *24(3)*: 27–50.

9 Várnagy, Réka. 2013. *Women’s Representation in the Hungarian Parliament*. Vienna: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

At the same time, some opposition parties experienced a decline: Jobbik no longer had any female MPs, and Momentum’s female representation also decreased. In contrast, the number of female MPs in DK, MSZP, and Dialogue remained relatively stable. Additionally, there were more independent female MPs in parliament, either because their parliamentary groups dissolved or they left their factions.

**Table 1: Gender Composition of the Hungarian Parliament (2026 March)**

Party/Fraction	Number of women	Number of Men	% of Women
Fidesz	17	99	14.7%
KDNP	1	18	5.3%
DK	5	10	33.3%
Momentum	1	8	11.1%
Párbeszéd	2	4	33.3%
MSZP	2	8	20%
Mi Hazánk	1	5	16.7%
Independent	2	8	20%
Jobbik	0	7	0%
National Minority Representative	0	1	0%

## 2.3. Characteristics of Gender-Based Political Violence in Hungary

In Hungary, gender-based political violence — from online harassment and disinformation campaigns to symbolic exclusion and threats — serves as a significant deterrent to women’s political participation. As highlighted in the initial country report, the phenomenon must be understood in the context of a highly centralized, authoritarian-style political system, where it functions as a tool of power.

Gender-based political violence manifests across multiple levels and in various forms: from legislative inaction and institutional blind spots to targeted attacks against individual female politicians. Based on qualitative data, legal analyses, and case studies, these patterns can be interpreted as part of a broader strategy of deterrence and symbolic domination.

Formally, women participating in Hungarian political life have access to a range of legal instruments to address violence, including physical, psychological, sexual, economic, symbolic, and online abuse. However, the legal framework is fragmented and inconsistent, and violence against female politicians does not exist as an independent legal category, significantly limiting the possibility of effective protection.

Existing laws — including the Fundamental Law, the Criminal Code, the Civil Code, the Labor Code, and the Act on Equal Treatment — prohibit abuses such as harassment, defamation, threats, or discrimination. Yet, these provisions do not align with the specific circumstances of political life, where female actors are exposed to heightened public scrutiny, power imbalances, and systemic targeting.

Another challenge is that female politicians, as public figures, are expected to “endure more.”<sup>10</sup> The higher tolerance threshold for criticism often discourages them from taking legal action, even in cases of gender-based verbal abuse or harassment.

Various forms of gender-based political violence in Hungary not only exist but are continuously reproduced, as the initial country report clearly demonstrates:

- **Direct violence (physical and sexual aggression)**, including verbal sexual harassment and sexist humiliation in political spaces. While physical violence is rare, the report documents numerous cases showing that female politicians regularly face humiliating, gender-based remarks in parliamentary and public forums.
- **Psychological and informational violence**, including intimidation, reputational attacks, and disinformation campaigns. The report notes that female politicians are often targeted by misogynistic narratives portraying them as unreliable, incompetent, or morally questionable, frequently through coordinated smear campaigns and false accusations.
- **Cyberviolence**, encompassing online harassment, hate speech, online threats, and the publication of personal information (doxing). Drawing on recent research, the report emphasizes that these attacks are often systemic, amplified via social media, and disproportionately affect women — especially government-critical actors. This pattern was confirmed in a 2024 study of the European Parliament election online environment, in which Hungary showed the most severe situation among France, Germany, and Hungary, with hate speech against female candidates nearly three times higher than against male candidates.<sup>11</sup>

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10 This higher tolerance threshold is based on Article IX of the Fundamental Law (freedom of speech), reinforced by the relevant provisions of the Civil Code (Section 2:44) and the Criminal Code (e.g., defamation §§ 226–227, harassment § 222). Case law assumes that public figures — including female politicians — must tolerate a broader range of criticism to ensure the free debate of public affairs.

11 Matlach, P-C., Drath, C., Castillo, A. & Degeling, M. (2025): Crushing Comments: Gendered Harassment During the 2024 EU Parliament Elections on TikTok. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. London: ISD. [www.isdglobal.org](http://www.isdglobal.org)

- **Symbolic and discursive violence**, delegitimizing women through gendered stereotypes and modes of speech. Female politicians are frequently portrayed as overly sensitive, unfit for leadership, or reduced to their appearance, further reinforcing their marginalization in political discourse.
- **Structural and institutional violence**, reflected in exclusion from decision-making, unequal representation, and the lack of effective complaint mechanisms. The report shows that informal party structures and male-dominated networks often act as “gatekeepers,” while sexist behavior within institutions frequently goes unpunished.
- **Preventive violence**, including threats, smear campaigns, and public attacks intended to deter women from entering or continuing in political life. The initial report highlights that women challenging dominant power structures — particularly in opposition roles — are especially exposed to these tactics.

These patterns, as documented in the initial report, are reinforced in a broader political and media environment where gender-based disinformation and harassment are normalized, contributing to the systemic marginalization of women in political life.

Although some of these acts theoretically fall under existing legal regulations, law enforcement is inconsistent and far from effective, especially in the political context. Inadequate gender-sensitive law enforcement, combined with institutional reluctance and the absence of specific protective mechanisms, results in impunity for the vast majority of these violent acts. The systemic targeting of female politicians, the lack of effective legal protection, and the ideological embedding of gender hierarchies collectively demonstrate that the erosion of the rule of law in Hungary directly undermines democratic participation and silences critical voices. This environment exerts a deterrent effect on women’s political engagement.

Female politicians have legitimate concerns that public statements — or participation in research revealing personal experiences or opinions — may entail consequences such as reputational damage, harassment, or retaliation. As a result, those affected by gender-based political violence often remain without adequate legal tools and effective protection.

The sensitivity of the topic is further indicated by the fact that, in certain political contexts, even participating in research can be limited or risky for respondents. These structural and cultural conditions not only explain the complexity and vulnerability of the phenomenon under study but also justify the need for particular caution in the research approach. Consequently, the formulation of research questions is crucial from methodological, ethical, and security perspectives, which are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

# 3. Research Design and Methodology

The research was implemented based on a pre-developed implementation strategy, designed to ensure access to the target group, manage political and institutional risks, and guarantee anonymity and ethical compliance. The strategy paid particular attention to the challenges of engaging female politicians within Hungary's specific political environment.

Qualitative methods were employed during the study. It was essential to explore female politicians' experiences and perceptions of gender-based political threats and violence in this way, as numerical data alone cannot fully capture these phenomena. Understanding the experiences and interpretations of those affected provides insight into the mechanisms and impacts of such attacks, complementing the existing literature on women's political representation and safety.

To this end, semi-structured in-depth interviews were prioritized, allowing participants to share their experiences relatively freely and flexibly, while the conversation remained organized around key themes. Semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for examining sensitive issues, as respondents can decide how much to disclose, and researchers can map nuanced perspectives. Methodologically, they enable the simultaneous investigation of the diversity of individual experiences and common patterns identifiable across interviews. The interviews were supplemented with online questionnaires for participants who were not available in person.

We also accounted for the possibility that some politicians might refrain from participating due to fear or party discipline — for example, members of Fidesz are known to be constrained in their public statements. To incorporate their perspectives, we conducted a qualitative document analysis relying on publicly available sources such as newspaper articles, interviews, and conference materials.

The combined use of semi-structured interviews, questionnaire responses, and document analysis allowed for cross-validation of the findings and the integration of multifaceted perspectives that might otherwise have been overlooked.

## 3.1. Research Questions

The study aims to explore the experiences of female members of the Hungarian National Assembly regarding violence and harassment in political life. While international literature increasingly documents the prevalence of gender-based political violence, less is known about how these dynamics manifest within the Hungarian political context and how the affected women themselves experience and interpret them.

Accordingly, the research focuses on identifying the forms, sources, and consequences of political violence against women, as well as the institutional and cultural mechanisms that shape these experiences. Particular attention is paid to psychological, online, sexual, economic, and physical forms of violence, as well as to how female politicians respond to and cope with these situations.

Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What forms of gender-based political violence do female members of the Hungarian National Assembly experience?
2. What are the most common sources and arenas of these attacks (e.g., political opponents, media, social media users, voters)?
3. How do female politicians interpret and respond to these experiences, and what impact do they have on their political behavior and public participation?
4. What institutional mechanisms or policy measures could help address political violence against women in Hungary?

## 3.2. Data Collection

The study population consisted of the 31 female members of the Hungarian National Assembly serving in the 2022–2026 parliamentary term, representing all parliamentary factions. This group was selected to capture cross-party, diverse perspectives and to gain insight into the gendered dimensions of political life in Hungary. The research aimed to map and understand the nature of attacks against female politicians and gender-based political violence, taking into account the perspectives of all significant political factions.

To identify potential participants, we compiled a list of female MPs using publicly available data from the official parliamentary database ([parliament.hu](http://parliament.hu)). Access to these elite interviewees was approached through a stepwise strategy. Initially, potential participants were contacted via email at the end of 2025. Invitations were sent to publicly available email addresses listed on the parliament.hu website, briefly outlining the topic and objectives of the study, informing recipients about the secure data-handling conditions of the research, and inviting them to participate in either a personal or online interview according to their preference. As a further step, invitations were also circulated through faction leaders.

When response rates remained low, we relied on personal and political networks: our direct contacts in professional and political circles were asked to recommend us to other potential interviewees. These intermediaries (researchers, faculty members at ELTE and Corvinus University with cross-party connections, women's rights experts, and independent neutral mediators) were presumed to already have professional or personal contacts with the MPs. This approach effectively implemented a snowball sampling technique and helped somewhat to reach a broader participant base. Where mediation did not yield results, potential participants were contacted through alternative email addresses, by phone, or via social media, in multiple rounds.

Special attention was given to the form and timing of outreach. For security reasons and to avoid the political risks associated with the so-called Transparency, the passage of which the government had deferred to autumn 2025, as well as potential scrutiny by the Sovereignty Protection Office, we deliberately sought contact before and after the relatively quiet December holiday period during the parliamentary recess and avoided the most intense phases of parliamentary sessions. Invitations were therefore sent primarily during periods when MPs were expected to be more flexible. We also carried out personal outreach around early March, coinciding with International Women's Day events, when issues of women's political participation receive heightened public attention. In the final phase of multi-step outreach, we engaged in direct personal approaches in the Parliament corridors during the last committee and plenary sessions of the 2022–2026 term. This phase coincided with preparations for national elections, candidate nominations, and an increasingly competitive campaign, which further restricted MPs' availability.

Of the 31 potential interviewees contacted through multiple channels, 23 responded. Of these, four explicitly declined participation, twelve agreed to an interview, and six suggested follow-up contact after the elections or promised to participate in the research. One person who initially agreed ultimately did not participate, resulting in a total of 11 completed interviews. Eight interviews were conducted in person, two online, and one by phone. The semi-structured interviews were conducted from December 2025 to March 2026.

Following the interviews, an online questionnaire was sent to those who had declined personal interviews or had not responded at all; potential participants were approached by email, phone, and in person to complete the survey. Only one positive response was received, and that participant also completed the questionnaire. The online data collection took place in March 2026.

One of the main methodological limitations of the study was access to interviewees. Another significant limiting factor was the asymmetry in willingness to participate across political affiliations. While opposition MPs were more likely to participate, the response rate among governing party MPs remained significantly lower despite repeated attempts. Non-responses appeared as refusals, delays, or direct rejections, sometimes following an initial agreement. This indicates that gender-based political violence is a politically and institutionally sensitive topic in Hungary, which also constrains opportunities for disclosure.

### **3.2.1. Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews**

The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and focused on exploring the forms, sources, and consequences of violence against women in political life. The interview guide combined structured questions with open-ended prompts, allowing participants to elaborate in detail on their personal experiences and perceptions, while ensuring that key thematic areas were consistently covered across all interviews.

At the beginning of each interview, basic background information was collected about the participants, including party affiliation, length of parliamentary membership, age, highest level of education, marital status, and whether they had children. These variables were recorded to contextualize the experiences discussed during the interviews.

The substantive part of the interviews examined the different forms of violence and harassment experienced by the female politicians. Participants were asked about experiences of psychological violence, including sexist or derogatory remarks, harassment, threats, and negative portrayals in traditional media. A separate section focused on online violence, addressing experiences on social media platforms, such as humiliating or sexualized content, hostile comments, and threatening private messages.

Given the sensitivity of the topic, questions on sexual harassment and sexual violence were introduced with particular caution and preceded by an explicit warning. Participants were asked to consider whether they had encountered unwanted sexual advances, demeaning behavior, or other forms of sexual misconduct in political settings.

The interviews also explored economic and institutional forms of violence, such as denial of financial resources, campaign support, or access to necessary working conditions, as well as potential damage to personal property. Participants were additionally asked about experiences of physical violence, including threats of physical aggression or actual incidents.

Beyond documenting experiences, the interviews examined reporting behaviors and institutional responses: whether incidents were reported to authorities, political parties, or other institutions, and how these situations were handled.

Finally, the interviews included a broader reflexive section in which participants were asked about the sources of attacks against female politicians (e.g., political opponents, media, social media users, or voters), existing institutional mechanisms in Hungary for addressing gender-based political violence, and whether such experiences influenced their political behavior — for instance, avoiding certain topics or limiting public appearances. Participants were also invited to share their views on potential policy solutions, institutional reforms, and cultural changes that could improve women's position in politics.

The semi-structured format allowed the interviews to capture both individual experiences and broader perceptions of gender-based political violence, while also providing space for participants to introduce additional topics or reflections they considered important.

### **3.2.2. Online Survey**

The online questionnaire followed the same thematic structure as the semi-structured interview guide and covered the same key topics: experiences related to psychological, online, sexual, economic, and physical forms of violence in political life. The questionnaire included both closed- and open-ended questions, allowing for the collection of structured responses as well as more free-form reflections. The aim of the questionnaire was not to create a statistically representative database, but to complement the interview findings and to provide an opportunity for participation to those who preferred a written format.

### **3.2.3. Document and Social Media Analysis**

In addition to the interviews and the online questionnaire, we also conducted qualitative document analysis and social media analysis to complement the primary data collection. This approach proved particularly important, as not all potential participants responded to interview requests – those affiliated with the government were primarily the individuals who declined to participate.

To partially address this representational gap, we examined publicly available materials in order to use the available sources as illustrative case examples. The brief, overview analysis covered three platforms: Facebook, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter). The content examined focused primarily on comments directed at female politicians' posts and public appearances, which are suitable for capturing the nature and intensity of gender-based online violence. The goal was to illustrate and corroborate patterns identified in the interview research, with particular attention to how user-generated content targeting female MPs aligns with the broader dynamics identified in the study.

### **3.3. Data Processing**

As the first step in processing the 11 semi-structured interviews conducted in this study, the materials were organized into a consistent structure suitable for analysis. Some interviews were transcribed from audio recordings, while others were based on detailed researcher notes, taking into account the participants' safety and comfort. Relevant units of meaning were highlighted and entered into a standardized coding table used by the international research team. This table included background variables, the occurrence and brief description of violence types, illustrative quotes, as well as information on institutional responses and coping patterns, ensuring both narrative richness and comparability.

Anonymization was carried out at an early stage of processing: participants were identified solely by ID codes (ID1–ID11). All direct and indirect identifiers were removed or generalized, with particular attention to names, positions, locations, and contextual references. Given the small size of the Hungarian parliamentary field and the low number of female MPs, anonymity was prioritized over providing detailed background information. Quotes were minimally edited where necessary to reduce identifiability.

