Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence and Democracy

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Digital Threats to Democracy

Social media has revolutionised the way we communicate and interact with each other. It has become ubiquitous in our daily lives, with billions of users worldwide using platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok to connect, share information, and express their opinions. People utilise the power of social media platforms that actively buttress democracy, fostering the creation of online spaces that serve as dynamic hubs for constructive dialogue, inclusive deliberation, and the exchange of diverse perspectives.[1] And while social media has the potential to bring people together and empower marginalized groups, it has also emerged as a significant threat to human rights, democracy, and peace.

Prospects for democratic participation are hindered by the reality that people use social media platforms to disseminate racist, sexist, and discriminatory content.[2] Social media threatens human rights through the spread of hate speech and misinformation. Hate speech on social media can have serious consequences, including increased levels of anxiety,

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[1] Schirch, Lisa. Social Media Impacts on Conflict and Democracy : the Techtonic Shift. Edited by Lisa Schirch, Routledge, 2021.

[2] Woolley, Samuel C., and Philip N. Howard, eds. *Computational propaganda: Political parties, politicians, and political manipulation on social media*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

depression, and self-harm among victims, and social media platforms have been used to incite violence and promote hatred against marginalized communities, such as refugees, immigrants, and religious minorities.[3,4] While many studies celebrate the opportunity for marginalized groups to build an online community,[5] critics note that social media is a threat to human rights, democracy, and peace. Although digital technologies offer opportunities and obstacles for democracy and peacebuilding, there is a significant barrier to online participation in fostering positive peace: *the internet is unsafe for women.*

Social media can undermine public trust in democratic institutions and processes, leading to decreased civic engagement and political polarization.[6] Social media algorithms have been shown to reinforce pre-existing biases, making it more difficult for individuals to engage with diverse perspectives.[7] Social media platforms have been used to spread false information about political candidates, parties, and issues, often with the intent of influencing public opinion or election outcomes, with some studies suggesting that fake news stories were more widely shared on social media than real news stories.[8,9]

Finally, social media can threaten peace as platforms become a breeding ground for fake news, hoaxes, and conspiracy theories, creating social unrest and undermining democratic institutions. Studies have shown that false information spreads faster and wider on social media platforms than accurate information.[10] This misinformation can contribute to the polarization of society and create a climate of distrust, making it more difficult to resolve conflicts peacefully.

Social media platforms can be used to mobilize people for violent protests and demonstrations, to incite hate and violence against particular groups, as well as to coordinate attacks and disseminate information about military operations.[11] Extremist groups have used social media to recruit new members and promote their ideologies and has led to the emergence of new forms of cyber warfare, with foreign actors using these platforms to sow discord and undermine democratic institutions in other countries.[12]

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[3] Ştefăniţă, Oana, and Diana-Maria Buf. "Hate speech in social media and its effects on the LGBT community: A review of the current research." *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations* 23, no. 1 (2021): 47-55.

[4] Stroińska, Magda. "Can there be a 'safe haven' for trauma survivors in this social media dominated world?." *Trames* 23, no. 2 (2019): 223-238.

[5] See (Anouna, 2020, Ragandang, 2020, Bytiyeh 2019, and Comninos 2013)

[6] Woolley, Samuel C., and Philip N. Howard, eds. *Computational propaganda: Political parties, politicians, and political manipulation on social media*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

[7] Bakshy, E., Messing, S., & Adamic, L. A. (2015). Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook. Science, 348(6239), 1130-1132.

[8] Lazer, David MJ, Matthew A. Baum, Yochai Benkler, Adam J. Berinsky, Kelly M. Greenhill, Filippo Menczer, Miriam J. Metzger et al. "The science of fake news." *Science* 359, no. 6380 (2018): 1094-1096.

[9] Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. "Social media and fake news in the 2016 election." *Journal of economic perspectives* 31, no. 2 (2017): 211-236.

[10] Vosoughi, Soroush, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral. "The spread of true and false news online." *science* 359, no. 6380 (2018): 1146-1151.

[11] Whitten-Woodring, Jenifer, Mona S. Kleinberg, Ardeth Thawnghmung, and Myat The Thitsar. "Poison if you don't know how to use it: Facebook, democracy, and human rights in Myanmar." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 25, no. 3 (2020): 407-425.

