

Year of  
2025



وحدة دعم المرأة  
Women's Support Unit  
وحدة دعم المرأة  
sabadul gurna adimii



المفوضية الوطنية  
العليا للانتخابات  
High National Elections Commission

# Annual Report on Monitoring Online Violence Against women in the Electoral context in Libya



supported by



## Opening Remark

Amid the political transitions taking place in Libya, ensuring the integrity and inclusiveness of the electoral process becomes especially significant—not merely as a procedural requirement but as a fundamental pathway to strengthening the public’s trust and building legitimate and stable institutions .

This report offers an in-depth analytical reading of one of the emerging challenges facing this process: the rise of online violence against women in elections, with all its direct repercussions on equal opportunities, freedom of participation, and the integrity of the public sphere.

The findings indicate that this form of violence is no longer confined to individual interactions; rather, it has evolved into more organized and impactful forms, escalating notably during the critical phases of the electoral process in close connection with the dynamics of political polarization and attempts to influence public opinion and institutional trust.

Acting within its mandate, the High National Elections Commission (HNEC) affirms its commitment to addressing this phenomenon within an integrated institutional framework. This framework is based on developing monitoring and analysis tools, strengthening reporting and response mechanisms, activating relevant regulatory frameworks, and expanding partnerships with rule-of-law institutions and relevant national entities.

The HNEC further affirms that combating online violence against women in elections requires a cross-cutting response that integrates technical, legal, institutional, and awareness-raising dimensions. This will ensure the protection of the electoral space from the negative impact of disinformation and hate speech while fostering a safe and inclusive environment for participation.

This report constitutes a clear call to strengthen joint action among various national and international actors to support efforts aimed at protecting women’s political participation as a cornerstone of any credible electoral process and as one of the essential conditions for building a sustainable democratic path.

As the HNEC carries out its national responsibilities, it affirms that enhancing women’s participation and protecting them from all forms of violence—including online violence—is not only a rights-based obligation but also a direct investment in the stability of the electoral process, the credibility of its outcomes, and the citizens’ trust in their institutions.

**With highest regards,**

**Ms. Rabab Mohammed Halab**

Board Member of the High National Elections Commission

## Acknowledgment & Appreciation

The High National Election Commission expresses its appreciation for the support from the United Nations Electoral Support Team and UNDP for its efforts to promote safe and inclusive elections. The publication of this report on online violence against women in elections (VAWE) is developed thanks to the eMonitor+ tool, a digital platform designed and provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to electoral institutions across the world.

The platform enables the monitoring and analysis of social media content related to electoral processes, including online incidents of violence, thereby strengthening early warning and response mechanisms.

The UNDP project “Promoting Elections for the People of Libya” (PEPOL) supports the HNEC by enhancing electoral systems and introducing innovative tools, with a strong emphasis on women participation and addressing online violence against women in elections and electoral officials.

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Contributing partners to PEPOL project



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**Annual Report on Monitoring Online Violence  
Against Women in Elections 2025**  
The High National Elections Commission

## Executive Summary

This report reveals a disturbing pattern of online violence directed against women engaged in electoral and political affairs in Libya during the year 2025, including female candidates, women working in public institutions, and women associated with managing the electoral process. The monitoring results show that this violence was not merely sporadic abuse or transient individual reactions but, in many cases, took on a repetitive and systematic character. This pattern seems clearly linked to key milestones in the electoral cycle, from the opening of candidate registration to electoral campaigns, and through to stages related to announcing polling dates and results.

During the period from 1 January to 31 December 2025, Libya witnessed a broad electoral process marked by the conduct of Municipal Council Elections through four polling events (16 August, 23 August, 18 October, and 13 December), covering 59 municipalities across the country. Women constituted 30% of the total voters and 28.5% of registered candidates (1,255 women out of 4,404), with 132 women elected as municipal council members, representing 23.5% of the total seats.

This electoral momentum was accompanied by intensified activity on social media platforms, which increasingly emerged as a central space for public discourse, political mobilization, and influence over public opinion. In this context, the eMonitor+ platform automatically monitored, based on pre-identified key words, over 152,000 social media posts, of which 933 posts were directly impacting the participation of Libyan women in the electoral context. The analysis revealed that approximately 96% of all the monitored violent content targeted women, while moral and psychological violence – including defamation, insult, ridicule, social stigmatization, and questioning of competence – constituted over 90% of the content analyzed.

The findings show that online violence against women in the Libyan electoral context is largely based on delegitimizing women politically and socially, not by discussing their platforms or positions, but by attacking their reputation, appearance, social background, and expected stereotypical roles. The analysis also showed a recurring presence of discourses based on stereotypes and misguided social or religious references to justify the exclusion of women from the public space.

The report furthermore observed a partial shift in some periods from targeting women as individuals to targeting the High National Elections Commission (HNEC) and its female staff,

through a discourse of skepticism affecting institutional independency and integrity via disinformation campaigns and fake news. This reflects an overlap between violence directed against women and political polarization, as well as attempts to influence public trust in the electoral process and its outcomes.

Data also indicates that Facebook constituted the primary platform for the spread of this discourse, while a large proportion of hostile content originated from anonymous or unverified personal accounts. This increases the difficulty of tracking the perpetrators and legal accountability, reinforcing an environment of impunity in the digital space.

The report's findings conclude that online violence against women during 2025 was constant during the electoral process and was not merely a marginal phenomenon. Consequently, confronting it requires a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach combining technical monitoring, institutional response, legal protection, awareness interventions, and strengthening partnerships with media and civil society to support a safer, more inclusive, and equitable electoral environment for women.

Overall, the data indicates that digital violence against women in elections in 2025 did not constitute an isolated or time-bound phenomenon confined to a specific phase of the electoral process. Rather, it evolved from intermittent waves of targeting observed during the early stages of the electoral cycle into more structured, sustained, and impactful patterns in its later phases.

