



Hate speech online – a gendered phenomenon that threatens democracy

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Gender Equality in the Digital Age: A Task for Europe
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Concepts and prevalence

- Hate speech, online hate
 - Gender-based violence, gendered violence
 - Online violence and harassment
 - Cyberviolence and harassment
 - Sexual harassment online
 - Symbolic/verbal/political violence
- stalking, controlling, threatening, sexually explicit or insinuating messaging, dick picks, trolling, hate speech aimed at silencing
- THL (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare) survey 2021: 42 % of girls of high school age have experienced sexual harassment online (the percentage doubled in 8 years)

The infographic features a dark grey background with a large pink shape on the right side. At the top left is the 'GENERATION EQUALITY' logo, which consists of a stylized sun with a female symbol inside. The main text is in large, bold, pink and white letters. A cartoon illustration of a woman holding a sign is on the right. At the bottom right is the 'UN WOMEN SUOMI' logo.

GENERATION EQUALITY

52%

TYTÖISTÄ JA NUORISTA NAISISTA on kohdannut verkkoväkivaltaa

END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

UN WOMEN SUOMI

Lähde: The World Wide Web Foundation and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (2020).



Gender-based Online Hate and Harassment

“Demeaning, threatening, or stigmatising expressions based on intolerance and hatred and targeted at a certain person or group of people based on their gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background or race” (Knuutila et al. 2019)

Gendered phenomenon: mostly produced by men and received by women (Pöyhtäri et al. 2013; Knuutila et al, 2019; Saresma et al., 2020)

Has become more frequent with digitalisation and the growing popularity of social media

Coincides with the right-wing populist upheaval



“When the remarkably young and female leadership came into power in December 2019, they made international headlines as pioneers of gender equality in governance. Their election also provoked online resistance in the form of abusive messages.”

- NATO Strategic Communications CoE (2021): explorative analysis of abusive messages targeting Finnish ministers on the social media platform Twitter → to understand the scope of politically motivated abusive language on Finnish Twitter
- Twitter data collected between 12 March and 27 July 2020
- Very low levels of both bot and coordinated activity
- The main topics triggering abusive messages were the COVID-19 pandemic, issues of immigration, Finnish EU relations, and socially liberal politics
- **Female Finnish ministers received a disproportionate number of abusive messages** throughout the monitoring period
- A startling portion of this abuse contained both latent and **overtly sexist language, as well as sexually explicit language**
- Large volumes of offensive and abusive messaging, but threats of physical violence were not observed

Hate speech, politics, and politicians

- Hate speech is a central part of contemporary political discourse
- Used as a political tool to exert pressure and influence or silence the opponent, often the liberals and reformists
- Hate speech is targeted against politicians **but** also politicians use hate speech
- Politicians use hate speech (or even commit hate crimes) → especially harmful, because politicians occupy an influential position and status; they have wide distribution networks; their persona gives credibility to their message → multiplicative effects

Poliitikot vihamielisten Twitter-viestien kohteena



Aleksa Knuutila, Heidi Kosonen, Tuja Saresma,
Paola Haara, Reeta Pöyhtäri

Viha vallassa: Vihapuheen vaikutukset yhteiskunnalliseen päätöksentekoon



Knuutila, Kosonen, Saresma, Haara,
Pöyhtäri: *Viha vallassa – vihapuheen
vaikutukset yhteiskunnalliseen
päätöksentekoon* (VNK 2019)

“The impact of hate speech on public
decision-making”, Report for Prime
Minister’s Office 2019

- 1/3 of municipal decision-makers had been targeted because of their work and almost 1/2 of those working in the parliament
- 2/3 believed that hate speech had increased in the past few years
- A mere threat of hate speech diminishes political participation
- 2021 municipal elections: situation getting worse!

Who is targeted with hate speech? Visibility and gender have effects

Out of municipal decision-makers: politicians in larger cities, women politicians, POC and racialized politicians, members of gender and sexual minorities, as well as the decision-makers in visible positions, such as mayors or the chairpersons of municipal governments, are targeted. Hate speech is frequently targeted at decision-makers who are women, LGBTQI+, racialized individuals or Swedish language speakers.