[12] Wu, Liang, Fred Morstatter, Kathleen M. Carley, and Huan Liu. "Misinformation in social media: definition,

Democracy, Social Media Technology, and Gendered Violence

Women play a crucial role in sustaining and enhancing democratic societies. Their participation in political processes brings diverse perspectives, experiences, and insights that contribute to more comprehensive policymaking.[13] Research emphasizes that women's presence in politics fosters a more inclusive governance model, addressing a broader range of societal needs.[14] The importance of women to democracy also extends to fostering political stability: nations with higher levels of women's political representation experience lower corruption rates and greater respect for the rule of law.[15] Women's participation can act as a check on power and promote accountability, contributing to the overall health of democratic institutions.

Politicians use social media to amplify communication and dialogic processes that contribute to social and political goods to foster new discourses of positive engagement online and off. However, as has already been highlighted, participation in digital peacebuilding is hindered by the reality that social media platforms are routinely used to disseminate racist, sexist, and other discriminatory content. Research shows that women's political participation in fostering a cohesive and nonviolent community is integral to sustainable peace.[16] However, the majority form of gendered cultural and systemic violence, commonly referred to as Violence Against Women (VAW), has not diminished in cyberspace. Despite its transformative airs, in fact, online violence against women is increasing.[17]

Female (in)security online

The internet has transformed the way we communicate, work, and interact with the world around us. However, for women, the internet can be an unsafe and hostile place. Women are disproportionately affected by online harassment, cyberstalking, and other forms of online abuse.

One of the keyways in which the internet is unsafe for women is through online harassment. Women are more likely than men to experience harassment online, with one study finding that 25% of women surveyed had experienced online harassment compared to 17% of

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manipulation, and detection." *ACM SIGKDD explorations newsletter* 21, no. 2 (2019): 80-90.

[13] Inglehart, Ronald, Pippa Norris, and Christian Welzel. "Gender equality and democracy." In *Human values and social change*, pp. 91-115. Brill, 2003.Journal of Democracy, 2004.

[14] Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. *Cultural barriers to women's leadership: A worldwide comparison*.

[15] Paxton, Pamela, Melanie M. Hughes, and Tiffany D. Barnes. *Women, politics, and power: A global perspective*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020.

[16] See Anderlini, Sanam Naraghi. Women building peace: What they do, why it matters. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007. Elisabeth, 2003; 'Women, Political Decision-making, and Peace-Building.' Global Change, Peace & Security 15(3), p. 250. Elisabeth, 2003. 'Women, Political Decision-making, and Peace-Building.' Global Change, Peace & Security 15(3), p. 250.

[17] Kavanagh, Emma, and Lorraine Brown. "Towards a research agenda for examining online gender-based violence against women academics." *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 44, no. 10 (2020): 1379-1387. See also Posetti, Julie, Nermine Aboulez, Kalina Bontcheva, Jackie Harrison, and Silvio Waisbord. "Online violence against women journalists." (2020), Holm, Malin. "Violence against women in politics: emerging perspectives, new challenges." *European journal of politics and gender* 3, no. 2 (2020): 295-297, and Barker, Kim, and Olga Jurasz. "Online Violence Against Women: addressing the responsibility gap?" *Women, Peace and Security* (2018).

men.[18] Online harassment can take many forms, including trolling, cyberbullying, and hate speech. The anonymity provided by the internet can embolden harassers and make it more difficult for victims to seek recourse. A recent study on the nature of anonymity online avers "There is…no point in denying the role of anonymity in such incidents. Those calling in swats, or sending multiple pizzas to a target, or making threats to kill or rape via Twitter, are usually not doing so because they mean to take responsibility for their actions."[19]

Another way in which the internet is unsafe for women is through cyberstalking. Cyberstalking involves the use of electronic communication to repeatedly harass, threaten, or intimidate someone. Women are more likely than men to experience cyberstalking, with one study finding that women were twice as likely as men to report being victims of cyberstalking. Cyberstalking can have significant impacts on a victim's mental health and well-being and can even escalate to physical violence.