## Key Findings

- **Concerning escalation in online violence against women in the electoral space:** Monitoring results showed a significant escalation in hostile discourse targeting women during 2025 compared to the 2024 Municipal Council Elections data, with approximately 96% of the nearly 1,000 monitored posts that contained violent content targeting women in elections, particularly female candidates, women associated with the electoral process, and women holding public or institutional positions.
- **Dominance of moral and psychological violence:** Moral violence – including insults, defamation, ridicule, social stigmatization, and symbolic delegitimization – constituted over 90% of the total observed content. A large proportion of posts focused on belittling women's abilities and questioning their competence instead of discussing their political positions, roles, or platforms.
- **Utilization of stereotypes to justify exclusion:** The observed content showed a clear reliance on stereotypes associated with women. A significant proportion of attacks revolved around appearance, attire, personal reputation, social background, and the "social legitimacy" of participating in public affairs, reflecting an attempt to frame women's political presence as a deviation from traditional social roles.
- **Targeting the HNEC and its female staff:** Hostile discourse was not limited to female candidates and women leaders but extended in several periods to the High National Elections Commission and its female staff through accusations and skepticism regarding

neutrality, integrity, and institutional performance. This gave certain discourse patterns an institutional dimension extending beyond individual acts of abuse.

- **Facebook's dominance in the spread of hostile discourse:** The vast majority of violent content was concentrated on the Facebook platform, which accounted for nearly 97% of all hostile posts, compared to a limited proportion on X (Twitter) and a marginal contribution from other platforms or websites. This reflects Facebook's centrality in shaping public discourse in the Libyan context.
- **Rise in accusations of a political and institutional nature:** 2025 witnessed an increase in accusations of a political and institutional nature, including those related to corruption, mismanagement, and misuse of public resources. This indicates that violence against women is no longer separate from political conflict but is sometimes used as a tool within it.
- **Role of anonymous accounts in amplifying violence:** A large proportion of hostile posts and comments originated from unverified or fake accounts whose identities are difficult to verify. This further complicates tracking the perpetrators and legal accountability to lower the rate of committing symbolic and moral violence online.

## HNEC's Response to Monitoring Results: Measures to Enhance a Safe and Inclusive Electoral Environment

Based on the findings revealed by the e-monitoring process, which indicated an escalation in some patterns of hostile discourse and misinformation related to the electoral process, the HNEC has taken a set of institutional measures to enhance its capabilities in monitoring, responding, and supporting a safer and more inclusive electoral environment. The most prominent of which include measures on:

### 1. Policy and legal levels:

- **Raising awareness of the issue:** The publication of the first eMonitor+ report (Q1–Q2 2025) played a key role in increasing awareness among the public and policymakers about the scale of the issue. The report provided data-driven evidence on patterns of online violence against women in the electoral context, strengthening understanding of the phenomenon and helping to define response priorities. It also served as a key reference to support institutional dialogue and guide future policies and responses.
- **Engaging policymakers and rule-of-law institutions:** Relevant ministries and entities—including the Minister of State for Women's Affairs and the Minister of Justice—were engaged, alongside key decision-makers and stakeholders, to position the issue of online violence against women in the electoral context as a priority within policy discussions. Throughout 2025, a series of high-level consultations were convened, including a key meeting in December 2025 to discuss the findings of the eMonitor+ report with relevant Ministries, in addition to a specialized training held in November 2025 targeting public prosecutors and rule-of-law institutions.
- **Activating an electoral Code of Conduct:** Activating the electoral code of conduct to combat violence against women for candidates and political actors, which includes explicit

clauses renouncing online violence and hate speech and stipulates corrective and punitive measures in case of violation.

## 2. Partnerships and Outreach Levels:

- **Expanding partnerships with civil society and the media:** Strengthening cooperation with civil society organizations, women's associations, and local media outlets to disseminate discourse supportive of women's participation in the political space. During this year, this includes organizing awareness sessions with journalists to enhance responsible media coverage that takes into account women's priorities and needs, while reducing the production of hate speech and discriminatory discourse.
- **Integrating women's protection into electoral outreach programs:** Incorporating the dimension of combating online violence against women into electoral awareness campaigns to promote a culture of safe and inclusive political participation, through training programs implemented by the HNEC via its Outreach Ambassadors.

## 3. Institutional level:

- **Establishing an official mechanism for receiving complaints and rapid response:** Launching a link on the HNEC's official website as a secure, dedicated online platform for receiving threats and hate speech reports directed against women, with an effective system for immediate documentation. Discussions have also begun with rule-of-law institutions to link this mechanism with law enforcement agencies to ensure accountability and taking necessary action when appropriate.
- **Strengthening and expanding the online Media Monitoring Unit:** Enhancing the institutional capacities of the Media Monitoring Unit by expanding its team on the technical level and in terms of personnel. The scope of monitoring was also expanded to include, in addition to hate speech against women, indicators of political polarization, the spread of misinformation, and confidence rate in the electoral process.
- **Building the HNEC staff capacity in promoting women's participation:** Organizing periodic training programs for the HNEC staff focusing on institutional neutrality, integrating women's priorities into electoral process management, and professional methods for dealing with hostile online campaigns, thereby enhancing the institution's readiness and ability to respond in a balanced manner to digital challenges.

## First: General Context

During 2025, Libya witnessed a large-scale electoral process coinciding with organizing the Municipal Council Elections (MCE) across various stages, including opening candidate registration, publication of lists, and preparations for voting, through 4 different polling events (16 August, 23 August, 18 October and 13 December), the MCE were conducted in 59 municipalities across Libya. Women constituted 30% of the voters and 28.5% of registered candidates (1,255 women candidates out of 4,404 in total), of whom 132 were elected in 2025 as municipal council representatives comprising 23.5% of the seats. This electoral process was accompanied by intense activity on social media platforms, which gradually transformed into a central arena for public debate, political mobilization, and influencing public opinion.

In this context, online violence against women, particularly female candidates and women working in official and electoral institutions, emerged as a concerning and growing phenomenon. The impact of this violence was not limited to personal targeting or individual defamation but extended to reducing safe spaces for women's participation in public affairs and weakening societal acceptance of their political presence.

## Second: Monitoring and Analysis Methodology

The monitoring process was implemented using an electronic system - the electronic monitoring platform "eMonitor+"— developed with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the HNEC. It aims to track patterns of online violence and hostile content related to women's participation in the electoral context.

Based on key words search, the system relies on collecting content from public influential online sources, then subjecting it to preliminary analysis using artificial intelligence techniques to detect content that may potentially contain indicators of violence, incitement, defamation, or other patterns of hostile discourse directed against women. In a later stage, the classified posts are referred to the HNEC's Media Monitoring Unit team, which has received specialized training to review the content, verify its relevance to the electoral context, and exclude material that falls outside the approved monitoring scope.

