MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN NORTH MACEDONIA

2025

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Reporting Diversity Network

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Introduction

People often hate what they do not understand or perceive as a threat. When repeated often enough, such fears become embedded in collective thinking, shaping how societies view “the other”.

This is where the media becomes central. Media outlets do not merely report events; they interpret and frame them. The choice of words, images, and headlines can either calm fears and foster understanding or amplify insecurities and feed hostility. In North Macedonia, where politics, ethnicity, and identity are deeply intertwined, the media often serves as both a mirror and a magnifier of existing tensions.

Monitoring the media, therefore, is not simply about tracking information. It is about examining how narratives are constructed, how hate speech and disinformation spread, and how these processes can be influenced or modified in order to form counter-narrative.

In the period from January 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, most recorded cases of hate speech targeted ethnicity, followed by political opponents. When analyzing multiple categories, it became evident that politicians from different ethnic backgrounds were among the most frequent targets. This pattern reflects the deeply rooted ethnic and political divisions in North Macedonia.

Hate speech directed toward the Albanian population reinforced the divisive narrative portraying Albanians as the “core problem” of Macedonian society. This trend was confirmed by both narrative and sentiment analyses, which revealed that the highest intensity of hate was consistently based on ethnicity.

Another category with a high number of cases was gender-based hate, especially targeting women. Alongside ethnic and political lines, we observed harmful narratives that focused on women’s personal lives and appearance rather than their professional roles. Very often, domestic violence was openly justified in comments, accompanied by narratives that confined women to conservative roles and prescribed how a woman “should” behave. During this monitoring period, such narratives were further amplified by state officials and representatives of the church, who often linked them to a traditional family context, defining how a “proper” family should look and how women should behave within it.

The main generators of hate speech were private individuals, primarily through Facebook posts and comments on online portals. While these portals generally do not publish hate speech directly, their sensationalistic and unethical reporting often fuels harmful narratives, which is why they ranked second in terms of generating hate speech. Although these platforms have an obligation to moderate content, they frequently fail or refuse to do so.

Another factor contributing to the high levels of hate speech in the media is the existing regulation, which is often poorly enforced, with high-profile politicians frequently excluded from accountability. Although North Macedonia has legislation to combat hate speech, enforcement remains weak and inconsistent. The Digital Services Act (DSA) has not yet been implemented and given that most hate speech is found on Facebook, the need for effective regulation is even more urgent. North Macedonia is making efforts to implement these measures as part of the EU negotiation process.

This report is part of the regional monitoring of hate speech in the media conducted by partner organizations across Western Balkan countries, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, under the Reporting Diversity Network.

Methodological Approach

This report uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure comprehensive and in-depth analysis.

The research applies a broad concept of hate speech, without limiting the characteristics for identifying a targeted individual or group. The Reporting Diversity Network defines hate speech as targeting individuals or groups based on their identity, without restricting its findings to definitions contained in national legal frameworks. In addition, the monitoring also includes harmful representations of marginalized groups.

Quantitative analysis was applied to measure the frequency, distribution, and reach of incidents, while qualitative analysis explored the narratives, framing, and broader social and political contexts in which these incidents occurred. The collected findings were classified according to several criteria. These include the group or individual targeted, the generator of hate speech, the type of hateful or discriminatory discourse, the reach of the content, the type of media in which it was identified, and the broader context of the event.

For sentiment analysis, the report applies the George Washington University methodology, which categorizes incidents into six levels:

1. Disagreement - rhetoric that challenges a group's claims, ideas, and beliefs;
2. Negative actions - rhetoric describing negative nonviolent actions associated with the group;
3. Negative character - rhetoric including non-violent characterizations and insults;
4. Demonizing and dehumanizing - rhetoric assigning sub-human or superhuman characteristics;
5. Instigation of violence - rhetoric implying or calling for physical harm, literal or metaphorical;
6. Death - rhetoric implying the killing or elimination of a group.

The monitoring covered traditional media (newspapers, television, and radio), online portals, and social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, X [formerly Twitter], and TikTok). Particular attention was given to the statements of public officials and other influential figures, given their capacity to shape public opinion.

Monitoring was conducted in both Macedonian and Albanian languages, reflecting the linguistic and ethnic composition of North Macedonia, where a considerable proportion of the population is ethnic Albanian. This bilingual approach ensures that hate speech and harmful representation are captured across the full spectrum of the country's media landscape.