The internet is also unsafe for women because of the way in which it perpetuates and reinforces gender-based violence and discrimination. Online content, including pornography and hate speech, can contribute to the objectification and marginalization of women, and can normalize violence against them. Moreover, women who speak out about gender-based discrimination and violence online are often subjected to further harassment and abuse.

The internet can be unsafe for women because of the ways in which it perpetuates and reinforces gender stereotypes and biases. Women are often subject to sexism and gender-based discrimination online, with studies showing that women are more likely than men to be subjected to derogatory comments about their appearance and to be sexualized. The perpetuation of gender stereotypes and biases online can limit women's opportunities and contribute to a culture of discrimination and exclusion.

Finally, women directly involved in social and political discourse are targeted and harassed both online and off, with female politicians and journalists signalling choices to leave the political arena, rather than put themselves, and their families at risk.[20] Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, was 'driven' from office after years of personal attacks and vilification in what New Zealand's first female prime minister, Helen Clark, described as 'unprecedented' online attacks.[21] Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, faced horrific online abuse, including death threats, threats of violence and sexualised insults.[22] Recent resignations from Ardern, and Sturgeon, as well as other notable female leaders including

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[18] Rainie, Lee., 2017. Online Harassment 2017. United States of America. Retrieved from https://policycommons.net/artifacts/617628/online-harassment-2017/1598480/ on 01 Jun 2023. CID: 20.500.12592/r7vbr0.

[19] Jordan, Tim. "Does online anonymity undermine the sense of personal responsibility?" *Media, Culture & Society*, 41(4): 573.

[20] Bigio, Jamille, and Rachel Vogelstein. "Women under attack: The backlash against female politicians." *Foreign Aff.* 99 (2020): 131. See also Posetti, Julie, Nabeelah Shabbir, Diana Maynard, Kalina Bontcheva, and Nermine Aboulez. "The chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists." *New York: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)* (2021).

[21] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/20/jacinda-ardern-speculation-that-abuse-and-threats-contributed-to-resignation

[22] https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15150383.police-investigating-horrific-catalogue-threats-abuse-nicola-sturgeon/

Brazil's [Manuela d'Ávila](#), India's [Priyanka Chaturvedi](#), and Thailand's [Chonticha "Lookkate" Jangrew](#) showcase how females are [driven out of public life](#), due to violent gendered abuse and widespread online misogyny.[23]

Such online VAW has not gone unnoticed; the rise of off and online political misogyny has resulted in a recent UNWOMEN publication, *[Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics.](#)* The erasure of females from online spaces will negatively impact peacebuilding unless platforms and moderators do more to eradicate gendered online violence.

Misogyny Online

Misogyny can be defined as a deeply ingrained prejudice against women, which can manifest in various forms of discrimination, hostility, and violence. Misogyny, and misogynoir, misogyny against Black women, is not simply a matter of individual attitudes or behaviours, but rather a systemic and cultural phenomenon that is supported and reinforced by social structures and norms.[24] As philosopher Rae Langton notes, misogyny can be seen as a form of hate speech that targets women based on their gender and serves to maintain patriarchal power relations.[25]

It is important to stress…that digital technologies do not merely facilitate or aggregate existing forms of misogyny, but also create new ones that are inextricably connected with the technological affordances of new media, the algorithmic politics of certain platforms, the workplace cultures that produce these technologies, and the individuals and communities that use them.[26]

Online misogyny is weaponized via technology-facilitated violence (TFV). TFV refers to the use of digital technologies to perpetrate acts of violence, abuse, harassment, and exploitation against individuals or groups. This can include online harassment, cyberstalking, and other forms of digital abuse. According to [research](#), TFV has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, particularly among young people, women. and LGBTQ.[27] This type of violence can have serious and long-lasting impacts on victims, including psychological distress, trauma, and even physical harm.[28]

VAW in politics, including TFV, is specifically used to frighten women from participating in politics, to deter them from continuing political work and ultimately to erase them from accessing political power. It can include acts or threats of violence that are physical,

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[23] https://thedisinfoproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/duff-2022-misogyny.pdf
[24] Manne, Kate. *Down girl: The logic of misogyny*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
[25] Langton, Rae. *Sexual solipsism: Philosophical essays on pornography and objectification*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
[26] Ging, Debbie, and Eugenia Siapera. "Special issue on online misogyny." *Feminist media studies* 18, no. 4 (2018): 516.
[27] Dunn, Suzie. "Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: an overview." *Suzie Dunn," Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Overview"(2020) Centre for International Governance Innovation: Supporting a Safer Internet Paper* 1 (2020).
[28] Henry, Nicola, and Anastasia Powell. "Technology-facilitated sexual violence: A literature review of empirical research." *Trauma, violence, & abuse* 19, no. 2 (2018): 195-208.

psychological, economic, or symbolic and it specifically targets women *because they are women*.[29] The following section will highlight four forms of TFV affecting women in Politics.