The contribution of the HNEC's monitoring team is not limited to technical verification of content but extends to qualitative analysis of the discourse, helping to identify patterns of violence, characteristics of hostile discourse, and the associated social and political contexts, allowing for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

During the first period from 1 January to 30 June 2025, over 87,000 posts were automatically monitored, including 46,319 posts on Facebook and 41,318 posts on X (Twitter). 634 posts were analyzed that were considered directly relevant to the participation of Libyan women in the electoral context.

During the second period from 1 July to 31 December 2025, over 65,000 posts were monitored, including 49,314 posts on Facebook and 16,023 posts on X (Twitter). 299 posts related to the same context were analyzed.

Thus, the total monitored posts during 2025 exceeded 152,000 posts, while the number of posts subjected to direct qualitative analysis was 933.

## Third: Comparative Analysis between the First and Second Halves of 2025

Comparative analysis shows that online violence against women in the electoral context underwent a clear transformation between the first and second halves of the year, both in terms of the size of violence and the functional characteristics of the discourse.

In the first half of the year, attacks were more clearly associated with the opening of candidate registration and announcing the female candidates' names. There was a relative increase in the amount of hostile content, especially that which focused on questioning women's eligibility for leadership, impugning their competence, and questioning their suitability for

political participation. This phase also significantly took on the character of "early deterrence," which aimed at reducing female presence from the starting point of the electoral process.

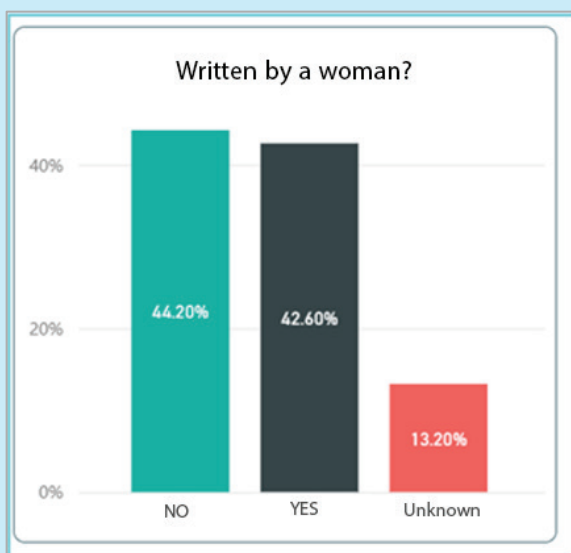
In the second half of the year, there was a qualitative shift in the nature of the discourse that emerged. It is represented by an increase in systematic repetition of posting the same hostile messages across multiple accounts and pages, alongside expanding the target circle to include, to a greater extent, the High National Elections Commission and its female staff. This indicates that the hostile discourse in this stage was no longer limited to targeting specific women but took on a broader political and institutional dimension.

In general, it can be said that online violence against women during 2025 was not a temporary phenomenon linked to a single moment but evolved from targeting phases associated with the start of the electoral process to a more organized and influential pattern of violence in the advanced stages of elections.

#### Fourth: Digital Structure of Violence: Platforms, Actors, and Mechanisms of Spreading Violence

Analytical data indicates that online violence directed against women in the Libyan electoral context is almost entirely centered on social media platforms, most prominently Facebook, which accounted for nearly 97% of all hostile posts, compared to about 3% on X (Twitter) and a very marginal percentage on other online news websites. This concentration is not only related to the platform's usage rate but also to the nature of the digital environment that allows for easy circulation and rapid, wide-scale re-sharing of content.

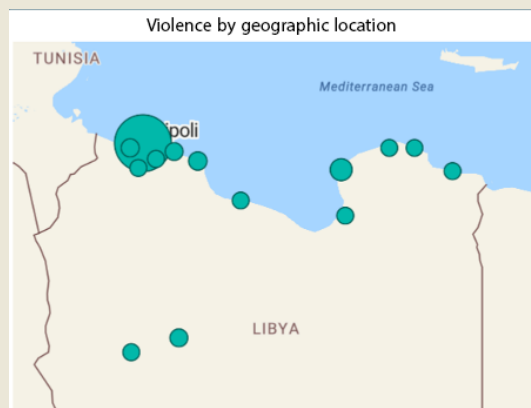
Data also reveals that hostile discourse does not only originate from known political or media actors but spreads largely through ordinary users, unidentified public pages, and fake or unverified accounts. In many cases, the original posted content is not hostile in itself, but the comment sections turn into open spaces for verbal and moral violence, reflecting that an important part of producing this discourse occurs horizontally and in a decentralized manner.



Regarding the gender of content producers, data reveals that **44%** of the violent discourse originated from men compared to **43%** from women, while the gender identity could not be determined in **13%** of cases. These figures reflect a reality: the phenomenon of online violence against women is not reducible to a simple binary of "male actor/female victim" but reflects more complex social and digital dynamics, including some women themselves reposting exclusionary or discriminatory discourses under the influence of various social, cultural, and political factors.

**Geographically**, the data showed a clearer concentration of hostile digital activity in Tripoli, followed by Benghazi, Misrata, Tarhuna, and Al-Khums. This distribution is likely linked to the concentration of political actors, media institutions, and official headquarters in these cities, making their environments more prone to the production and circulation of hostile discourse.

This pattern can also be explained by the fact that these urban centers host more active and organized online networks, including local political pages and paid online pressure groups, which facilitates the production and systematic repetition of hostile messages in the form of campaigns. Therefore, the geographical dimension does not merely reflect a spatial distribution of content, but reveals an overlap between political geography and the online environment, where centers of political influence intersect with centers of discourse production, making women who are most present in the public space the most vulnerable to targeting.



### Fifth: Relationship Between the Electoral Process Stages and the Escalation of Hostile Discourse

Temporal analysis reveals a clear correlation between the electoral process stages and the escalation of hostile discourse against women. Waves of online violence were, in several instances, associated with pivotal moments in elections, indicating that this violence does not appear randomly but escalates in response to political and electoral developments. This escalation can be analyzed chronologically as follows:

#### 1. Opening of Candidate Registration – End of February

This stage coincided with a first wave of escalation centered on questioning women's eligibility for leadership and impugning their competence, reflecting a pattern of early deterrence aimed at discouraging women's participation at the electoral process entry point.