Gendered differences in the municipalities (questionnaire)	Men	Women
	(n=670)	(n=572)
Respondent targeted	28% (±3.4%)	42% (±4.0%)
Their kin targeted	14% (±2.6%)	14% (±2.9%)
Abusive language or derogatory speech	20% (±3.0%)	34% (±3.9%)
Threats	10% (±2.3%)	18% (±3.2%)
Hostility towards groups of people	10% (±2.3%)	20% (±3.3%)

Poliittisten toimijoiden kokema vihapuhe sukupuolittuneena poliittisena väkivaltana

Tuija Saresma, Reeta Pöyhtäri, Heidi Kosonen, Paula Haara & Aleksi Knuutila

Hate speech experienced by political actors as gendered political violence (Saresma et al., *Sukupuolentutkimus - Genusforskning* 4/2020)

	Miehet (n=670)	Naiset (n=572)
Itse ollut kohteena	28% (±3.4%)	42% (±4.0%)
Läheiset olleet kohteena	14% (±2.6%)	14% (±2.9%)
Halventaminen tai solvaaminen	20% (±3.0%)	34% (±3.9%)
Uhkaaminen	10% (±2.3%)	18% (±3.2%)
Vihamielisyys ryhmiä kohtaan	10% (±2.3%)	20% (±3.3%)

Taulukko 1. Sukupuolten väliset erot kuntapäättäjien vihapuhekokemuksissa. Osuus vastaajista, jotka ovat kokeneet vihapuhetta viimeisen 12 kuukauden aikana. Suluissa merkitty 95 prosentin luottamusväli.

Erittelimme kyselyssä erilaisia vihapuheen tyyppiä, muun muassa halventamisen, uhkaamisen sekä vihamielisyyden esimerkiksi tiettyä kieli- tai etnistä ryhmää kohtaan. Kaikissa tyypeissä naisiin kohdistui miehiä enemmän vihapuhetta. Naisten kohtaa-

ma vihapuhe oli miesten kohtaamaa vakavampaa sikäli, että heihin kohdistettu vihapuhe sai useammin uhkausten muodon. Erot naisten ja miesten välillä ovat tilastollisesti merkitseviä. Myös vastaajien läheisiin kohdistui säännöllisesti vihapuhetta.

	Heikentänyt paljon	Heikentänyt jonkin verran	Ei vaikutusta	Vahvistanut jonkin verran	Vahvistanut paljon	En osaa sanoa
Naiset (n=256)	13%	38%	35%	9%	4%	1%
Miehet (n=224)	7%	26%	53%	10%	4%	0%

- Hate speech targeted at politicians is a clearly gendered phenomenon
- It affects the subjects like physical violence
- We call this sub genre of hate speech as verbal political violence
- It aims at hurting/wounding and silencing its targets and thus make them leave politics (or certain topics)
- Hate speech experienced by politicians is intersectional: it is targeted at women, gender and sexual minorities and ethnic minorities

Producers of hate speech

”Networks of hate: Exploring circulation and producers of online hate”