1. Harassment and cyberstalking: This refers to the use of digital technologies to intimidate, threaten, or harass women online, often through sexualized or gendered insults, derogatory comments, and non-consensual sharing of personal information.[30]
2. Rape and death threats: Women are often targeted with explicit threats of sexual violence or death, which can lead to increased fear and anxiety.[31]
3. Online trolling: Trolls use social media to make derogatory comments or engage in inflammatory behaviour, which can contribute to a hostile environment for women.[32]
4. Body shaming: Women are often subjected to criticism and scrutiny of their physical appearance online, which can contribute to negative body image and self-esteem.[33]

Examples of Political Misogyny

Harassment and cyberstalking

One well-known example is the online abuse and threats received by Hillary Clinton during her 2016 presidential campaign. According to a report by the Pew Research Center, Clinton received more negative comments on social media than any other presidential candidate, and a significant proportion of these comments were sexist and misogynistic in nature. Another example is the harassment and threats received by Australian politician Julia Gillard during her time as Prime Minister. Gillard faced a barrage of sexist and misogynistic attacks online, including threats of violence and calls for her to be assassinated. [34] Research has also documented similar forms of political harassment and cyberstalking experienced by female politicians in other countries, including the UK, Canada, and the US.

Rape and Death Threats

In India, Bharatiya Janata Party spokesperson Nupur Sharma was threatened with rape and beheading. Indian female politicians have faced a barrage of rape and death threats both online and offline at double the rate of female politicians in the UK and USA. In the United States, former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords received death threats after voting in favour of the Affordable Care Act. In Canada, Liberal MP Chrystia Freeland, has received online threats, as has Green Party MP Elizabeth May. In the United Kingdom, female

29 Krook, Mona Lena, and Juliana Restrepo Sanín. "Gender and political violence in Latin America. Concepts, debates and solutions." *Política y gobierno* 23, no. 1 (2016): 127-162.

30 Jane, Emma A. "Online abuse and harassment." *The international encyclopedia of gender, media, and communication* 116 (2020).

31 Krook, Mona Lena. "Violence against women in politics." *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 1 (2017): 74-88.

32 Fichman, Pnina, and Madelyn R. Sanfilippo. *Online trolling and its perpetrators: Under the cyberbridge*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

33 Perloff, Richard M. "Social media effects on young women's body image concerns: Theoretical perspectives and an agenda for research." *Sex roles* 71, no. 11-12 (2014): 363-377.

34 Australian police investigate calls to assassinate Julia Gillard, The Telegraph,28 July 2011. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/8667958/Australian-police-investigate-calls-to-assassinate-Julia-Gillard.html

politicians have also been targeted with rape and death threats, including Labour MP Jess Phillips, who received 600 rape threats in a single night.

Online Trolling

UK Labour MP, Jo Cox, was murdered in Yorkshire after receiving online trolling. Ukrainian MP Svitlana Zalishchuk was impersonated online offering to run naked through Kiev. Zimbabwean opposition party president Linda Masarira, has experienced online attacks on her sexuality and children. Kenyan politician Esther Passaris posted a photo of herself walking on a beach contemplating the death of her father. As her thigh was visible under her kaftan, Twitter trolls accused her of 'sexualizing' her mourning by showing skin. A sombre tribute to her father became a tool to disparage her reputation prior to an election.

Body Shaming

Former presidential candidate and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been subjected to body shaming throughout her political career, with comments on her hair, clothing, and weight. Whitby regional councillor Celina Caesar-Chavannes was body shamed, called 'Big Rhonda' by Deputy Mayor Chris Leahy. French politician Sibeth Ndiaye's nomination to become France's first black spokesperson triggered online groups to begin making negative comments about her heritage, and her appearance, such as: "*Who does she think she is with her afro haircut? In her village in Senegal*?!" Regarding her experience on body shaming in off and online, Canadian PC MLA Karla MacFarlane has intoned "if I gain a few pounds or lose a few pounds, I hear about it on social media."