#### 2. Declaration of Intentions and Candidacy – Beginning of March

With some women announcing their candidacy, the level of direct personal targeting increased, especially through anonymous or fake accounts, suggesting a particular sensitivity towards the emergence of women with community presence or public symbolic status. This phase also coincided with HNEC's publication of the preliminary candidates' list and subsequently the final list, further amplifying visibility and, in turn, exposure to online attacks.

### 3. Electoral Campaigns – End of April

During this stage, hostile discourse shifted more towards personal and moral defamation, using accusations that affect reputation and social acceptance, in an attempt to influence the public image of female candidates and voter behavior towards them.

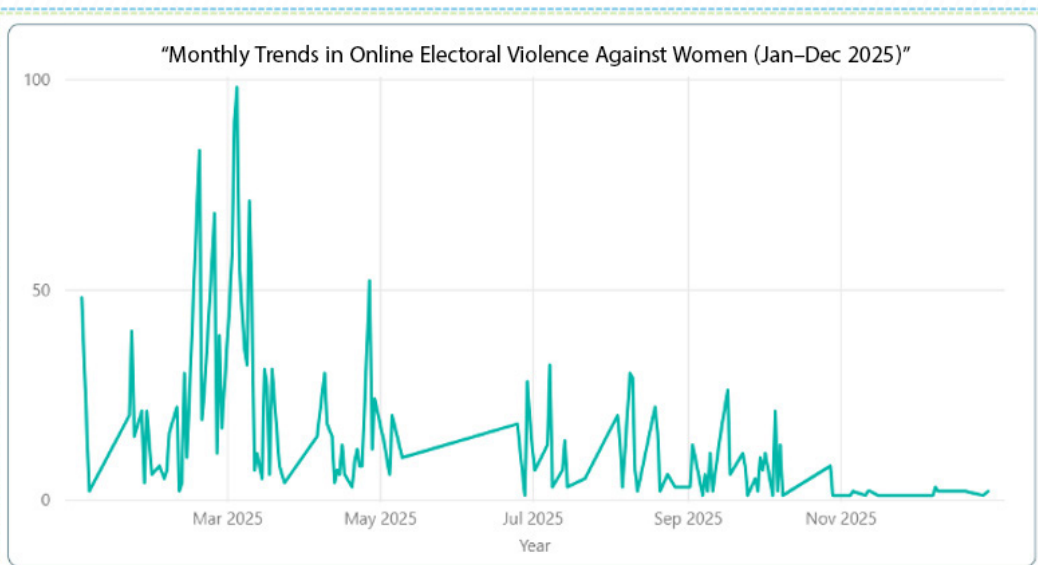
### 4. Polling Date Announcement – Mid-August

Data shows that the second period, from July to December 2025, witnessed a new peak coinciding with the HNEC’s announcement of the polling date in mid-August. This announcement, representing the transition from preparations to the official scheduling of the election process, reactivated political debates and raised the level of political polarization. This was reflected in the escalation of targeting women, both as candidates and as actors in public affairs, alongside the escalated targeting of the HNEC and its female staff.

### 5. Continuation of Municipal Electoral Milestones – September and October

Violent hostile discourse did not decline during this stage; it maintained high levels with the targeting expanding to include the electoral institution itself, in an attempt to undermine it through systematic campaigns.

These data confirm that online violence against women escalates according to a logic of "a peak associated with an electoral milestone," necessitating the adoption of proactive monitoring and response mechanisms linked to the electoral timeline.



Every increase in the frequency of violence intersects with a "pivotal moment" in the electoral path (opening of nominations, announcement of names, launching campaigns, setting the polling date, announcing results).

The pattern of discourse changes according to the stage: from questioning eligibility, to personal incitement, to moral defamation, and then to politicizing the attack and linking it to the legitimacy of the electoral process.

This pattern indicates that online violence against women is not random behavior but rather a pressure tool linked to managing political competition and an attempt to redraw the boundaries of women's participation in public.

The shift in targeting from female candidates to the electoral institution in some periods reflects the expanding circle of hostile discourse, making it part of a broader struggle over legitimacy.

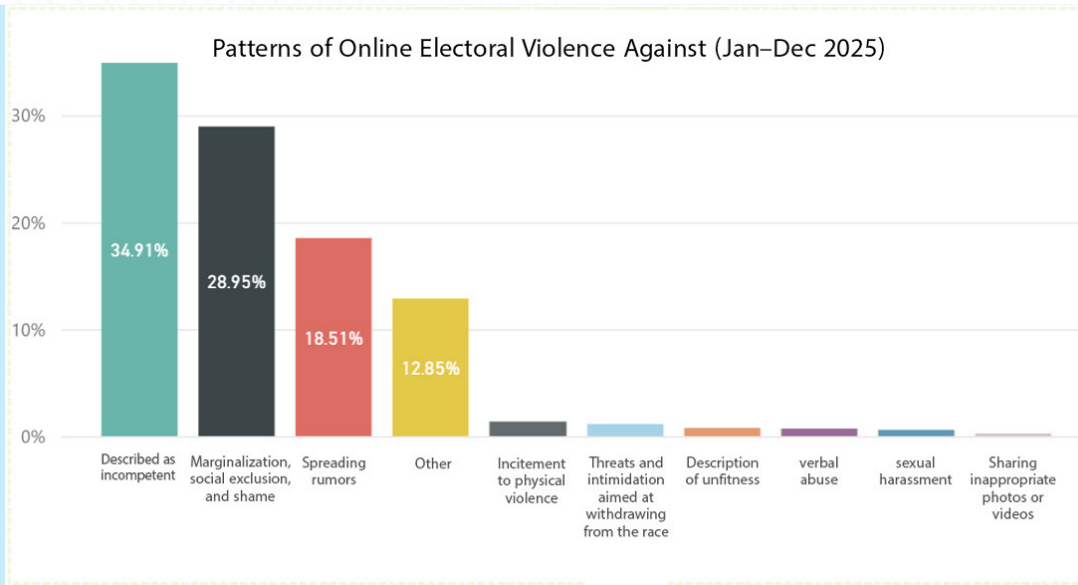
These data confirm that violence against women in the electoral context escalates according to a logic of "a peak associated with a milestone," necessitating the adoption of proactive monitoring and response mechanisms linked to the electoral timeline to protect women and ensure the integrity and credibility of the electoral process as a whole.