Narratives and sub-narratives

Quantitative analysis

During the monitoring period from January 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025 (18 months), we recorded a total of 138 incidents of hate speech. Some of these incidents were assigned to multiple categories, reflecting the complexity and overlap of different forms of hate speech. Of all recorded hate-speech incidents, 31.8% were directed at people based on their ethnicity. The second most common target was political or ideological opponents with 25.2%, followed by gender, which represented 19.9% of the incidents. This pattern is largely influenced by the presidential and parliamentary elections that were held in the period of May-April 2024 and the upcoming local elections in October. Alongside the interplay of ethnic dynamics and the polarization between Albanian and Macedonian parties, which has led to an increase in interethnic hate speech.

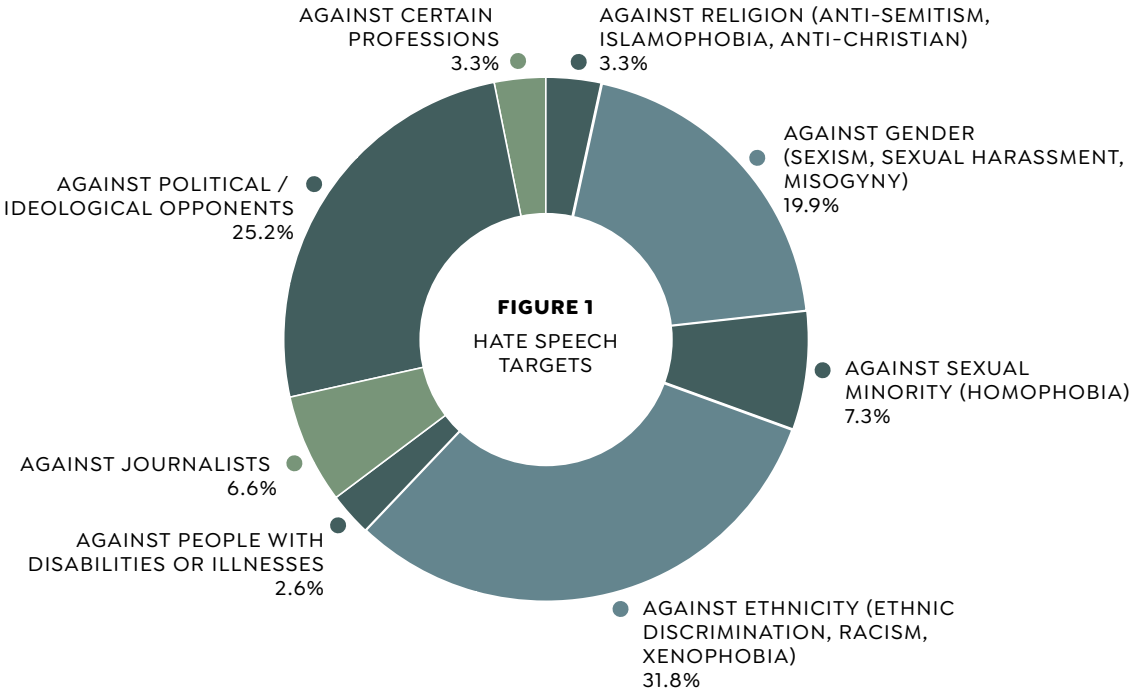


FIGURE 1
HATE SPEECH TARGETS

Furthermore, hate speech was directed toward sexual minorities, accounting for 7.3% of incidents, and against journalists, representing 6.6%. The least targeted groups were religious communities 3.3% and people with disabilities 2.6%.

When it comes to the type of hateful and discriminatory discourse, almost half of the recorded cases (41.2%) contained insults, including personal, denigrating, and humiliating language. This was followed by negative group labeling, stereotyping, and expressions of hostility, accounting for 20.9% of cases. Inflammatory speech (such as content related to conflict situations, repeated messages from different actors, or prolonged coverage by the same media) accounted for 11.3%, while incitement to violence represented 10.7%, sharing the third place among types of hate speech.

The spreading of harmful lies, including misinformation and disinformation, is another phenomenon that ranked high, accounting for 9.0% of cases. This highlights the connection between disinformation and hate speech, showing how false or misleading information is often used to provoke and fuel hatred.