The presence and increase of online abuse, including harassment, cyberstalking, rape threats, death threats, online trolling, and body shaming has made political participation increasingly dangerous for women. And while vice president Oren Segal of the Anti-Defamation League's centre on Extremism acknowledges that "threats and harassment against local officials present a significant challenge to American democracy," he also notes that women officials are targeted 3.4x more than men. While online threats abound, there are far more prevalent against female politicians. This does not only create a cost for political participation for women, it is driving them away from politics.

Mary Simon: Governor General of Canada

A public facing response to this behaviour came from Governor General Mary Simon, who was sworn in as Canada's first Indigenous Governor General on July 26, 2021 after serving as an advocate for Indigenous rights and culture throughout her career. However, Simon's appointment was met with online abuse and criticism, particularly from those who opposed her support for Indigenous issues. By February 2023, Simon's decision to close all social-media comments was a direct result of online TFV including harassment, abusive, misogynistic, and racist engagement.
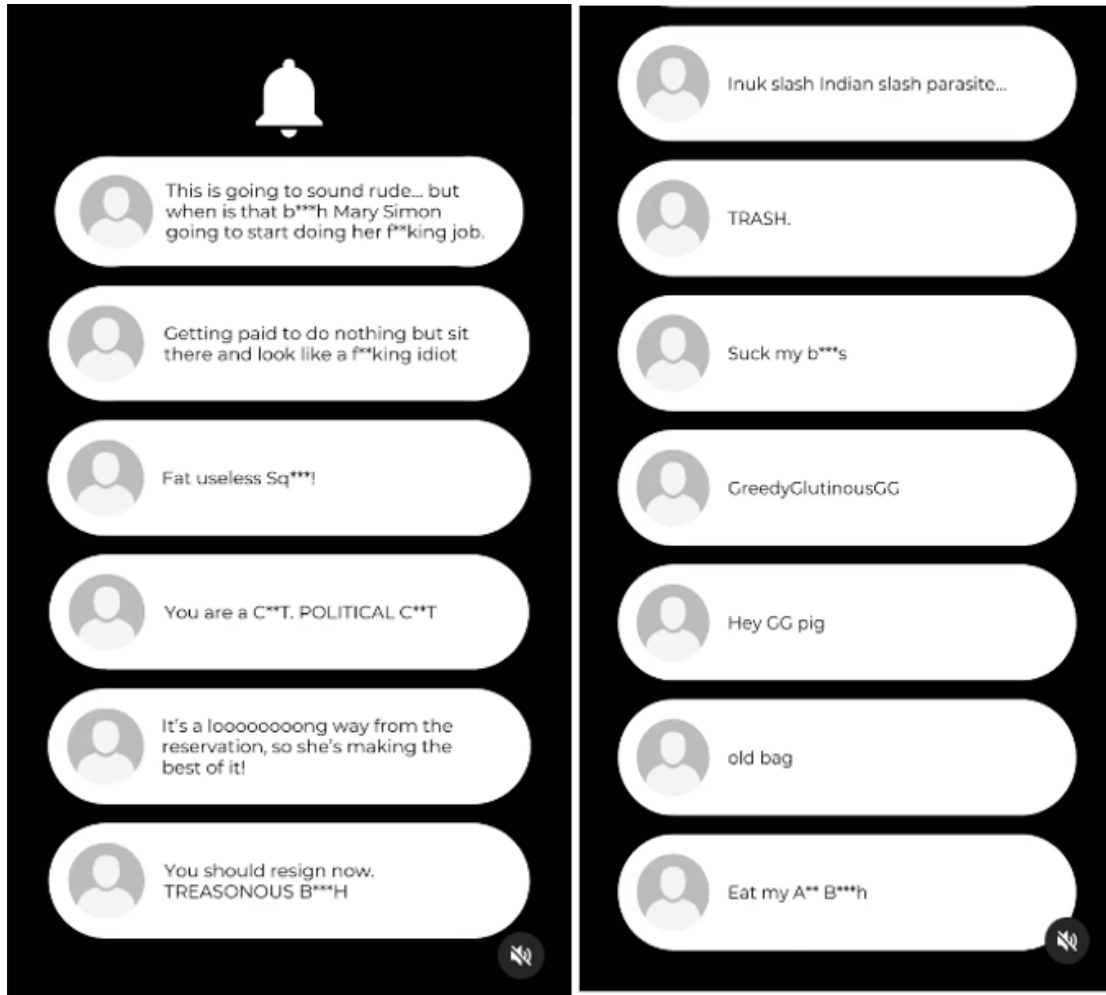
Figure 1. governorgeneralcanada. (2023, March 8) # IWD2023[35]