## Sixth: Methods and Tactics Used in Hate Speech

### First Half of the Year: Symbolic Violence as a Tool for Early Deterrence

Data reveals that online violence against women in the Libyan electoral context relied primarily on moral and symbolic violence, accounting for 80% of the total content monitored, more than it relied on direct threats of physical violence. Questioning competence topped the list at 34.91% of total posts, followed by shame and social ostracism at 28.95% of total posts, then spreading rumors at 18.51% of total posts. This pattern reflects a "soft" exclusionary strategy aimed at keeping women away from political participation.

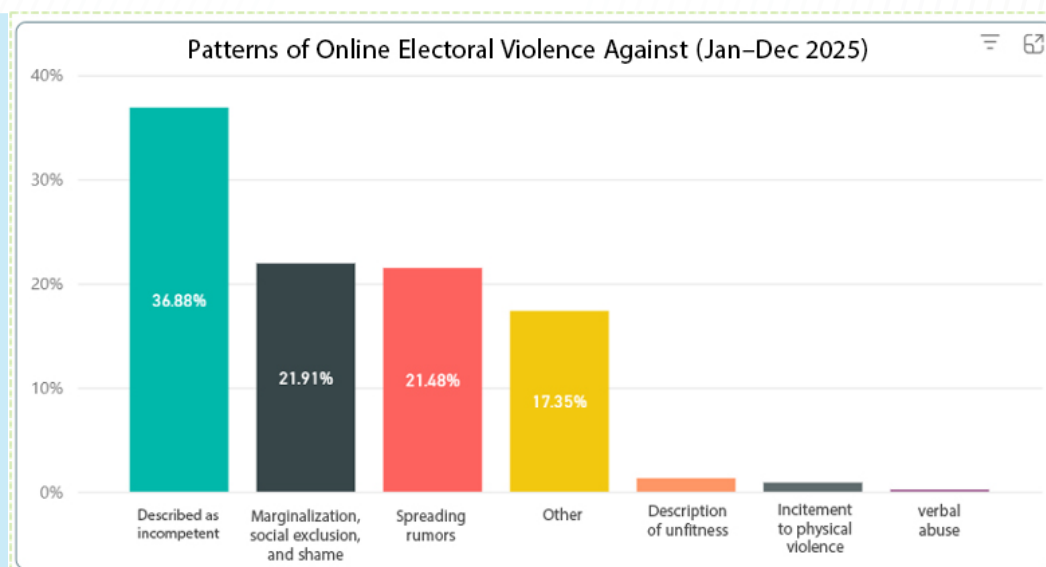
Despite the limited number of explicit threats of physical violence, the monitoring made clear the existence of other practices of a serious nature, no less dangerous than physical violence, such as verbal harassment or posting and sharing of non-consensual content or content altered by artificial intelligence. This confirms that the violence was not only moral but also carried clear deterrent dimensions aimed at early intimidation from the beginning of engagement in the electoral context.



### Second Half of the Year: Reinforcing Stereotypes and Expanding the Circle of Defamation

In the second half of the year, the same patterns of violence continued but at a more organized and systematic pace. Describing women as incompetent topped the list at 36.88% of total posts, followed by marginalization, ostracism, and shame at 21.91% of total posts, then spreading rumors at 21.48% of total posts. The "other" category, accounting for 17.35% of total posts, also reflects a greater diversity in forms of online psychological violence, indicating the evolution and expansion of tactics.

These data indicate that the hostile discourse was no longer merely circumstantial skepticism but transformed into a more entrenched narrative seeking to establish the idea that politics constitute an unsuitable space for women and that those engaged in it are legitimate targets.



### Comparison Between the Two Periods

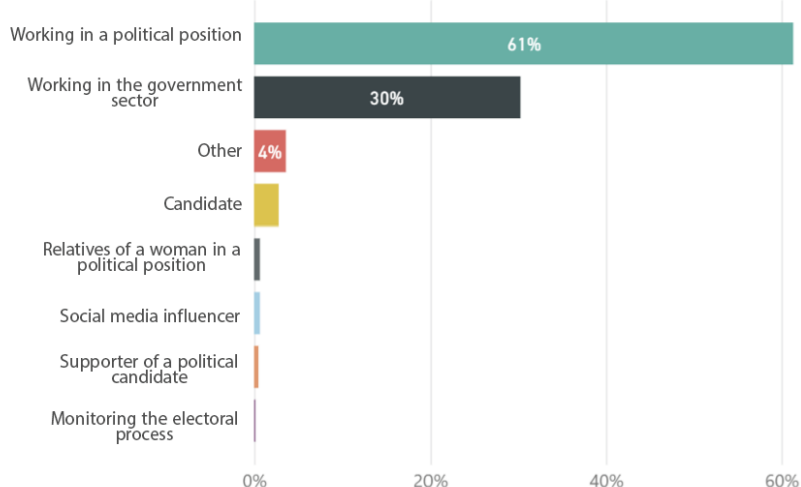
It is clear that the core of the violence in both periods remained primarily moral violence, as these patterns maintained their presence in the first and second halves of the year. However, the fundamental shift lies in the degree of organization and the surrounding political context. In the first half of the year, the violence took on an early deterrent function aimed at limiting candidacy or reducing female presence from the outset, while the second half became more integrated into a public discourse linked to the stages of the electoral process. It was characterized by a greater degree of repetition and expansion, in a more systematic and organized manner, suggesting an evolution in the function of hostile discourse from early deterrence to directly influencing electoral competition and institutional acceptance.