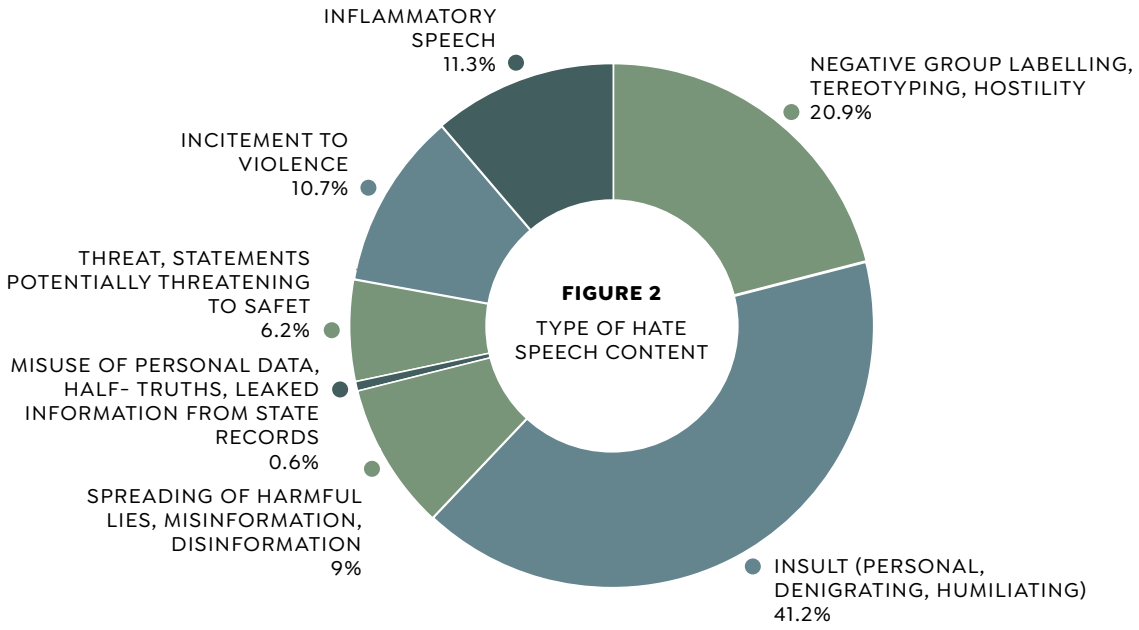


FIGURE 2
TYPE OF HATE SPEECH CONTENT

Half (52.7%) of the main generators of hate speech during this monitoring period were private individuals. Politicians, state officials and political parties ranked second at 16.0%, followed by journalists at 14.0%. Influencers and bloggers accounted for 8.7% reflecting the lack of regulation of influencers in the country. The amount of hate speech coming from private individuals is alarming. This often occurs through the sharing of media content using sensationalistic headlines, or simply by reposting issues, where the accompanying comments themselves are hateful. This opens the discussion on the importance of moderating comments on online media platforms.