The resulting anonymized and structured interview material formed the basis for further coding and analysis, ensuring ethical compliance and research reliability. The coding approach combined predefined categories with patterns emerging from the data, in order to capture the forms and dynamics of violence. The first level of coding focused on background variables (e.g., age, parliamentary experience), the second level recorded the presence of violence types, marking their frequency and co-occurrence in a binary manner. The third level linked brief case descriptions and quotes to the codes, preserving nuances of meaning, while the fourth level focused on institutional responses and behavioral consequences. This multi-level coding enabled a comparable analysis of patterns and mechanisms.

### **3.4. Ethical Principles and Data Protection**

To ensure the confidential handling and safety of participants, several measures were implemented throughout the research process. Interviews were conducted in secure, neutral locations or online, depending on participants' preferences. We avoided sites associated with political parties or civil organizations to maintain neutrality and ensure participants could share their experiences comfortably. For online interviews, we used Zoom with encrypted communication.

Participants were also given the option to join the study via an anonymous registration form, provided through Google Forms in anonymous mode without recording IP addresses. In many cases, where feasible, detailed note-taking was used instead of audio recording, minimizing the collection of sensitive personal data. Contingency communication plans were also developed to address potential technical issues, maintaining flexibility and security.

The interviews were conducted in accordance with strict ethical protocols for sensitive research. Participants were informed that their contributions would remain fully anonymous, that they could pause or withdraw from the interview at any time without justification, and that special care would be taken when discussing particularly sensitive experiences related to gender-based political violence.

Regarding legal protection, the research fully complied with GDPR requirements: all necessary documentation was prepared, including a detailed data protection statement. During data processing, all information was stored in coded form, with access restricted exclusively to members of the research team via secure digital platforms. Analysis and reporting were based on aggregated results, with no identifiable information about any individual participant included in the final materials. Together, these measures ensured participant anonymity, protected sensitive information, and created a safe environment for sharing experiences of gender-based political violence.

# 4. Research Findings

## 4.1. Thematic Analysis: Patterns, Types, and Mechanisms

The analysis of the interviews confirmed several of our initial expectations. Based on participants' accounts, various forms of political violence are structurally present in the lives of female politicians: they are not tied to individual actors, limited to a single political side, or restricted to isolated incidents, but are embedded in the broader logic of political functioning. It also clearly emerged that most affected individuals cope with these experiences through personal and informal strategies, while institutional response mechanisms are only available to a limited extent.

The thematic coding of the qualitative interviews suggests that gender-based political violence against female politicians cannot be understood as a series of isolated events, but rather as a complex, multidimensional, self-reproducing system. The empirical material shows that different forms of violence do not operate in isolation but constitute a network of interdependent, mutually legitimizing, and reinforcing mechanisms, which over time structure the conditions of political participation.

Five closely interconnected main mechanisms emerged during coding:

- (1) Normalization
- (2) Personalization and depoliticization
- (3) Cumulative and multi-arena operation
- (4) Structural embeddedness
- (5) Perpetrator configurations and levels of organization

The following section provides a detailed overview of these mechanisms.

### 4.1.1. The Structural Presence of Violence: Normalization as a Systemic Mode of Operation

One of the strongest and most consistent patterns is the normalization of violence. Participants typically did not describe sexist, demeaning, or aggressive behaviors as exceptional events, but rather as everyday—and in many cases expected—parts of political life. This is well captured by the statement:

***“As a politician, it has become part of my job to receive abusive, sexist, and demeaning comments online every day” (ID10).***

It is important to note that in several interviews, this abusive behavior was explicitly linked to national-level political engagement. One respondent, who previously had extensive experience at the local government level, framed it as a difference:

***“Becoming a member of parliament feels like people feel empowered to be harsher, to comment more aggressively—so it’s a more open field where everything can be criticized. When I was a local representative, if they had a question or criticism, it was tied to a specific topic. Here in parliament, it’s completely different” (ID5).***

This situation signals not merely the frequency of attacks but a deeper structural phenomenon: violence becomes integrated into the political role, implicitly becoming a “cost” of political participation. Several respondents described it as something one must learn to endure. For instance, one pro-government interviewee stated:

***“I’m somewhat immune to it; I can handle it now, but I don’t even read the comments anymore” (ID3).***

Respondents differed in their explanations for the motivations behind the violence. Some framed it as a cultural pattern or traditional view of women:

***“I perceive it (the violence) as stemming from the typical Fidesz, traditional convictions. Not always out of malice, but this is how they think—this is specifically their image of women” (ID5).***

Other interviews highlighted the general coarsening of political culture:

***“In Hungarian political public life, judging and disregarding each other has become normalized on both sides” (ID10).***

Normalization operates on three interrelated levels. At the individual level, adaptation and internalization are observed: participants learn to manage, filter, or ignore attacks. At the collective-discursive level, cultural legitimation occurs, as disparagement and humiliation become routine in political communication. At the socialization level, violence is transmitted as a norm. This is reflected in the observation:

***“Anyone who enters public life has to tolerate everything” (ID5).***

This is further corroborated by the fact that several respondents identified the normalization of public discourse as the key point for changing political culture.

#### **4.1.2. Personalization and Depoliticization as Mechanisms of Delegitimization**

The second key pattern is the personalization and depoliticization of political conflicts. The interviews indicate that attacks against female politicians are largely not directed at their political claims, policy proposals, or arguments, but rather at their person, body, femininity, and social status. This is clearly expressed in the following statement:

***“They don’t dispute my political claims, but my body, my femininity, my appearance” (ID10).***

A similar logic appears in another interview:

***“I haven’t experienced comments related to what I actually say politically. They attack me specifically because I am a woman” (ID9).***

The first and most striking dimension of personalization is body-based reduction and sexualization: instead of political debate, the female body becomes the main arena of conflict. This is reflected in recurring remarks such as:

***“What does her hair look like?”***

or insulting comments targeting appearance, clothing, or body weight (ID7).

The second dimension is competence delegitimization. One young female politician reported that her expertise was easily undermined by gender bias:

***“They probably assumed I earned my degree because I slept with all my professors” (ID9).***

It is important to note that youth emerged clearly as an additional aggravating factor for respondents, which, combined with gender, increases the exposure to attacks. Another interview summarized this more generally:

***“The opinion of a young woman often counts for less in public discourse” (ID10).***

The third dimension is intersectional bias, particularly the combined effect of age and gender. One respondent articulated this clearly:

***“Simply because I am young and female, people treat me differently and communicate with me in a different way” (ID9).***

One important consequence of depoliticization is that political debate loses its substantive dimension, being replaced instead by identity-based conflict. This is not merely a distortion of communication; it represents a structural undermining of political agency for women.

#### **4.1.3. The Cumulative and Multi-Arena Nature of Violence**

The third defining mechanism is the cumulative and multi-arena operation of violence. The interviews indicate that violence is not confined to a single space, but manifests simultaneously across the online sphere, the media, parliamentary and intra-party contexts, as well as private and family life.

The online space is particularly significant:

***“Every post, every opinion of [the respondent] is a target” (ID10).***

Respondents consistently identified the online sphere as the primary source of psychological attacks, emphasizing the “freedom” unleashed in digital spaces as the most defining experience (ID11).

***The online space is especially potent because it offers anonymity, enables mass targeting, and operates with low consequences. This is well captured in the observation:***

***“There are countless bots and fake profiles; sheer numbers are a weapon in themselves” (ID10).***

Another respondent described it similarly:

***“Members of the digital army can get away with anything via fake profiles” (ID11).***

A crucial aspect of the cumulative nature is escalation. Verbal abuse can intensify into serious threats:

***“I also receive death threats” (ID10).***

Another interview cited similarly extreme examples:

***“They said I should be raped,” “I am a whore” (ID4).***

The crossing of boundaries between the political and private spheres is particularly significant:

***“They posted my mother’s address” (ID10).***

Other instances include intimidation of family members, threats targeting children, or attacks directed at one’s residential environment (ID11; ID6).