### Seventh: Against Whom Does the rate of Online Violence Escalate?

#### First Half of the Year – Targeting the Political Elite

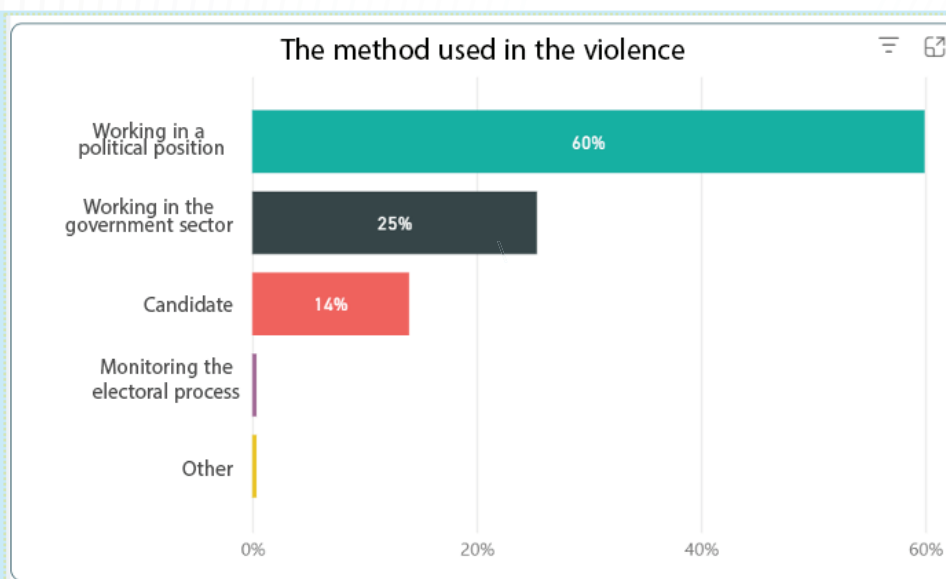
Data during the first half of the year showed that women working in political positions constituted the most targeted category, at a rate exceeding 61% of the total monitored posts, followed by women working in government institutions at 30%, followed by violence against female candidates at 2.80% of the total monitored posts.

Other targeted categories also appear, such as relatives, supporters, influencers, and observers of the electoral process, reflecting that online violence is not limited to women directly active in political work or in the electoral context, but extends to include the networks surrounding them in an attempt to produce a broader social pressure.



## Second Half of the Year: Consolidation of Direct Targeting

In the second half of the year, the same trend continued with some shifts. Women in political positions constituted 60% of those targeted by hostile discourse, while the rate of women working in the government sector reached 25% of those targeted. The most notable development, however, was the rise in the rate of female candidates targeted, reaching 14% of the posted hostile discourse – a qualitative development compared to the first half. This reflects the escalation of targeting as electoral competition intensified and women's chances of winning increased. This shift indicates a transition of violence from targeting the established elite to attempting to directly influence the dynamics of candidacy and competition.



### Comparison Between the Two Periods

The comparison confirms that women in political decision-making positions remained the central target in both periods, indicating that online violence is used as a tool to limit women's presence in positions of political influence. However, the most notable difference lies in the rise of rate of female candidates targeted in the second half, which reflects a direct link between the escalation of violence and the intensification of the electoral context.

In the first half, the focus was on deterring and containing existing institutional presence, while in the second half, attacks shifted towards influencing the electoral path itself and attempting to reshape the balance of competition. This development indicates that online violence is not random, but adapts to political stages and escalates as women approach decisive moments and access to decision-making centers.

## **Eighth: Patterns of Online Violence Against Women in Elections**

The monitored content reflects that the hostile discourse against women in elections – consisting of insulting, violent, and hate-inciting phrases that recurred in online posts during the electoral period – has a systematic discursive structure. It targets not only women as individuals but also the symbolism of their political presence and the legitimacy of their participation in elections and subsequent political involvement. This discourse can be classified into four main, interconnected patterns:

### **1. Undermining Political Integrity by Merging Moral and Political Accusations**

One of the most prominent patterns was the systematic questioning of the integrity of women politicians by merging moral accusations (corruption, lying, betrayal, violation of Sharia Law) with political accusations of a treasonous nature (foreign allegiance, Zionism, normalization). This merging of moral and treasonous accusations is not random or coincidental; its use creates a composite image portraying women as both unpatriotic and immoral actors simultaneously. It transforms women from political competitors into a moral and national threat, a danger to society's values, thus justifying their symbolic exclusion from political participation.

### **2. Degradation Based on Stereotyping Women's Roles**

Phrases that strip women of their political eligibility were utilized repeatedly by attacking their identity and linking it to deficiency, weakness, and being unfit for leadership rather than criticizing their programs or political positions, evidencing a mechanism of symbolic exclusion based on transforming women from political actors into beings with incomplete eligibility. This strategy is dangerous because it establishes a normalization of discrimination and makes exclusion seem like a "natural fact" rather than a hostile stance. It also reproduces stereotypes that confine politics to men.

### **3. Exploiting Misguided Social and Religious References**

Data showed a notable presence of discourse based on misguided social or religious interpretations used to justify excluding women from political work. Phrases hinting at the "impermissibility" or "unsuitability" of women's participation in leadership are used, lending a false value-based or pseudo-legitimate character to exclusion.

This pattern represents a transition from personal attacks to producing a justificatory discourse that creates exclusion, using misguided religious narratives. It is not content with insulting a specific woman but seeks to entrench a rule that women's participation in politics is a "deviation from the social or religious order." Here, online violence turns into a tool for re-engineering the public space according to exclusionary conceptions, deepening long-term structural exclusion.

### **4. Targeting Female Figures Within Collective Campaigns**

Some attacks targeted prominent female figures or initiatives supporting participation in sarcastic or hostile contexts, with data indicating organized targeting beyond individual criticism. This pattern reveals a strategy of "striking the figure to weaken the phenomenon." When prominent female leaders are targeted with repeated sarcastic or hostile discourse, the goal is not just their person but to undermine the symbol they represent. Through this

targeting, a collective deterrent message is sent to other women: that rising to the forefront will be met with systematic defamation campaigns.

When these patterns are combined, it becomes clear that online violence during the electoral period was not merely a result of political emotion but rather an integrated discursive system aimed at:

- Delegitimizing women politically
- Undermining their social reputation
- Framing their participation as a cultural or religious threat
- Disseminating collective deterrent messages to any woman considering entering the public space

This demonstrates that online violence against women in the Libyan electoral context is not an incidental event, but rather a tool of political and social pressure used to redraw the boundaries of political participation according to unequal, exclusionary criteria.