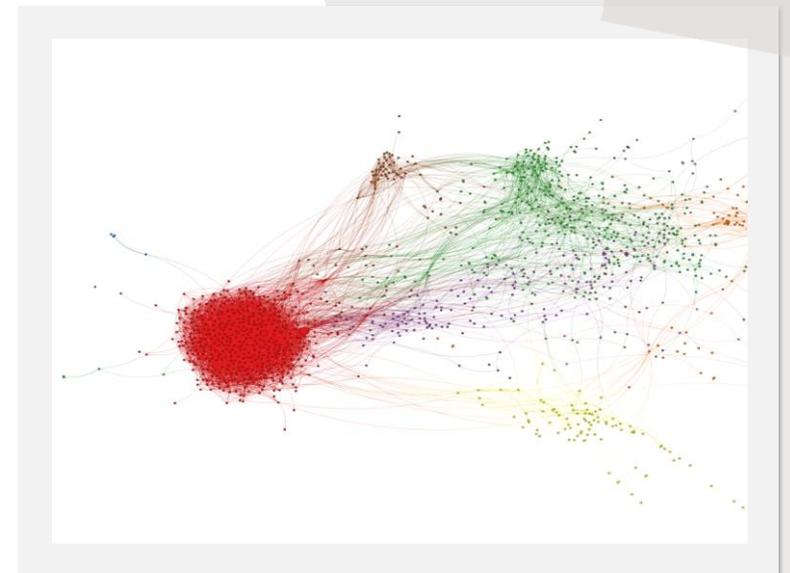
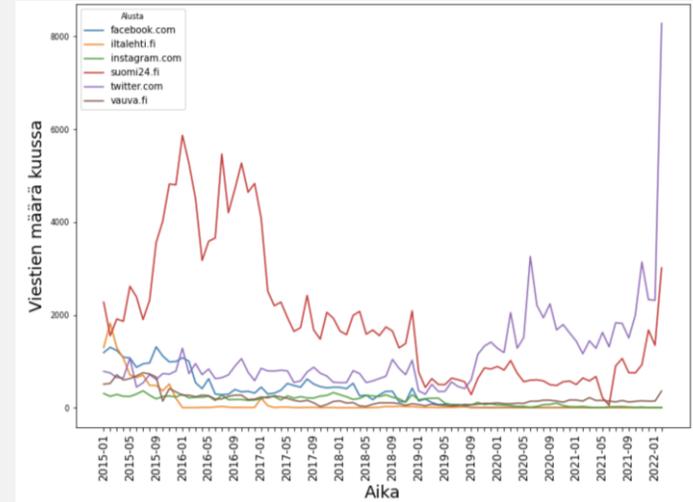
- Verkkoviha : Vihapuheen tuottajien ja levittäjien verkostot, toimintamuodot ja motiivit
- Saresma, Tuija; Pöyhtäri, Reeta; Knuutila, Aleks; Kosonen, Heidi; Juutinen, Marko; Haara, Paula; Tulonen, Urho; Nikunen, Kaarina; Rauta, Jenita (2022-06-20)

<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-298-5>



I Network analysis based on computer-assisted classification

- Aim of network analysis: To study producers of hate speech based on the connections between them (as opposed to eg. thematic analysis of messages)
- The data is user-generated content from Finnish image boards, discussion forums, news article comments as well as Facebook and Instagram, from 2015 to 2022
- We downloaded 1.2 million messages that contain ethnic, religious or gender-related slurs, based on a list of 67 slur words
- Our definition of *slurs*: 1) Derogatory words about groups 2) Deemed inappropriate in everyday contexts (Hjort 2007)
- With computer-assisted methods, we categorised messages according to whether slur words is used in a stigmatizing, abusive or threatening manner
- Platforms used for hateful posts: The discussion forum suomi24.fi and Twitter are the platforms where slurs are most prominent



II Categorizing producers of hate speech through analyzing their motives

- Comparative examination of different actors that produce hate speech
 - An analytic method through which we can begin to evaluate the differences between the different motivations that individuals and groups may have
 - Based on internet ethnography conducted on various Finnish websites
 - News sites, blogs, social media communities
 - Focus on message- and imageboards
 - Three major motives for producing hate speech can be discerned:
 - Ideological, Emotional and Performative
- A broad variety of types of speech and motivations



Hate speech as gendered, digitally mediated violence

- Affective online communication as a new form of violence (Saresma et al. 2020; 2021)
- Digitally mediated violence is an integral part of the chain of violence that links intimate violence, violent societal structures and ideological and political violence
- Affective discursive expressions of hatred are spread through social media, arouse affects and shape our understanding of reality
- They are violent themselves but also pave the way for an ideological readiness to use other types of violence

Vihapuhe on verbaalista väkivaltaa, joten voisimme käyttää rohkeammin väkivalta-sanaa

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VÄKIVALTA MEDIASSA -
WEBINAARISSA 27.4.21

#tasaarvoiset