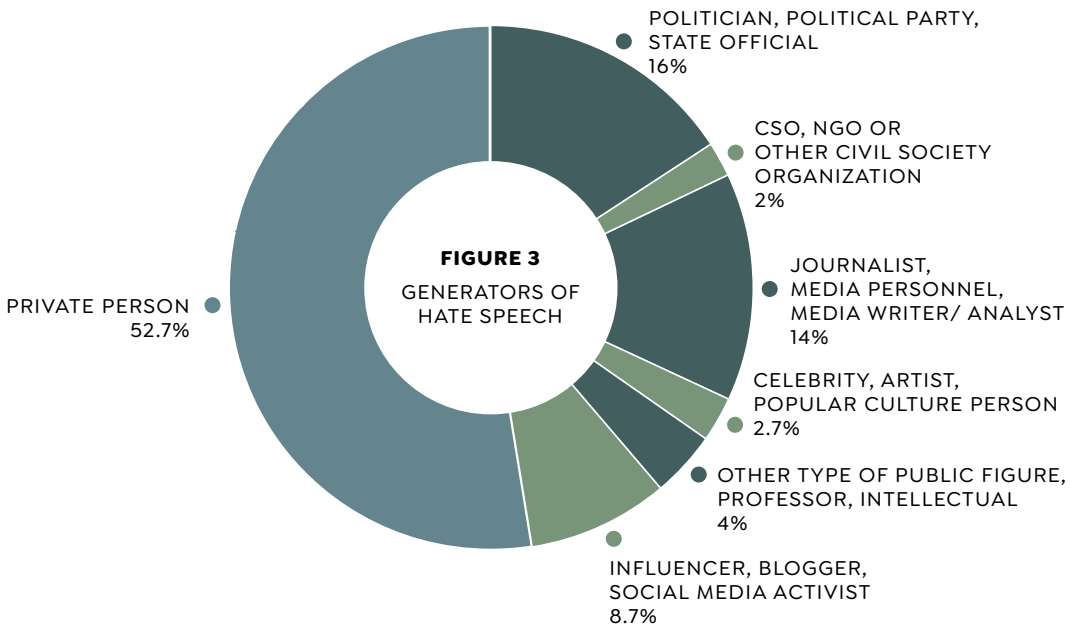


FIGURE 3
GENERATORS OF HATE SPEECH

Ethnic hate narratives

Harmful and hateful narratives targeted ethnic minorities in 31.8% of cases in North Macedonia, especially when it came to ethnic Albanians. This reflects the ethnic polarization of society and the legacy of past conflicts, but also the political and sociological context in which Macedonians and Albanians live. In many cases, most of the incidents that fell into multiple categories were those targeting both ethnicity and political opponents.

Albanians are often portrayed as intruders trying to overtake the country, frequently depicted as culturally inferior and labeled as a "tribe" or even the "cancer" of society. This rhetoric is present in the majority of incidents targeting ethnicity and is repeatedly amplified by the media.

This trend is also visible among young people. In March 2024, a student party in Skopje took an unexpected turn when the playing of an Albanian song toward the end of the event sparked controversy and triggered a wave of hate speech on social media. The students who organized the party were labeled as traitors. A nationalist group named Patriotsko društvo (Patriotic Society), self-proclaimed as "a young, ambitious group of patriots filled with enthusiasm", criticized the inclusion of the song in the program. On another occasion, this group reacted when unknown individuals wrote insults in the Albanian language and defaced the monument located on the quay in Gostivar.

On the post, they wrote: "There is no negotiating with Shiptars because they don't understand reason", using the derogatory term Shiptar and reinforcing the harmful narrative that living together and mutual understanding are impossible. The comments under the post further echoed and amplified these narratives.

Another example is an anti-Albanian campaign launched on social media after a post appeared on Facebook from a suspicious closed account. In the post, the author claimed without providing any further details that at the cash register in the "Kipper" market in Norh Macedonia, a saleswoman refused to give product prices in Macedonian, allegedly insisting on speaking in her native language first.

Following this, the campaign spread to Instagram and X in North Macedonia, calling for a boycott of the "Kipper" and "Kit Go" markets solely because their owners are Albanian.

The same narrative about language has repeatedly sparked hate speech, as in the case of Besija Iljazi's appointment as economic director of the Clinic for Toxicology. The headline labeled the appointment as "scandalous," fueling a wave of comments over her lack of Macedonian language skills and past political connections, despite the Ministry of Health stating her appointment complied with the law.

Comments included extreme hate speech, such as: "This is the cancer of our country, we should close all Albanian universities", targeting the Albanian community, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and intolerance.

Even celebrations and national symbols are sometimes used to fuel hate speech and are perceived negatively. During celebrations in Skopje on November 28–29, 2024, videos showing the burning and desecration of the Macedonian flag first, and then the Albanian flag circulated on social media, fueling ethnic tensions and hate speech. Media outlets and political actors amplified the content, further escalating the situation.

Following the burning of the Macedonian national flag, the fan group City Park Boys displayed a banner reading: "The sun you are stepping on will burn out" referencing and responding to the previous day's events.

Political or ideological opponents were the second most frequently targeted group, making up 25.2% of cases including those between the opposition and the ruling party, as well as between Albanian and Macedonian parties, as previously mentioned. This highly polarized political context, combined with ethnic tensions and the two election periods, has contributed to an increase in hate speech compared to previous monitoring period, while also remaining elevated within the same year.

The name change remains persistent topic in the discourse between the opposition and the ruling party. While one side claims it will restore the old name, the other has been labeled as traitors or "Severdzan" a derogatory term meaning "North Macedonians" used to label those who accept the name change.

Opposition leader Venko Filipče's criticism of Mickoski for attending the NATO summit despite his past opposition to NATO membership and the name change reignited familiar political narratives and hatred. Among the comments was: "In which country did you come to power in 2017? To the North? The North should take you away, you mentally ill and deranged".

Another example is the tragedy in Kočani, where 61 young people lost their lives. The subsequent protests were portrayed as anti-government, and communication quickly became hostile toward the protesters, accusing them of being pawns of the opposition.

Milenko Nedelkovski, a journalist affiliated with the ruling party, even went so far as to call for the deaths of the loved ones of demonstrators. Online media published his post with headlines:

"Milenko's curse: May God grant that the deaths of the loved ones of those who protested serve as a warning, so that others may make advantage of and protest".