### **Ninth: Who Stands Behind Online Violence Against Women in Elections?**

Data indicates that the primary source of online hate speech against women in Libya is not limited to known political or media actors but extends to a greater degree to ordinary users and public pages with unidentified or unknown responsible parties. It also shows that many pages attracting large numbers of hostile comments do not necessarily post inciting content in the original post; rather, they present general posts related to women's participation, but the comment sections transform into open spaces where verbal and moral violence is practiced. This violent discourse is largely fueled by unregulated public interaction, without intervention from the content creator to moderate comments.

#### **Feigned Spontaneity and Horizontal Spread of Violence Without a Clear Leading Source**

This violent discourse is characterized by a feigned spontaneous and unorganized nature, spreading horizontally among users without a direct link to a declared political entity. However, this apparent spontaneity does not negate its danger; rather, it makes confronting it complex due to the absence of a clear central actor who can be held accountable or legally responsible.

We are facing a pattern of "digitized political violence" that reflects misguided cultural/religious attitudes regarding women's role in the political context more than it reflects direct political trend from known political actors. Given that the main contributors to its spread are ordinary people with fake accounts, the discourse turns into repetitive behavior, making it closer to a social phenomenon that may negatively impact the narrative of women's political participation in the future.

### **Absence of Explicit Violence on Official Pages: Self-Censorship or Indirect Direction?**

Data shows a noticeable decrease in violent discourse on official pages of parties or known media outlets. This can be explained by two or more parallel possibilities, including:

- Either the presence of self-censorship to avoid accountability or damage to the institutional image.
- Or the reliance on indirect channels for influence through unofficial accounts or online networks that adopt an offensive discourse without declared affiliation.

This pattern may indicate a possible shift of hostile discourse from the direct public level to the informal network level, where "online delegation" in attacks is practiced, allowing influential parties to benefit from the escalation without bearing its legal or ethical consequences.

### **Concealed Identities and Anonymity as a Primary Incubator for Violence**

Fake accounts or anonymous public pages are the most prominent in spreading the most extreme hostile discourse against women. Anonymity provides a wider margin for escaping accountability. Concealment plays several roles, not limited to protecting user privacy, but turns into an enabling mechanism for symbolic violence. The absence of accountability due to the difficulty of identifying the source of posted content creates a feeling of guaranteed impunity and lowers the moral threshold for expression, allowing discourse to move from criticism to explicit incitement without fear of prosecution.

### **A Discourse that Originates from the Base More Than It Is Managed from the Top**

Observed patterns indicate that hate speech in the Libyan context is not directly led from the top of political power but is fed by the online social base, benefiting from:

1. Weak content moderation
2. Absence of legal frameworks criminalizing electoral online violence
3. The production of an exclusionary culture that implicitly considers targeting women in politics as acceptable

## **Tenth: Analysis of Patterns of Digital Violence Against Women in the Electoral Context**

Analysis of the sampled monitored posts reveals that the hostile discourse directed against women in the Libyan electoral context is characterized by being both comprehensive and selective at the same time. It does not target a specific category but extends across multiple levels of public presence, including government officials, HNEC members and staff, female representatives in the legislative authority, candidates, and female public figures. The content of this discourse varies between direct abuse, moral defamation, questioning of competence, and challenging neutrality or national belonging, reflecting a charged online environment where social platforms are used as a tool to reproduce exclusion directed against women and

undermine their public presence. The following is a reading of the most prominent patterns revealed by the analysis according to the targeted categories:

### **1. Ministers and Government Officials – Economic Incitement and Politicization of Public Outrage**

Data showed that the discourse directed against government officials, including ministers, often takes a populist character based on accusations of corruption and illicit gain related to public funds, resource management, or privileges. This discourse does not stop at the limits of legitimate criticism but goes beyond that to employ financial accusations as a tool for incitement against women in positions of power.


In a number of posts, institutional failure or dysfunction is implicitly linked to the presence of a woman in the position, whereby her leadership presence is presented as a potential cause of the problem, not merely an administrative or political context open to criticism and evaluation. Discussion often shifts from questioning policies or decisions to personal insults and slurs, reflecting an attempt to undermine the public respect a woman holds.

The repeated targeting of specific figures through misleading campaigns and publishing false content also suggests the possibility of ongoing pressure campaigns targeting the symbolism of female leadership more than specific decisions themselves.

### **2. HNEC Female Members and Staff – Questioning Neutrality to Undermine Institutional Legitimacy**

The analysis shows that women working within the High National Elections Commission and its affiliated offices are subjected to a distinct pattern of hostile discourse focusing on questioning neutrality, patriotism, or institutional integrity. The impact of this discourse is not limited to personal targeting but extends to undermining the legitimacy of the institution the woman represents within the electoral process.

In this context, the woman is transformed from an employee or official within a public institution into an entry point used to raise doubts about the integrity of elections or the neutrality of the electoral body. Questioning identity, loyalty, or professional independence is



This hate speech and online violence against women in the electoral context is not merely an isolated individual expression, but rather a reflection of an online system that allows for the collective and continuous reproduction of discrimination and exclusion against women through the employment of misguided social and religious narratives.

The absence of a central actor does not mean the absence of formal or informal organization; it reveals the transformation of violence into an embedded practice online where deeper organization can't be excluded. This necessitates a multi-dimensional and cross-sectoral response: legal, technical, cultural, and awareness-oriented, to ensure a safer electoral environment for women's participation.

employed as a means to undermine public trust in the institution, which gives this pattern a strategic dimension beyond direct personal abuse. This reflects an implicit awareness

among some digital actors that targeting women within sensitive institutions might be a more effective tool for undermining trust in institutions and influencing public opinion.

### **3. Elected Female Leaders and Parliamentarians – Shifting Discussion from Performance to Moral and Social Judgments**

Posts targeting female parliamentarians and elected women leaders show that hostile discourse tends to shift the discussion from evaluating legislative or political performance to focusing on appearance, attire, behavior, or moral reputation. Thus, the woman is not seen as a political actor with a stance, program, or performance but is reduced to a stereotype linked to femininity or traditional moral and social judgments.

Sarcasm and mockery are frequently used as tools to devalue the symbolic significance of female leadership and to empty their political presence of its substance. This reflects a deeper resistance to the idea of women assuming leadership roles of a representative or legislative nature, which may ultimately lead to the repositioning of women from the political and institutional space back into social judgment.