#### **4.1.4. Structural and Institutional Embeddedness**

The coding results clearly show that violence is not merely a communicative or interactional phenomenon, but also an institutionalized mode of operation: female politicians experience not only individual attacks but also operate in organizational and parliamentary environments that are often structurally disadvantageous for them.

Representation inequality was directly highlighted in several interviews. One respondent reflected on her experience in an agricultural committee:

***“There are 11 of us in the committee, and I am the only woman” (ID5).***

In another interview, the male-dominated decision-making environment is described vividly:

***“I sit at the negotiating table with 10–15 men” (ID3).***

Another important dimension at the structural level is the functioning of informal norms. Several respondents noted that the achievements of women are systematically relativized:

***“Our successes were constantly downplayed by men” (ID8).***

This is complemented by the observation that political behaviors considered natural for men are often problematic for women, provoking remarks and attacks. One respondent explained:

***“I am always afraid of being shamed. This is a very strong internal barrier for me. Often, I think I should see a psychologist, but I simply did not dare to go through with it. I even feel ashamed about that.***

***It’s also in me that a female politician wouldn’t be accepted if she went. I had a conversation with ... about how bravely she admits to seeing a psychologist.***

***I dare not do that. I have this fear: would they consider me a weaker leader because of it?***

***As a woman, you always have to balance on a thin line: you cannot be ‘too weak,’ but not ‘too aggressive’ either, while constantly proving your leadership capacity. In this context, going to a psychologist seems risky to me.***

***Honestly, I probably would never go — at most to a coach I can talk to. Because if it got out that I see a psychologist, I am afraid people would not vote for me. This is a deeply ingrained thought in me.***

***Maybe it’s silly — indeed, perhaps it is. But this is how I currently think. Women are simply judged very differently.” (ID8)***

A further critical dimension is control over resource allocation, which emerged in the interviews as one of the least visible yet most significant forms of structural violence. While overt verbal or psychological attacks are directly perceptible, structural violence operates through institutional rules, informal practices, and decision-making routines, making it harder to identify and hold accountable.

According to the interviews, this mechanism is evident on multiple levels. One of the most direct forms is institutional obstruction: respondents reported being restricted in parliamentary speaking opportunities, hindered in information requests, and subjected to pressure via administrative and financial means, such as withholding staff salaries:

***“They did not let me speak in parliament; they blocked my information requests.”***

***“They even withheld my staff’s salaries.”***

***“This was already blackmail and pressure” (ID10).***

These practices not only limit individual political maneuverability but also structurally weaken the execution of representative functions. Such restrictions are particularly problematic because they are often hidden behind formally legitimate procedures, yet effectively serve to obstruct political participation.

Another important manifestation of structural violence is distorted intra-party resource allocation. Respondents reported consistent marginalization in committee positions, speaking opportunities, communication support, and visibility. Expressions such as

***“I was always at the end of the line” (ID1)***

***“I couldn’t get the microphone” (ID1)***

reflect long-term patterns rather than isolated incidents. While the gendered nature of these mechanisms may not always be explicit, their impact contributes to the marginalization of female politicians.

A defining feature of structural violence is its cumulative effect. Limited access to resources — whether information, financial support, institutional tools, or public visibility — reduces political agency over time and simultaneously makes women more vulnerable to other forms of violence. Those who cannot speak cannot respond to attacks; those without access to information cannot exercise effective oversight; those lacking resources are less able to resist pressure.

In this sense, structural violence functions as a quasi meta-level mechanism, framing the operation of other forms of violence. It not only enables but actively reproduces political inequalities, making the marginalization of female politicians systemic rather than exceptional.

The interviews also indicate that gender-based political violence manifests within political communities themselves. One parliamentarian stated:

***“It hurts most when it comes from my own party colleague.” (ID3)***

This highlights that violence is linked to intra-party norms. Respondents noted that sexist remarks and demeaning communication are common in male-dominated spaces, where the presence of women does not coincide with meaningful norm changes.

This dynamic leads to a key conclusion: gender-based political violence is not solely an external threat, but also embedded in the everyday functioning of political institutions. Accordingly, violence is reproduced within political organizations themselves, reinforcing its structural embeddedness and contributing to its normalization.

#### **4.1.5. Perpetrator Configurations and the Organization of Violence**

Based on the interviews, three main types of perpetrators can be distinguished:

- (1) Individual, impulsive attackers
- (2) Targeted, politically motivated actors
- (3) Organized or semi-organized networks

It is important to emphasize that these categories are not rigidly separated, but often overlap and can combine in a single case. One respondent explicitly typologizes this distinction:

***“So there are those for whom it is relatively clear that a mental health assessment would be worthwhile, because they attack everyone equally, and it is obvious they are very, very fixated—not necessarily only on politicians, but on any public figure, and practically as if they spend the whole day on this. That’s one group of people.***

***Then there’s a group that performs this ‘magical work’ on commission, mostly on behalf of political opponents. And then some focus on a single person.” (ID1)***

The first group, individual, impulsive attackers, typically act in a personal, often irrational or emotion-driven manner. These attacks often occur in everyday interactions, such as during campaigns or in face-to-face encounters:

***“..a photo of me had been put up on a poster next to the counter, and a gentleman commented to the person at the counter. I was standing right there, but he didn’t notice me — that he was definitely not getting my vote, but he would still enjoy ejaculating on my face.” (ID2)***

Similarly, in the online space:

***“In the government parties, we receive such obscenities, I sometimes even wonder if I need this. [...] It floods from the internet; I’ve been involved in every campaign since ’24, but what happens now is unprecedented.” (ID3)***

The volume and continuous presence of these cases generate significant psychological pressure.

The second group, targeted, politically motivated actors, operates with a clearly instrumental logic. The interviews provide several examples where attacks are directed against specific political figures, issues, or positions:

(Regarding an attack by government-affiliated media):

***“‘Too young.’ ‘How did they get here?’ ‘Will they be able to handle it?’”***

***“The media reacts negatively to women; few get opportunities to appear, with the same talent or the same occasion. So effectively, it’s very, very difficult to show what you have accomplished.” (ID1)***

In these cases, the purpose of the attack is the strategic, politically targeted undermining of credibility and competence.

The third category, organized or semi-organized networks, is especially visible in the online sphere. Respondents noted multiple instances of coordinated, campaign-like operations:

***“Hundreds of thousands listen; this is how it spreads. [...] My 18-year-old son listens to it; this is what they listen to, this humiliation.” (ID3)***

***“Death threats in online media: ‘I will be hanged,’ ‘they should rape us,’ this happened to everyone.” (ID4)***

These examples suggest that attacks do not occur as isolated incidents, but follow scalable and recurring patterns with significant reach. It is important to note, however, that organization is not always formally verifiable, yet respondents consistently point to the political logic, repeated narratives, and campaign-like nature of the attacks, reinforcing the perception of coordination.

Analytically, this typology goes beyond merely describing perpetrators: it shows that individual attacks generate constant noise and pressure, targeted actors challenge political legitimacy, while networked operations enable the scaling and wide dissemination of attacks.

#### **4.1.6. The Cumulative and Self-Sustaining Nature of the Mechanisms**

An important observation from the interviews was that in several cases, the interview situation itself became a reflective space: as the conversation progressed, participants became aware that the events they had experienced were not isolated incidents, but could be interpreted as experiences of violence.

This indicates that certain forms of violence—particularly structural and psychological—are often normalized and only acquire meaning retrospectively, through narrative reconstruction. Relatedly, respondents did not experience individual acts of violence as separate events, but rather as cumulative, interrelated, and mutually reinforcing. The interviews therefore suggest that the mechanisms identified earlier do not operate in isolation, but are part of a dynamic, self-reinforcing system.