When political issues acquire an ethnic dimension, narratives emerge suggesting that the justice system favors Albanians over Macedonians. These narratives are often amplified by political parties with anti-Albanian stances, as in the case of Skopje Mayor Danela Arsovska, who sought to sanction illegal building constructions in the Albanian-majority municipality of Cair. Arsovska was attacked during an inspection, a confrontation that was framed by some as politically and ethnically motivated, further fueling tensions and public debate over justice and accountability.

The communication from both sides has been confrontational. Arsovska herself stated: "No one is afraid of you, along with the garbage you plan to bring, we'll clean you up too!"

However, video footage shows that Arsovska was physically attacked, verbally insulted and threatened with rape, violence and harm to her children.

Some online comments included explicitly hateful and ethnically charged language, such as: "Shiptar dogs, they don't know any better"! and "Incestuous tribe" while other aimed at the Minister of Internal Affairs "Tell this to your mother at home, you are a drug addict, a louse and a villager".

Another political figure, Petar Bogojevski, has been noted for using political rhetoric that sometimes amplifies ethnic tensions and spreads divisive narratives. There was an attempt to appoint Bogojevski as director of the National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility, which oversees programs like Erasmus+ that are meant to promote European values such as inclusion, democracy, human rights, and respect for diversity. However, his history of hate speech and offensive rhetoric directly contradicted these principles, prompting a reaction from the European Commission and preventing his appointment.

Hateful narratives against gender

Hateful narratives targeting gender were the third most common category, making up (19.9%) of all recorded cases. While often mixed with ethnicity, religion and politics, these narratives ultimately targeted women, and appeared in both Macedonian-language and Albanian-language media.

Very often, when we examined articles about domestic violence against women, we saw not only unethical reporting but also comments justifying the violence and blaming the victim.

“Well, if she was a whore, a drinker, and a gambler, and she made her mother feel ashamed, it's a good thing the old woman didn't grab her knife and snap her neck like a chicken. It's a good thing she only got away with a beating”.

No woman was spared from harmful narratives—public figures like politicians, artists, and journalists were simply the most visible examples. Instead of being criticized for their professional work, they were almost always targeted with insults and demeaning remarks about their appearance or private life. For example, the country’s first woman president, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, faced ageist attacks, while female journalists were demeaned by colleagues in ways that fueled further hostility. Similarly, singer Adelina Tahiri was targeted after publicly sharing that she was a victim of domestic violence. These cases demonstrate that gendered hate speech follows consistent patterns, reducing women to personal attacks rather than engaging with their professional achievements regardless of age, profession, or background.

Another example of gendered attacks is the harassment of transgender people, who have been targeted not only by mainstream media but also by anti-gender movement and religious figures. In North Macedonia, transgender individuals, particularly trans women remain a marginalized group with limited visibility and representation in public life. Anti-gender movements, supported by conservative organizations and religious actors, exploit societal conservatism to frame transgender rights as a threat to children and traditional family values. This has fueled disinformation campaigns, public protests, and institutional barriers, including the cancellation of educational events on gender-affirming care, reinforcing stigma and restricting access to healthcare, education, and social recognition.

A striking example is Bishop Jakov Stobiski’s statement at the conference Serbian Identity, Serbian Language, and the Law of Gender Equality on January 16, 2024, in Belgrade, which was picked up by online media and used as a headline.

“Bishop Jakov Stobiski: incredible connection between the progression of gender ideology and a kind of liberalization of pedophilia on a global level”.

The same rhetoric was later echoed by the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party. At an event organized by the youth organizations, the Prime Minister announced major changes to student standards. In his speech, he stated: “We must fight for a country full of young people: for many children in kindergartens, for many children in schools, for many young people in universities. That means a marital union between a husband and a wife.”

When such narratives are adopted by political actors and translated into state rhetoric, they gain legitimacy and wider reach. In this way, anti-gender narratives shift from the margins of public debate into official political discourse.

Hateful narratives against sexual minorities

Hateful narratives against sexual minorities accounted for (7.3%) of the monitored cases. As in previous years, the Pride Parade triggered a rise in hate speech, but this year a counter-parade was organized in Bitola. Certain media amplified this framing, reinforcing harmful narratives about LGBTQI+ rights and visibility, while the Church further legitimized it by promoting the counter-parade as the "true pride parade," portraying the "real family" as home with mother and father, emphasizing Orthodox Christian values as the sole foundation for raising future generations.