When [interviewed](#) about the rise in political online abuse she has received Gov. Gen Simon remarked,

> Many detractors will say that women should just learn to have a thicker skin, to take a joke. If they can't take it, stay out of the line of fire. Others will say online abuse is part of the role of a public figure, even though the equivalent spoken words would be condemned. I must respectfully disagree.[36]

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[35] governorgeneralcanada. "#internationalwomensday." *Instagram video*, 2023, March 8. 2023, May 28.
https://www.instagram.com/reel/CpiKrz6A4j2/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link
[36] Governor General shares abusive comments she received through social media
CBC Mar 08, 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/mary-simon-abuse-comments-social-media-1.6772247

National Approaches Addressing TFV Against Women

The landscape of online content regulation and safety has been undergoing transformations across various countries. In this context, notable legislative measures have been implemented to address the challenges posed by digital platforms. The following legislative endeavours exemplify the evolving strategies that some nations are employing to mitigate the significant complexities associated with online content regulation and safety.

1. **Germany:** Enacted in 2018, Germany's Network Enforcement Act imposes stringent obligations on social media platforms with over 2 million users. They are required to expeditiously remove clearly illegal content within 24 hours and eliminate all illegal content within seven days. Failure to comply with these requirements can result in penalties amounting to 50 million Euros.

2. **United Kingdom:** The Online Harm White Paper, introduced in 2020, introduces a novel regulatory framework for online safety in the UK. This framework involves the establishment of an independent regulatory authority tasked with overseeing and enforcing compliance with the regulations, thereby ensuring a safer online environment.

3. **European Union:** The EU's Digital Services Act enacted in 2022, introduces a comprehensive set of due diligence obligations for social media platforms. These obligations encompass content moderation, risk assessments concerning the dissemination of illegal content, as well as addressing intentional manipulation of platform services and its potential impact on fundamental rights.

4. **Canada:** As of March 2023, Canada remains steadfast in its *commitment* to implementing a transparent and accountable regulatory framework for online safety within its borders. This commitment underscores the significance of addressing online safety challenges in a manner that ensures transparency and accountability.

A recent white paper in Canada outlined the potential of a 'Digital Defence' strategy:

> The growing body of research shows that, all over the world, women in politics and journalists are targets of vicious online attacks and gendered disinformation campaigns framing them as inherently untrustworthy, unintelligent, too emotional, or sexualized, often carried out with malign intent and coordination.[37]

The paper catalogued the prevalence of online "threats, harassment, fake stories and graphic sexual taunts ...used to delegitimize, depersonalize and ultimately dissuade women from being politically active, with the most vicious attacks aimed at women of color and religious minorities."[38] The paper went on to urge that regulatory frameworks "demand greater transparency, accountability and better risk assessments from social media

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[37] https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/research/migs/docs/WomenLeadership/WhitePaper_CanadianWomenLeaders.pdf p. 1
[38] https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/research/migs/docs/WomenLeadership/WhitePaper_CanadianWomenLeaders.pdf p. 2

platforms with respect to their modus operandi, and the devastating harms caused by the content that's placed on their platforms."[39]

The fact that Canada, a country considered to be at the forefront of gender-equality, where women's rights are human rights, still lacks legislation designed to address the savagery of online TFV against women who work in and for the public, speaks to the inadequacy of so-called *notice and take-down* approaches to vile content. Online abuse is endemic, and it will not be managed by deleting one comment at the time.