This is well summarized by one respondent:

***“One thinks twice before going on a TV show because of the extent of gaslighting and cyberbullying that follows.” (ID10)***

From the interviews, a typical process can be reconstructed, in which elements build on each other: **de-legitimizing discourse → online attacks → psychological pressure → institutional restrictions → self-limitation.**

- At the beginning of this process is the delegitimizing discourse, which questions women politicians’ competence, suitability, or legitimate presence in the political space.
- These discursive attacks materialize in concrete actions, the intensity and personal nature of which create significant psychological pressure. Notably, online attacks are quasi-constant in the lives of respondents.
- Sustained psychological strain can eventually interact with the institutional level: restrictions on speaking opportunities, limited access to resources, and administrative obstacles further reinforce marginalization.
- This combined effect can ultimately lead to self-limitation, where actors consciously or unconsciously restrain their speech, choice of topics, or political activity.

A key feature of this process is that it is neither linear nor singular: the elements interact and reinforce each other over time, stabilizing marginalization. In this sense, violence against women politicians is not merely a series of events, but a self-sustaining system, in which discursive, psychological, and structural dimensions are closely interconnected.

This spiral reduces political visibility, distorts participation, and exerts a long-term exclusionary effect. Violence thus functions not merely as a reaction to women’s political presence, but as an active mechanism regulating who can remain in the political space and under what conditions.

Based on the thematic analysis, gender-based political violence can therefore be described as a multilevel system of control, operating simultaneously on discursive, interactional, structural, and technological levels. This system not only restricts the agency of women politicians, but also actively shapes the boundaries of political participation, determining who can stay in politics and under what conditions. This dynamic also explains why addressing individual forms of violence in isolation is insufficient: inaction at any point contributes to the reproduction of the entire system.

#### **4.1.7. Restricted Access as a Structural Mechanism**

Beyond the experiences revealed in the interviews, the data collection process itself exposed an additional, structural-level mechanism. During the research, access to interviews was not merely a methodological issue, but emerged as an empirical phenomenon in its own right. The systemic difficulty in reaching certain groups — particularly women politicians aligned with the governing party — suggests that silence, refusal to participate, and controlled communication can function as indirect mechanisms shaping the visibility of gender-based political violence.

The data collection process revealed three interrelated but distinguishable patterns: non-response, direct refusal, and withdrawal after initial agreement to participate. Reactions observed during personal outreach particularly illustrate this mechanism. Statements such as *“I don’t feel like doing this”* or *“How many times do I have to say that I won’t participate?”* are not simply individual choices, but direct expressions of refusal to speak. These reactions indicate that participation in the research does not always appear as a neutral act, but rather as a situation in which speaking out itself may carry risks.

In this sense, non-response cannot be interpreted merely as a loss of data, but rather as a meaningful phenomenon, highlighting the political and institutional conditions under which speaking about gender-based

political violence becomes possible — or impossible. This dynamic can also be understood as a form of preventive restriction, in which the potential risks associated with speaking out deter participation.

Particular attention should be paid to the phenomenon of withdrawal after initially agreeing to participate. In cases where individuals initially appeared open to interviews but subsequently canceled scheduled appointments and did not respond to further requests, a more dynamic process emerges. This pattern indicates that speaking out is not a one-off decision, but rather a process in which political, institutional, or personal risks may be reassessed over time. In this sense, withdrawal should not be understood merely as a logistical occurrence, but as a subtle form of preventive self-limitation, in which participation may seem warranted, yet doubts or fears inhibit follow-through.

Taken together, these three patterns contribute to limiting the visibility of experiences, highlighting how structural and procedural mechanisms can constrain the documentation and recognition of gender-based political violence.

## 4.2. Forms of Gender-Based Political Violence

Based on the thematic coding of the empirical material, gender-based political violence against women politicians can be categorized into six main types. These categories are not independent phenomena, but rather interconnected, mutually reinforcing, and often co-occurring forms of violence, each contributing — albeit with varying intensity and function — to the restriction of political participation. The distinctions between these categories are not merely formal; they can be captured in terms of empirical prevalence, impact intensity, and structural depth.

According to the coding of the interviews, the frequency of occurrence of each type of violence is as follows:

- Psychological violence (defamation, intimidation, humiliation, etc.), online harassment (hate speech, sexism, etc.), and sexualized attacks (harassment) were experienced by nearly all respondents, and by all young women MPs.
- Physical violence (pushing, hitting, spitting, etc.) affected approximately two-thirds of the respondents.
- Economic violence (denial of resources) was reported by more than half of the participants.

### 4.2.1. Physical Violence (Low Frequency, High Symbolic Impact)

Direct physical violence appears relatively rarely in the sample; however, in every case, it carries a highly pronounced symbolic and psychological impact. One respondent reported:

*“During a signature-collection event, someone kicked over my table and yelled at me,”*

and

*“I have also been spat on in public” (ID10).*

Other sources highlighted the direct threat or intimidating presence of physical aggression (ID4, previously).

In another interview, physical violence appeared not merely as a threat but as a concrete act: a respondent recounted an attack during a trip abroad, in her hotel room, which constituted an attempted sexual assault. Only her firm and decisive response prevented the attack from being carried out.

These incidents are significant on multiple levels: they extend the domain of violence beyond online and discursive dimensions into physical space, explicitly target women's political presence, and function as a deterrent not only for the affected individual but also for potential entrants into political life.

#### **4.2.2. Psychological and Informational Violence (Highest Frequency)**

Psychological and informational violence emerges as the most frequent and broadly experienced form in the interviews. One respondent described:

***“As a politician, it has become part of my work to receive abusive, sexist, and degrading comments daily” (ID10).***

Similar statements include:

***“What are you babbling about, little girl?” (ID4)***

***“You’re ugly”***

***“You don’t know what you’re doing” (ID7)***

This category encompasses verbal degradation, denial of competence, sustained mental pressure, and various forms of surveillance and intimidation.

A particularly stark example is institutionalized psychological pressure, where a respondent reported becoming the target of an organized campaign of harassment:

***“They sent the intelligence service after me to break me down” (ID4).***

#### **4.2.3. Cyber Violence (High Intensity, High Scalability)**

Cyber violence is one of the most intense and rapidly spreading forms of gendered political violence, and it is particularly effective due to the specific features of the online space. Interviewees described it as follows:

***“I have even received death threats,”***

***“On Instagram, I am regularly sent pictures of male genitalia,” and***

***“Someone even created fake pornographic content in my name” (ID10).***

Many respondents also reported sexualized, humiliating comments, violent threats, and even threats directed at family members (ID11). The interviews further highlight a pattern: the power of cyber violence derives from anonymity, mass reach, and algorithmic amplification. In other words, cyber violence not only extends but also intensifies other forms of political violence.

#### 4.2.4. Symbolic and Semiotic Violence (Hidden but Structurally Impactful)

Symbolic violence is less visible but has a deeply structural impact, as it operates at the level of meanings and representations.

***“It’s not my political statements they question, but my body, my femininity, my appearance” (ID10).***

Elsewhere, it manifests in the deliberate use of humiliating or degrading images:

***“They intentionally use those photos that demean women based on their appearance” (ID4).***

This category includes distorted media representations, caricatures, body shaming, and discourses tied to gendered roles. Its function is to undermine credibility, trivialize political roles, and shape social perceptions.

#### 4.2.5. Structural, Institutional, and Economic Violence (Deep Structure)

This category represents the deepest level of violence, as it directly affects political agency. In one interview, it was described as:

***“They didn’t allow me to speak in parliament, and they obstructed my data requests,”***

and

***“The salaries of parliamentary staff were withheld as a form of political pressure” (ID10).***

In another interview, resource deprivation and visibility disadvantages within the parliamentary group appeared through concrete mechanisms. According to the respondent, committee positions and associated resources consistently placed her at a disadvantage:

***“My committee seat was always left behind despite our own outrage” (ID1).***

Structural disadvantage appeared not only in formal positions, but also in political visibility. Access to communication resources — such as photographers, videographers, or media appearances — was regularly limited:

***“Somehow I always ended up at the back of the line and didn’t get the photographer or videographer” (ID1).***

As a result, the ability to speak and participate was restricted, directly affecting political agency:

***“I couldn’t get the microphone” (ID1).***

This category operates through formal restrictions, informal power practices, and manipulation of resource allocation, and is particularly critical because it is difficult to observe and even harder to prove.