Another harmful media practice in presenting this population is treating them merely as statistics, which leads to dehumanization. One outlet, for example, reposted an old article on Facebook with the headline about "how many homosexuals live in North Macedonia," which, despite being outdated data, provoked a flood of negative comments under the post.

A similar case occurred with an article about HIV-positive people and AIDS, which was again presented only through statistics. In the comments section, however, the discussion quickly turned into hate speech against homosexuals, with users posting remarks such as "You want an LGBT parade, and you'll end up with AIDS.

This shows how dehumanizing framing and the misuse of statistics can amplify prejudice and stigma against sexual minorities. Even neutral or factual information, when presented without context or exploited by the public, can become a tool for spreading hate and reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

Sentiment analysis

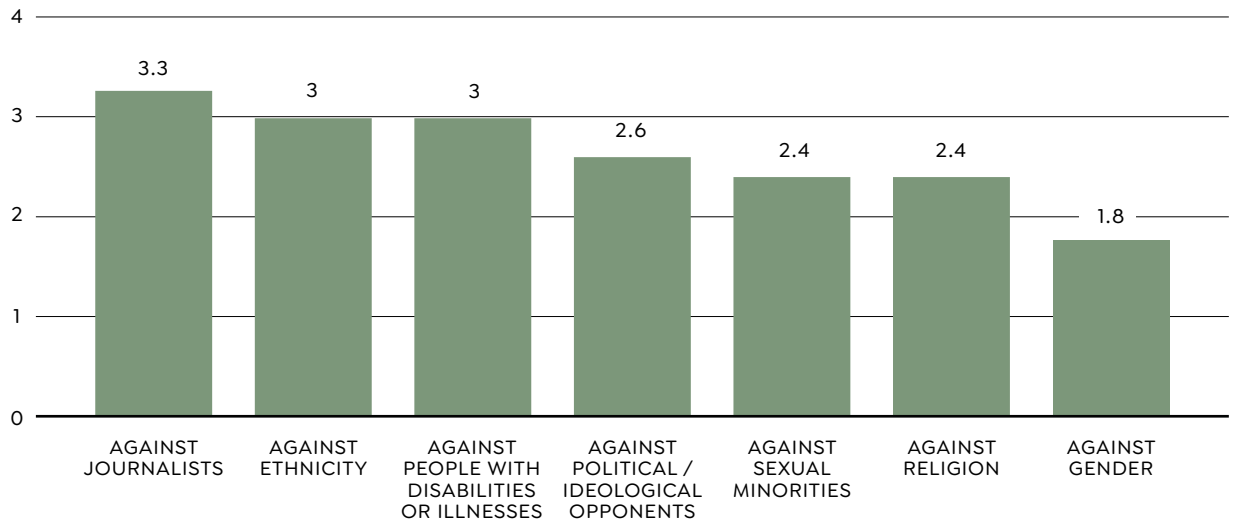
Reported cases were assessed on a scale from one to six based on the intensity of sentiment expressed, with one representing the lowest intensity and six the highest, indicating calls for literal killing or elimination of the targeted group. The overall average score across all cases was 2.76.

The highest intensity of hate was directed against journalists and fact-checkers, averaging 3.3. These attacks escalated particularly after Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg labeled them of being political bias and the platform's decision to remove fact-checking in the United States became a widely discussed topic. This global narrative was echoed locally, fueling distrust and leading to direct threats of violence against fact-checkers and media workers.

Hate based on ethnicity scored 3.0 and against political or ideological opponents with average score 2.63 also ranked high. These categories frequently overlapped, with the most severe rhetoric observed against political opponents belonging to other ethnic groups.

Religion-based hate 2.4 and homophobia 2.4 showed somewhat lower intensity, while the lowest was recorded in hate targeting gender, with average score 1.8. Hate directed at people with disabilities or illnesses also averaged 3.0, though this finding is less representative given the small number of recorded cases.

Figure 4: Average sentiment score per targeted group/individual



Among all recorded incidents, disagreement was the most frequent category, appearing in 50 cases. This was followed by negative character with 28 cases, violence with 24, and negative actions with 22. Less frequent were demonizing and dehumanizing with 10 cases and call for death with 4. The distribution shows that while extreme forms of harm like violence and death are present, most incidents involve verbal or ideological conflicts, highlighting the prominence of disagreements and negative characterizations in the overall pattern of harmful content.

Visibility analysis

This monitoring covered both traditional media outlets and social media, with priority given to cases with high visibility—those appearing in national news or on influential social media pages with wide reach.