Deplatforming Misogyny for Democracy

The active involvement of women in democracy is vital for balanced governance and sustainable progress. Women's participation ensures diverse perspectives, prioritizes essential issues, prevents conflicts, advances gender equality, provides role models, and contributes to overall societal well-being. In the pursuit of democracy, a comprehensive framework emerges from the need to address digital gender-based violence (TFGBV) through targeted strategies. The *Women's Legal Education and Action Fund's* '[Deplatforming Misogyny](#)' report (2021) revolves around several key principles and action points:

A.   **Centering Human Rights and Intersectionality:** To pave the way for a more equitable digital landscape, it is imperative to apply a principled human rights-based approach to the regulation of online platforms. This entails giving due regard to the fundamental rights to equality and freedom from discrimination. Legislation aimed at combating TFGBV should integrate substantive equality considerations. By weaving these considerations into the fabric of regulatory frameworks, it guards against the exploitation of dominant societal groups to stifle the expression of historically marginalized groups. An integral aspect of this process involves consulting and sincerely considering the perspectives and lived experiences of victims, survivors, and those broadly impacted by TFGBV. This collaborative approach enhances the effectiveness and relevance of the legislative response.

B.   **Legislative Reforms for Empowerment:** Empowerment and justice requires legislative reform. Establishing centralized expert regulators dedicated to addressing TFGBV represents a significant stride. Such regulators can offer legal remedies and support to individuals affected by TFGBV on digital platforms and wield regulatory and enforcement powers; regulators can additionally conduct research on TFGBV, and promote awareness via training and education for the public, stakeholders, and professionals. Furthermore, adapting provisions within the Copyright Act to cater specifically to various forms of TFGBV, reinforces the commitment to curbing online gender-based violence. Enacting laws enabling the swift removal of well-defined harmful content from platforms, without the need for a court order, ensures timely intervention against harmful content. Equally important is a focused approach – ensuring that legislative efforts centre solely on TFGBV,

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[39] https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/research/migs/docs/WomenLeadership/WhitePaper_Ca-nadianWomenLeaders.pdf p. 10

preventing dilution or compromise of its constitutional validity by attaching it to other unrelated platform regulations.

C.   **Responsibilities of Platform Companies:** In the journey toward peacebuilding, platforms must also shoulder their share of responsibilities. Platform companies should be required to establish visible and user-friendly mechanisms for complaints and reporting abuse. These mechanisms serve as crucial conduits for addressing and rectifying instances of TFGBV swiftly. Moreover, for platforms that are specifically designed for or enable TFGBV, a clear and delineated threshold of harm should warrant an automatic content removal order that extends across parent, subsidiary, or sibling platforms. This interconnected approach serves as a robust mechanism to curb the spread of harmful content. Independent audits, conducted either by a dedicated TFGBV agency or other independent bodies, combined with the publication of comprehensive annual transparency reports, hold platforms accountable and promote responsible practices. To truly create a just digital landscape, legal obligations need to accommodate the varying sizes, natures, purposes, and user bases of platforms.

D.   **Research, Education, and Empowerment:** Finally, to solidify the foundation of peacebuilding, research, education, and empowerment take centre stage. Funding and disseminating educational resources and training programs focused on TFGBV create informed and vigilant communities. Strengthening frontline support workers and community-based organisations in their efforts to combat gender-based violence, abuse, and harassment enhances their capacity to effectively support survivors of TFGBV, thereby contributing to holistic peacebuilding. Simultaneously, investing in empirical, interdisciplinary research by TFGBV experts fosters a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its intersection with emerging technologies.

In unison, these principles and actions carve a path toward peacebuilding by dismantling the digital gender-based violence landscape and fostering an environment of equality, justice, and empowerment.

Conclusion

The goal of online abuse is to harm women, deter them from participating in political discourse, and to tell them, and anyone watching, they are not welcome in politics. The erasure of females from political discourse and political power is an assault of human rights, democracy and peace and must be addressed by regulators who acknowledge that as long as misogyny creates revenue for these platforms, they will not self-regulate. Much more is needed, and soon, to ensure that women remain participants in democracy. If we do not protect women politicians, more women will avoid political participation. If we fail to make the internet safe the voices of women will withdraw from democracy, from civic spaces, and from the public sphere.

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