#### 4.2.6. Preventive Violence (Pre-emptive Exclusion)

Preventive violence is one of the most important yet least visible categories, because it operates before political participation or in its early stages. This is reflected in statements such as:

*“Sometimes I wonder whether I even need this,”*

*and the observation that women*

*“slowly dropped out of politics” (ID3).*

This form does not appear as a direct attack; rather, it functions as a deterrent mechanism: it narrows the pool of entrants, increases dropout rates, and distorts representation.

#### 4.2.7. Interrelations and Configurations Between Categories

Based on the analysis, the six categories do not occur in isolation but appear in configurations. The most common pattern is the combination of psychological violence, cyber violence, and symbolic violence, which can be accompanied by structural constraints and, more rarely, by physical violence. The limitations in institutional processing of these experiences are also indicated by the low willingness to report incidents.

#### 4.2.8. Summary

The six identified categories of violence constitute a multilevel, interlocking, and mutually reinforcing system. Based on the empirical material, gender-based political violence does not appear in a single dominant form, but operates as a combination of mechanisms with varying intensity and visibility. The different forms — from discursive, psychological, and cyber violence to structural constraints and physical threats — do not exist in isolation, but emerge in configurations that amplify each other’s effects, shaping the conditions of political participation.

The key conclusion is that gender-based political violence is not an exceptional or deviant phenomenon, but a systemic dynamic embedded in the functioning of politics. This dynamic not only restricts the agency of the individuals affected but also, over time, distorts the structure of political representation, primarily by increasing barriers to entry and reinforcing self-limitation. In this sense, gender-based political violence is not merely a consequence, but a structuring element of the political field for women.

### 4.3. Analysis of Resilience and Coping Strategies

Based on the analysis of qualitative interviews, female politicians are not passive victims of gender-based political violence, but actively employ coping strategies. At the same time, the analysis shows that these strategies are predominantly adaptive and defensive, and rarely able to change the underlying structural conditions. As a result, resilience often appears not as a liberating force, but as a form of adaptation to a distorted system.

- (1) The coping patterns can be classified into five main categories:
- (2) Avoidance and withdrawal,
- (3) Technical and operational coping,
- (4) Normalization and cognitive reframing,
- (5) Community and institutional support, and
- (6) Self-limitation and exit dynamics.

The predominance of individual coping strategies is also explained by the fact that the majority of respondents considered institutional mechanisms insufficient. The following section provides an overview of these strategies based on the empirical material.

#### 4.3.1. Avoidance and Withdrawal as Defensive Strategies

One of the most common coping strategies is avoidance, particularly in the online space.

*„There were times when I completely shut myself off from Facebook for months“ (ID10).*

This strategy is effective in the short term, as it reduces immediate psychological stress and interrupts violent interactions. However, in the long term, it carries significant costs: it diminishes political visibility, limits communication with constituents, and can place the politician at a disadvantage in political competition.

#### 4.3.2. Technical and Operational Coping Mechanisms

The second key strategy is technical coping. This is reflected in statements such as

*„blocking, muting“ (ID7)*

or

*„I don't read the comments“ (ID3).*

This strategy is quick, practical, and provides an immediate sense of control. However, it does not eliminate the violence itself; it only reduces individual exposure. According to the interviews, this becomes an invisible yet time-consuming and resource-intensive part of everyday political work.

### 4.3.3. Normalization and Cognitive Reframing

One of the most important, yet also most ambivalent, coping mechanisms is normalization as a strategy.

*„It became part of my job“ (ID10),*

and

*„I’m a bit immune to it“ (ID3).*

Psychologically, this is adaptive: it reduces stress, increases mental resilience, and allows for continued functioning. At the same time, it is problematic at the systemic level, as it may legitimize the violence and contribute to its reproduction.

### 4.3.4. Community and Institutional Support

Support structures appear less frequently, but when present, they function as significant protective factors. Some interviews mention intra-party protection, female role models, and solidarity networks (ID8; ID2). In other cases, informal support comes from the immediate political community or family. One respondent’s explicit view is also telling: while they indicated formal party support, they would strongly endorse an independent, anonymous reporting channel outside the party (ID11).

### 4.3.5. Self-Limitation as an Indirect Consequence

One of the most important consequences of coping strategies is self-limitation.

*„One thinks twice before going on a TV show“ (ID10).*

In the interviews, this appears in multiple forms: avoiding certain topics, reducing public appearances, and restraining communication. This mechanism is particularly significant because it does not operate as an external compulsion but becomes internalized.

Self-limitation is visible not only at the narrative level but also in the structure of responses: out of 11 respondents, 8 reported being rather or decidedly cautious in their statements.

### 4.3.6. Exit Dynamics and Attrition

The endpoint of coping often manifests as exit or exclusion.

*„Sometimes I wonder if this is even for me,“*

or

*„they gradually phased out“ (ID3).*

At the individual level, this dynamic appears as career withdrawal, while at the systemic level it functions as selective reproduction: the system is more likely to push out less resilient actors, thereby homogenizing the political field over the long term.

### 4.3.7. Individual Coping and Its Limits within Structural Violence

One of the key insights from the interviews is that coping strategies are primarily organized at the individual level. Respondents highlighted support from family, and in some cases solidarity within the party or among women politicians, as the most important resources. These strategies play a crucial role in maintaining everyday functioning, yet their effects remain largely confined to the individual level.

Based on the empirical material, the coping practices of women politicians are diverse and dynamic, with their primary function naturally not being to eliminate the violence, but rather to manage and survive it. In this sense, resilience cannot be understood simply as resistance, but as a complex adaptive process that allows political presence to be sustained in a hostile environment.

At the same time, while these measures increase individual survival chances, the violence operates at a structural level. Consequently, addressing the institutionally and discursively embedded field of violence requires action at that systemic level.

## 4.4. Survey Analysis

The response received via the online anonymous survey aligns closely with the patterns identified in the qualitative interviews, particularly regarding the high intensity of psychological and cyber violence, as well as the inadequacies of structural and institutional support.

The respondent's experiences clearly confirm the trend observed in the interviews: the primary arena of gender-based political violence is the online space, with psychologically and sexually motivated attacks dominating. Humiliating, gender-based remarks and sexualized harassment occur on a weekly or even more frequent basis, accompanied by both direct and veiled threats affecting not only the respondent personally but also their family members. Some of these incidents were reported to the authorities — a relatively rare but particularly important indicator in the sample, highlighting that institutional responses, while limited, are not absent.

Their answers also corroborate the cumulative, multi-sphere, and collective nature of violence mechanisms identified in the interviews:

***„Anger and ,courage‘ have run amok in the digital space.“***

At the same time, the respondent did not report sexual advances or physical assault, which aligns with the pattern of lower frequency of physical violence. In this case, self-limitation did not occur: the respondent did not avoid public policy topics, did not reduce public appearances, and did not consider leaving political life. This indicates strong individual resilience, which — consistent with the interview findings — should primarily be interpreted as an adaptive coping strategy.

The respondent reported formal party support, yet evaluated the overall institutional tools in Hungary as clearly insufficient. Their recommendations — including stricter regulation of fake profiles and normalization of public discourse — point to the need for interventions at both technological and discursive levels, closely linked to the structural problems identified.

## 4.5. Document and Social Media Analysis

Since all interviewees highlighted the general and severe deterioration of public discourse, especially in online spaces, a limited document analysis was conducted — in line with the methodological framework — to partially address the representational limitations of the interview research. This analysis drew on publicly available sources, including press materials, politicians' social media posts, and comment sections.