Out of all recorded cases, the largest share originated from Facebook 60.9%, online portals followed with 28,7% cases, while television channels accounted for 4,6%, Instagram for 3,4%, and YouTube for 2,3%.

It is important to note that online portals themselves mostly did not publish explicit hate speech in their news articles. However, on Facebook page of the portal, they often posted sensationalistic headlines and stories, which in turn triggered hate speech in the comments. Although portals are obliged to moderate and remove such comments, they generally leave them visible, allowing hate to circulate unchecked.

By comparison, television and Instagram had fewer recorded cases, while YouTube showed limited but notable instances of harmful content. Still, Facebook clearly remains the main driver of online hate, both through direct posts and the amplification of content from traditional media outlets.

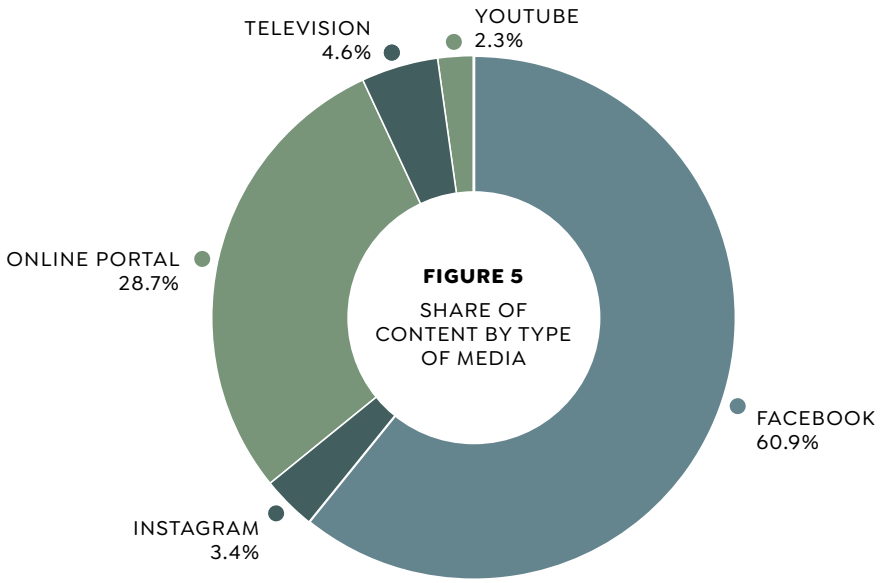


FIGURE 5
SHARE OF CONTENT BY TYPE OF MEDIA

Comparative analysis

Hateful narratives in the media in North Macedonia often share many common features. Most cases fall under multiple categories, meaning that when hate is incited, several aspects of a person's identity are attacked simultaneously. Some of the cases involved political opponents, who were targeted not only because of their political affiliation but also because of their ethnicity. Similarly, women politicians or artists faced hate not only for their professions but also because of their private life, reflecting the intersection of political and gender-based bias.

An illustrative example is singer Adelina Tahiri, who has faced hate across multiple media and identity dimensions. In Albanian-language media, she was criticized for marrying a Macedonian, while in Macedonian-language media, comments were hateful because she is Albanian. On top of this, both media landscapes attacked her for the age gap in her marriage, labeling her a "gold digger" and using other derogatory terms implying she married for money. This reflects the intersection of ethnic, gender, and social norms in the hate directed at her.

Another example is Deputy Prime Minister for Good Governance and Transparency Arben Fetai, who received a death threat via his official email after his recent statement supporting the removal of the constitutional 20 percent definition for the Albanian language. On Facebook, he published the message he received, which the media then picked up, producing headlines such as: "A bullet in the head for you, you Shipo Fetai". This case highlights how political positions and ethnic identity can intersect in online hate speech and how media coverage can amplify such threats.

Sports fields are often spaces where hateful, ethnic-based chanting occurs, and related fan groups become especially active when posting about such events. One example is the act of vandalism in Drachevo, Skopje, where an icon of Jesus Christ was destroyed in a local park and a Quran was left beside it. The incident was reported with sensationalism in the media, further fueling interfaith and interethnic tensions. The fan group Komiti responded with the statement: "We will not forgive".

Interestingly, media outlets amplified Komiti's statement by placing it prominently in their coverage. However, many comments from citizens under these reports struck a different tone, emphasizing that no true believer would commit such an act and, unlike typical patterns, these comments were not hateful.