### **4. Female Candidates for Elections – Framing Participation as a Transgression from Social Norms**

The analysis showed that female candidates face a complex discourse combining questioning of merit, mockery of form or appearance, and sometimes linking candidacy to content affecting reputation, personal relationships, or the perceived weakness of male authority in the family. The employment of some social and sometimes misguided religious references was also observed to re-present women's participation in elections as a transgression from their expected traditional social roles. It is worth noting that this tactic or pattern is used to lend social or moral legitimacy to exclusion, so that the attack appears not as discrimination, but as a defense of values, norms, or presumed "natural social roles."

In some cases, targeting is not limited to individual candidates but extends to lists with strong female presence and to the very idea of women's candidacy, transforming women's participation and their nomination into a direct target of attack.

### **5. Women Politicians and Public Figures – Smear Campaigns for Long-Term Exclusion**

Hostile discourse also extends to include women with political, community, or media presence, where moral, financial, or political accusations are repeatedly made against them without clear evidence. In this context, it is important to note that violent content is not limited to immediate abuse but turns into a smear mechanism with lasting impact, contributing to building a permanent negative narrative about women. The continuous linking of women in the electoral context with scandal, deviance, or corruption leads to questioning the legitimacy of their existence in the public space, transforming individual targeting into a collective deterrent message directed at other women wishing to engage in public affairs. This affects the very model the woman represents, reproducing perceptions that consider women's presence in politics a threat to the social order or prevailing values.

## Most targeted categories of women



These patterns demonstrate that online violence against women in the Libyan electoral context cannot be reduced to emotional reactions or sporadic abuses. Rather, it takes on a repetitive, quasi-systematic discursive structure based on three main pillars:

- **Incitement of the Public** through the employment of accusations with political, economic, or service-oriented dimensions to arouse public anger against women in positions of responsibility.
- **Moral Defamation** aimed at undermining the social legitimacy and symbolism of women's presence in public.
- **Questioning of Neutrality, Patriotism, or Integrity** leading to the weakening of trust in institutions, especially when women are part of the public or electoral authority.

This overlap between the personal and the institutional aspects confirms that hostile discourse targets not only women as individuals but also the roles they occupy, the symbolism they represent, and the possibility of expanding their presence in the public space.

Consequently, addressing this phenomenon requires a comprehensive approach that is not limited to monitoring and documentation but extends to strengthening legal and institutional protection, supporting public discourse based on respect, and dismantling the social narratives that grant exclusion the appearance of legitimacy under the guise of criticism or expression.

## Comparative Analysis of the Evolution of Online Violence Against Women During 2025

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data analyzed during the first and second halves of 2025, several key comparative observations can be drawn:

### 1. From Scattered Individual Violence to Systematic and Repetitive Discourse

In the first half of the year, hostile discourse was characterized by individual attacks with a clear focus on questioning competence, impugning reputation, spreading rumors, and defamation. The attacks were mostly sporadic, related to stages such as announcing candidacy or the announcement of women's names in the public scene. In the second half, the discourse evolved into a more organized and repetitive pattern, where the same accusations and terms were observed being recycled across multiple accounts and different pages, suggesting a systematic online amplification of hostile messages. This implies that the attacks became closer to online campaigns with a unified narrative, where it is clear that hostile discourse transitioned from "reactive" online violence to "cumulative and systematic" violence, increasing its psychological and political impact on targeted women.

### 2. Rising Interconnection between Online Violence against Women and Political Violence:

While the discourse in the first half centered on reputation and competence, it expanded in the second half to include accusations of a political and institutional nature, such as corruption, foreign allegiance, and mismanagement. This made violence against women part of a broader political struggle, implying that violence against women is no longer just a reflection of exclusionary ideology but has become a tool within the political-electoral conflict, used to strike opponents and undermine trust in institutions.

### 3. Evolution of Actors and Posting Patterns:

Fake personal accounts maintained their prominent role in posting hostile discourse, but the second half witnessed a greater presence of local pages and an increase in the reposting of discourse across online networks, suggesting a more intense horizontal spread alongside the continuation of anonymous accounts. Women's contribution to posting or reposting hostile discourse also increased. Online violence has become more "horizontal," spreading through social networks without clear central leadership, but at the same time shows indicators of indirect political investment.

### 4. Targeting Women as they Approach the Center of Decision-Making:

In both periods, women in political and electoral positions were the most exposed category to targeting, indicating that the intensity of violence is directly proportional to the level of political influence exercised by women.

### 5. The Escalating use of Misguided Cultural-Religious Discourse to Justify Exclusion:

In the first half of the year, references to religious and social discourse appeared on a limited scale to justify excluding women, while in the second half, invoking this discourse became more explicit to frame women's participation as a departure from the "natural social role of women."

## Conclusion

The results of this report reflect a concerning reality of the nature of the online environment during the electoral process in Libya during 2025. The analysis has shown that online violence against women is not a marginal or incidental phenomenon but a recurring element during the electoral process, a means used to undermine the legitimacy of women's presence in the public sphere, influence their social and political image, and in some cases, affect the confidence in the institutions themselves.

The analysis has also shown that moral and psychological violence remained the most widespread form, through defamation, questioning competence, social stigmatization, and spreading rumors, while the escalation of hostile discourse was clearly linked to the pivotal stages of the electoral process. The findings also confirmed that women in decision-making positions, female candidates, and women working in the High National Elections Commission were among the most targeted categories.

These data indicate that online violence against women in the Libyan electoral context transcends being a problem of online communication or abusive individual behavior, becoming an institutional, political, and social challenge requiring an integrated response led by the High National Elections Commission (HNEC), this approach goes beyond coordination by adopting a structured institutional and operational framework. It encompasses strengthening collaboration with rule-of-law institutions and relevant national authorities, alongside the development of practical measures within the HNEC's mandate. These include contributing to the enhancement of the regulatory framework governing the electoral process, clarifying institutional roles in monitoring and accountability, and reinforcing awareness-raising and communication efforts.

In parallel, the adoption of targeted short-term measures—such as improving reporting mechanisms and activating rapid response protocols—will contribute to ensuring a safe electoral environment and enabling meaningful and effective participation of women.

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