Social media constitutes a role-driven communication space for politicians, and thus, the posts appearing there cannot replace interviews conducted in a confidential setting. The aim of this subchapter is solely to corroborate the mechanisms identified in the interview research using examples from public discourse. The phenomena identified here are qualitative patterns only, and are not suitable for causal or frequency-based inferences.

Authoritarian systems create politically extreme, polarized online platforms that provide spaces for even lethal threats:

***„Die by morning with your mother, you monkey... I'll catch you in Pest or anywhere, I'll execute you.“***

Public reactions confirm the mechanisms identified in the interviews at multiple points, particularly in terms of personalization, depoliticization, and symbolic delegitimization. A recurring pattern in comment sections and media appearances is the intellectual devaluation and personal discrediting of politicians:

***„What is this idiot doing? She shouldn't speak.“***  
***„Dear, not short, but good and thick, interested?“***  
***„Who knows how many asses she's kissed, how many dicks she's sucked?“***  
***„She only says what they tell her to.“***  
***„Nobody,“ „trash,“ „monster.“***

These expressions — sexist in content, political in form — reflect the mechanisms identified in the interviews: attacks do not target political performance or positions, but instead focus on the person, the body, and femininity, consistently shifting political debate from content to personal levels.

Age-related attacks also appear:

***„...the old lady... stays in her well-cut victim pose... could someone come who is prepared and could take her down?“***

Such remarks operate at the intersection of dehumanization and age-related stereotypes, contributing to the symbolic devaluation of political actors.

We observed that these phenomena cannot be unequivocally attributed to a single political side. Analysis of social media, consistent with the underrepresentation observed in the interviews, indicates that pro-government female MPs speak less frequently in public about the violence they face. This phenomenon can be interpreted in the context of the token woman and patriarchal bargain.

The concept of the token woman<sup>12</sup> refers to actors whose presence is demonstratively ensured by the system through female representation, while they have no substantive influence on decision-making. The patriarchal bargain<sup>13</sup> ensures that the system validates only those women who accept its prescribed conditions and adopt its operational logic and narrative. A key element of this adaptation is restraining the public thematization of conflicts.

In this sense, silence is not passivity, but a structurally determined, system-rewarded adaptation strategy: a mode of operation that, by limiting individual agency, actually contributes to the reproduction of gender-based political violence.

## 4.6. Institutional Gaps and Interpretative Limitations

Based on the interviews and document analysis, and in the absence of formal legal and institutional frameworks, it becomes apparent that among MPs, the recognition of the structural nature of political violence against them is far from straightforward.

A significant share of respondents attributes violence against women politicians to an authoritarian mode of governance, including its gender norms, style, and the rise of a centralized, delegitimizing public discourse. This reflects broader discursive shifts accompanying democratic backsliding, which create conditions that enable and sustain gender-based political violence, while also reinforcing the instrumental use of gender ideology. At the same time, framing the issue solely as a byproduct of declining political culture risks obscuring accountability and limiting the identification of targeted legal and institutional responses.

Our interviewees' positions on the institutional handling of gender-based political violence sometimes do not align with the specific functioning of the phenomenon. Several respondents emphasized that the appropriate way to address violence against female politicians is through the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, expressing skepticism about regulating violence in politics as a standalone legal category:

***„Until we ratify the Istanbul Convention, there is no point in speaking specifically about protecting female politicians—the whole system is incomplete. If we create rules only for politicians, it could even backfire.“ (ID1)***

What is less widely recognized is the connection that the insufficiency of existing institutional frameworks directly leads to the compulsion for individual coping strategies. In the absence of independent, transparent, and consistently functioning complaint mechanisms, as well as legal and psychological support systems, individual and informal coping — or even the neglect of the problem — often emerges as a survival strategy; however, it cannot substitute for structural-level interventions.

The interviews highlighted that certain forms of violence — particularly sexist remarks, verbal aggression, and online harassment — are perceived as “a natural part of political work.” This normalization reduces the willingness to report incidents and reinforces an environment in which violence remains without consequences, thereby directly contributing to the limitation of women's political participation.

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12 Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books. <https://archive.org/details/menwomenofcorporookant>

13 Deniz Kandiyoti: Bargaining with patriarchy, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/089124388002003004>

## 5. Connection to the comparative analysis

The results of the interview study align closely with findings from the European Union and global research on gender-based violence against women politicians (VAWP). According to a 2024 briefing by the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), 85% of female Members of Parliament in the EU experience psychological violence, while 65% face sexist or sexualized attacks. In our study sample, a substantial majority of respondents reported psychological and online violence.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) global surveys from 2016 and 2018 found that 65% of female parliamentarians experienced<sup>15</sup> sexist attacks, a trend that is also reflected in the findings of the present research.

### 5.1. Comparative Framework

The present analysis is based on empirical research conducted within the Recognise, Resist, Rise Up project, which investigates gender-based political violence against female Members of Parliament in multiple European countries — including Czechia, Ireland, Germany, and Slovakia — alongside Hungary. The study examines the forms, mechanisms, and institutional responses to such violence. The comparative framework primarily allows the Hungarian data to be situated in an international context.

Comparability is ensured through methodological consistency: partner countries applied the same semi-structured interview protocol, worked with uniform coding categories, and adhered to a shared ethical procedure. This enables the Hungarian findings to be directly compared with data from other member states, with any differences attributable to political and institutional contexts rather than methodological variations.

From a comparative perspective, particular significance lies in those national characteristics where the Hungarian situation diverges from patterns identified in other countries.

### 5.2. National Specificities

In the Hungarian context, the “anti-gender” discourse is not merely one political narrative among others, but has become a structuring element of government communication. The illiberal political system associated with Viktor Orbán, characterized by power concentration, consistently employs the concept of “gender ideology” as a symbolic enemy, representing both external and internal forces perceived as threatening the national identity.

This discursive framework is embedded in a hypermasculine political logic, emphasizing order, control, and hierarchy, while positioning female political actors as deviations or threats. Within this system, women’s political presence is not only a political matter but also a normative issue, closely tied to the maintenance of traditional gender roles.

Consequently, this discursive framework functions not merely as a communication tool but also creates a normative environment that legitimizes attacks against female politicians and contributes to the normalization of gender-based political violence. From this perspective, the current patterns of violence against

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14 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/759600/EPRS\\_BRI\(2024\)759600\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/759600/EPRS_BRI(2024)759600_EN.pdf)

15 <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

female politicians in Hungary can be interpreted as a consistent European example of the institutionalization of anti-gender politics.

From this viewpoint, the Hungarian situation exhibits country-specific characteristics along four additional dimensions.

### **5.2.1. Systemic Media Concentration and the Infrastructure of Violence**

Over the past decade, Hungary has shown a significant decline in international democracy indices, and it remains among the lowest-performing countries in the European Union in terms of media freedom.<sup>16</sup> The dominance of a government-linked media system and the marginalization of independent outlets have led to a highly distorted public discourse, while issues of violence against women primarily appear as the concern of under-represented political actors. Consequently, the main platform for opposition voices is increasingly restricted to social media, a level of concentration that is generally less pronounced in other EU member states.

### **5.2.2. The Absence of an Institutional Protection Framework and Double Standards**

Hungary has not ratified the Istanbul Convention; moreover, the National Assembly, following a government-initiated proposal, adopted a political resolution rejecting accession to the Convention<sup>17</sup>, and violence against women in politics is not recognized as a separate legal category under the current legal framework. This constitutes an exception among EU member states, as most have at least partially incorporated the Convention's standards. The absence of a legal protection framework has particularly severe consequences in a political environment where — as documented in the interview research — politicians experience political pressure through institutional mechanisms such as the obstruction of data requests, restrictions on speaking opportunities, and the withholding of salaries.