This case reflects a broader pattern in the country, where Islam is almost always framed through the lens of ethnicity. Such framing is often amplified by the media and sports fan groups, turning religious incidents into tools for fueling interethnic tensions and serving political purposes.

Preventive and ex-post actions to combat hate and disinformation narratives

In North Macedonia, hate speech is primarily regulated through the Criminal Code, which criminalizes incitement to national, racial, religious, or other forms of discriminatory hatred, discord, or intolerance. The 2014 amendments strengthened these provisions, including Article 319, which imposes prison sentences for causing or inciting hatred based on identity, and Article 394-d, which addresses the online dissemination of racist and xenophobic material.

Judicial practice shows some progress. In a landmark case, a resident of Demir Kapija received a suspended one-year prison sentence for posting violent hate speech against the LGBTQI+ community on Facebook. This marked the first conviction in the country for hate speech based on sexual orientation, demonstrating the legal system's capacity to respond to online threats and incitement.

Media monitoring indicates that the main generators of hate speech are private individuals, primarily posting in Facebook comments, which often go unsanctioned. Online portals often publish unethical or sensationalistic headlines that can provoke hate, and complaints are reviewed by the Council of Media Ethics, which publishes decisions but lacks enforcement power. Politicians also contribute to the problem, often using hate speech without consequences; for example, Petar Bogoevski has faced multiple complaints for hate speech but has never been sanctioned and was even awarded a managerial position in the Erasmus program.

When it comes to disinformation, these acts are not criminalized or legally sanctioned in North Macedonia. Instead, they are primarily addressed through fact-checking initiatives, such as the Truthmeter, which verifies and labels false or misleading content without imposing legal consequences on those spreading it.

Overall, this demonstrates that while North Macedonia has established legislation against hate speech, there is often insufficient political will to enforce it consistently. Sanctions are applied unevenly, and high-profile cases, particularly involving politicians, often go unpunished. This inconsistent enforcement, reinforced by societal narratives suggesting the law is applied unequally, contributes to the normalization of discriminatory and hateful behavior.

Conclusion

The monitoring has shown just how deeply hate speech is embedded within public discourse in North Macedonia. Ethnic, political, and gender-based narratives dominate, often overlapping and reinforcing each other. An analysis of 138 cases revealed that ethnic minorities, particularly Albanians, remain frequent targets, often portrayed in ways that dehumanize and stigmatize them. Terms like “cancer”, “Shiptar”, and “tribe” are used to construct a narrative of fearmongering, framing “Macedonians as victims who have lost sovereignty over their own state”. Within this narrative, hating Albanians becomes equated with being patriotic, while accepting them, or other marginalized groups like LGBTQI+ people is framed as traitorous. When combined with the ideal of a “patriot” who rejects the current state name, despises Albanians and sexual minorities, strictly follows religious doctrine, and adheres to conservative family norms, this narrative effectively divides Macedonians into two categories: the “true patriots” and the so-called traitors, or “Severdzan”.

Gender was also a dominant category, and many cases included a gender component, especially when it came to women. Although the monitoring was conducted in both Macedonian- and Albanian-language media, there was little difference in the patterns of gender-based hate speech. In both languages, narratives consistently criticized and insulted women based on their private lives rather than their professional roles. This demonstrates that, across ethnic lines, there is still a limited sense of gender equality, and harmful stereotypes about women’s behavior and roles remain deeply ingrained in public discourse.

Social media platforms are significant channels for the dissemination of hate speech, with most harmful content coming from private individuals. Following them are online media outlets that publish sensationalistic and unethical content. This highlights that media do not even need to directly publish hate speech, simply mentioning an ethnicity in a headline or covering a sensationalized personal story, or sometimes even an ordinary event, is enough to trigger a flood of hateful comments. On one hand, this reflects the deep divisions in society and the impersonal nature of social media, where people feel they can say anything without consequence. On the other hand, it underscores the urgent need for effective moderation of comments and content, as well as improving media literacy among a population that remains vulnerable to manipulation and hate.

Among these private individuals, we often find politicians who use their profiles to stir hate, either by creating incidents or sharing statements that reflect personal opinions rather than official institutional positions. Media outlets pick up these statements and publish them as news, amplifying their reach. This practice, combined with the lack of sanctions, creates a situation where, even though laws against hate speech exist, enforcement is left largely to political or moral judgment. The absence of accountability allows hate speech to persist, fueling further division and animosity. This underscores the urgent need for positive narratives that provide alternative perspectives and counter harmful rhetoric.

Reporting Diversity Network

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