### **5.2.3. The Structural Deficit of Representation**

Hungary ranks among the lowest in the EU in terms of women's parliamentary representation (26<sup>th</sup>): the 15.6% share achieved in the 2022 elections is less than half of the EU average (33.6%, EuroParl 2026).<sup>18</sup> This figure alone contextualizes the research findings: in political arenas where women are already marginal actors, the normalization of violence and the mechanisms of structural exclusion are more pronounced. The concepts of the token woman and the patriarchal bargain are particularly dominant in Hungary, as women's political presence is often symbolic, sustained by a "showcase representation" logic: the visibility of individual female actors obscures systemic inequalities.

The political system actively resists change: verbal aggression and sexist delegitimization serve as tools to maintain the existing power order, and the authoritarian functioning further entrenches male-dominated "gatekeeper" structures.

A specific feature of Hungary is the hyper-masculine concentration of power associated with its authoritarian political system, which reinforces the mechanism of preventive exclusion through sexist narratives

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16 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/freedom-world/2024>

<https://www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/>

17 <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2020-2-H1-41>

18 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/edn-20260305-1>

targeting opposition women, the reduction of women's roles to biological functions, the absence of quotas, and institutional silence.

The “structure of silence” is a distinctive phenomenon in the Hungarian political context, tightly linking political loyalty with gendered role expectations.

#### **5.2.4. The Intertwinement of Political Polarization and Gender-Based Violence**

The Hungarian political arena is deeply polarized, and this polarization permeates the structure of gender-based violence as well. The narratives of violence — such as “traitor,” “foreign agent,” “Soros pawn” on the opposition side; “puppet,” “host body,” “political soldier” on the government side — merge with gendered devaluation, making gender-based violence inseparable from the broader brutality of political discourse.

Compared to trends observed in other EU member states, in Hungary this dynamic is amplified by unequal media conditions and the fact that hate-driven narratives are systematically fed by governmental or government-sponsored communication, giving the phenomenon a particularly sharp form. The research findings indicate that in this context, gender-based violence not only restricts women's political participation but also undermines the legitimacy of their presence in the democratic public sphere.

## **6. Communication and Dissemination**

The findings of this analytical country report are useful on multiple levels. The identified mechanisms, perpetrator patterns, and resilience strategies contribute to the comparative analysis of gender-based political violence, while the methodological insights — particularly regarding low participation rates and the use of complementary approaches — provide relevant lessons for other contexts.

The results also lay the groundwork for raising awareness of gender-based political violence, for transferring resilience strategies within training frameworks, and for developing party-independent reporting and case-handling approaches as well as policy recommendations to address attacks on women in public life.

Communicating the findings aims not only to maintain scientific credibility but also to increase societal awareness, reinforcing the public understanding of violence against women in politics and supporting efforts to improve the legal and institutional environment. At the same time, the communication strategy minimizes the risk of political instrumentalization in the post-election context. Training-oriented use of the results is given particular emphasis.

The communication strategy is based on two potential scenarios:

**Unchanged political environment:** The focus remains on making structural problems visible, strengthening resilience strategies, and activating civil and professional networks.

**Political opening:** There is an opportunity for more direct policy utilization of the findings, with particular attention to developing legal and institutional frameworks and establishing independent reporting and case-handling mechanisms.

In both scenarios, a core principle is that communication relies on systemic patterns rather than isolated cases, ensuring the protection of participants and preserving the professional integrity of the research.

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings suggest that violence against women politicians in Hungary is rooted in an institutional and discursive environment that actively shapes both the conditions of political competition and the boundaries of participation. In a system characterized by the concentration of power, where “gender” is instrumentalized as a political tool, women actors are particularly exposed to delegitimizing and personal attacks.

In this context, violence functions not only as a deterrent but also as a mechanism of informal regulation within the political sphere, shaping who can participate, under what conditions, and with what legitimacy. Various forms of violence — psychological, online, sexual, symbolic, structural, and preventive — interact and reinforce one another, creating a system that actively regulates the conditions and limits of political participation.

The six identified mechanisms — normalization, personalization and depoliticization, cumulative and multi-arena violence, structural embeddedness, organized perpetrator configurations, and self-perpetuating cycles — operate not in isolation but as a mutually reinforcing system. Most attacks are not aimed at political content but target the person, body, gender, and legitimate presence of female politicians. This personalization and depoliticization serve as tools to structurally undermine political agency.

Much of the violence operates through less visible mechanisms: restricting speaking opportunities, limiting access to resources, relativizing performance, and organizational norms that encourage silence. In this way, violence is not merely a reaction to female presence but a structural instrument for regulating the boundaries of the political field. This implies that isolated interventions are insufficient, as institutional gaps at any point allow the entire system to reproduce itself.

It is particularly important to note that even the opportunity to speak is unequally structured. The access difficulties and withdrawals observed during the research indicate that publicly discussing gender-based political violence can, in itself, be risky. Silence, therefore, is not merely a methodological limitation but an integral part of the phenomenon.

Both the interview and document analysis confirm that the silence of women from certain political groups, along with the mechanisms of tokenism and the patriarchal bargain, indicate that the current system conditions women’s political participation. Within these conditions, the public discussion of gender-based violence is not tolerated. This silence constitutes a form of violence itself, with the effect of isolation — cross-party solidarity cannot develop because the institutional conditions for sharing experiences are lacking.

Female politicians’ coping strategies are typically individual and informal: avoidance, technical defenses, normalization, and self-limitation. While these strategies enable continued functioning, they do not transform the structural conditions that reproduce violence. Resilience, therefore, often represents adaptation rather than a systemic solution. Strengthening individual coping is necessary but not sufficient on its own.

A key normative conclusion of the research is that experiencing gender-based political violence, which can be identified regardless of party affiliation, could in principle form the basis for cross-party solidarity and collective engagement with the issue. However, this requires structural conditions: an institutional framework in which speaking out carries no political risk and in which shared vulnerability can override party loyalty. Such a framework does not currently exist in Hungary, and establishing it constitutes one of the most important structural recommendations.

# Recommendations

## 1. Legal and policy level

Gender-based political violence against politicians/in politics should be recognized as an independent legal category in the Criminal Code and the Electoral Act. This requires initiating social and professional debate, as the prevalence of the phenomenon justifies developing politically contextualized guidelines addressing online attacks, reputational violence, and coordinated campaigns. The current practice of applying a higher tolerance threshold for public figures, which effectively legitimizes gender-based attacks, needs to be reconsidered. Ratification of the Istanbul Convention is an essential step, which has already been completed in the vast majority of EU Member States.

## 3. Political parties and organizations

Parties must acknowledge their role in reproducing the problem. Public condemnation alone is insufficient; internal norms, training programs, and leadership accountability are required. Supporting female politicians is an organizational, not merely communicational, issue, and this applies equally to both governing and opposition parties.

## 5. Training and public discourse

Many forms of gender-based political violence are normalized. Targeted training and awareness-raising are needed in both political and media environments. The quality of public discourse directly affects the conditions for democratic participation. Improvement requires political will, as well as the active involvement of the media and support from civil society throughout the process.

## 2. Institutional and parliamentary level

Establish an independent, confidential complaint-handling mechanism within the National Assembly that provides genuine legal, psychological, and digital support. Implement transparent and mandatory data collection on violent incidents targeting representatives. Regularly monitor the composition of committees and allocation of institutional resources by gender. Develop and enforce internal protocols addressing harassment and sexist behavior.

## 4. Online platforms and digital security

Platforms must take active responsibility for removing threatening and sexist content. Rapid-response support systems and digital security training for female politicians and public actors are necessary, particularly for those with limited resources. Address coordinated fake-profile networks and algorithmic amplification at both EU and national levels — the responsibility for managing the situation cannot be shifted solely to the affected politicians.

## 6. Research and monitoring

Long-term monitoring systems are necessary, with particular attention to the local level, electoral periods, and women entering politics, where preventive exclusion is especially strong. The findings of this research should be interpreted in the context of women's political participation rates, and EU-level comparative analysis will further clarify the position of Hungarian-specific patterns within the broader European picture.