MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN MONTENEGRO

2025

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Content

Introduction

Montenegro is a culturally diverse society, in terms of its multiple religious and ethnic communities, and political tensions, hate speech, and disinformation represent a serious threat to society's well-being. Over the past years, the country has repeatedly faced waves of misleading narratives and hostile rhetoric, particularly during moments of heightened social tensions.

According to Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index, Montenegro made a slight improvement in press freedom, moving from the 40th position in 2024 to 37th in 2025. Although the constitution and laws guarantee freedom of speech and expression, the index noted that "press freedom continues to be threatened by political interference, unresolved attacks on journalists, and economic pressure."

In October 2024, the Government of Montenegro adopted the country's first Media Strategy, following a prolonged process. The strategy pledged to improve gender-sensitive reporting, combat disinformation, support media literacy, strengthen the independence of public broadcasters, improve the socioeconomic position of journalists, and enhance fair competition in the media market. However, Montenegro's media landscape remained highly polarised, and no progress was made in strengthening media self-regulation to overcome divisions within the media community.

Data collected by the Safe Journalists network show that over the past year, the trend of attacks on journalists, columnists, and photojournalists has escalated. Over the past year, there has been a noticeable increase in the authorities' tolerance toward the glorification of Greater Serbian politics, the Chetnik movement, and similar ideologies. This is reflected in the actions of decision-makers toward the leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who organised prayer services for representatives of the Chetnik movement and erected a monument to Chetnik leader Pavle Đurišić. All of this was reported in Serbian media by portrayals glorifying the Chetnik movement, as well as attacks on the civilian and media sectors that condemned such actions.

Such actions have deepened divisions across Montenegro's political, religious, and ethnic lines, while undermining social cohesion and contributing to an atmosphere of mistrust. The country's media environment reflects this fragmentation: while some reputable outlets maintain high editorial standards and public credibility, others serve as vehicles for spreading inflammatory content and unverified claims. The rapid expansion of digital platforms and social media has only accelerated the dissemination of such harmful narratives, making efforts to monitor and counter them increasingly difficult.

In response to these trends, the Centre for Investigative Journalism of Montenegro (CIN CG), as part of the Reporting Diversity Network, implements media monitoring aimed at identifying and analysing the most significant instances of hateful and discriminatory discourse since 2021. This research spans traditional media, online outlets, and public communications from political and religious leaders. Its goal is to provide evidence-based insights that can support the development of more effective responses to these challenges.

What distinguishes this study is its broad and inclusive approach. Rather than adhering strictly to legal definitions, the research explores a wide array of discriminatory expressions based on factors such as religion, political views, nationality or social or economic status, disability, refugee or migrant background, gender identity, and sexual orientation. This comprehensive lens allows for a deeper understanding of how individuals and groups become targets of hostility.

Ultimately, the findings from this research are intended to strengthen both national and regional efforts to mitigate the impact of hate and discrimination-driven rhetoric. By placing Montenegro's situation within a wider Western Balkan context, RDN media monitoring emphasises the importance of cross-border cooperation, inclusive dialogue, and coordinated strategies to protect democratic values and societal harmony in the face of these persistent threats.

Methodology

The defined methodological approach mirrors our preceding report, maintaining consistency in the analysis of media content. We conducted a comprehensive monitoring of traditional and online media outlets, including newspapers, television broadcasts, information portals, radio, and social media platforms such as X, Facebook, and Instagram. This extensive media monitoring focused on identifying and analysing incidents of hate speech and discriminatory content, with a particular emphasis on content originating from public officials and politicians. The rationale behind this focus stems from the substantial influence these figures have over public opinion, making their statements critical to understanding the dynamics of hate speech in Montenegro.

The methodology did not include the analysis of comments posted on online media, nor those on social media, but only the content directly being published by media and influential individuals in Montenegro. The analysis used a multifaceted approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods, alongside adjusted discourse analysis. This allowed us to classify the collected cases by various criteria: the subject matter, the narrative techniques employed, the targeted groups or individuals, the profile of the perpetrators of hateful and discriminatory discourse, the reach and impact of the content, the media format utilised, and the broader societal and political context within which these incidents occurred.

Quantitative analysis

Between January 2024 and June 2025, data were collected through monitoring both traditional media and social media content related to various social identities and groups, including gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual minorities, and migrants/refugees. During this period, CIN CG recorded a total of 81 individual incidents involving hate speech and/or discriminatory language.

Out of 81 cases, 34 cases targeted multiple categories of identities, while 47 cases encompassed one type of hate speech (e.g. targeting only gender or only ethnicity).

The most prevalent type of hate speech in Montenegro is against ethnicity, which has also been noted during previous monitoring periods. Overall, 35 incidents against ethnicity were collected. Out of those, 21 cases also consisted of another type of hate speech, most commonly against religion. This indicates that hate speech in Montenegro often goes hand in hand with hate speech against religion. Montenegro's mix of ethnic and religious communities, combined with deep societal divides, makes the findings consistent with the country's underlying social frictions.

Hate speech against gender is the second most prevalent category of hate speech, with a total of 25 cases, while 11 cases also include another type of hate speech. Rhetoric against political opponents is the third most frequent, with 23 cases. Attacks targeting solely political opponents appeared in only eight cases, suggesting that political opponents, although they are attacked because of their political affiliation, are targeted based on other identity categories as well, primarily their religion, ethnicity and gender.

During the period covered by this report, CIN CG identified 10 cases of hateful discourse targeting journalists.

Multiple and single cases categorisation

Category	Sum	Percent
Against religion	16	19.75%
Against ethnicity	35	43.21%
Against gender	25	30.86%
Against journalists	10	12.35%
Against political opponents	23	28.40%
Against certain professions	3	3.70%
Against people with disabilities	2	2.47%
Against sexual minority	4	4.94%
Total	**81**	**100.00%**

Chart 1. Number of incidents targeting single identity categories

Type of hatred	Number of incidents
Against sexual minority	1
Against people with disabilities	1
Against certain professions	1
Against political opponents	8
Against journalists	7
Against gender	14
Against ethnicity	14
Against religion	1
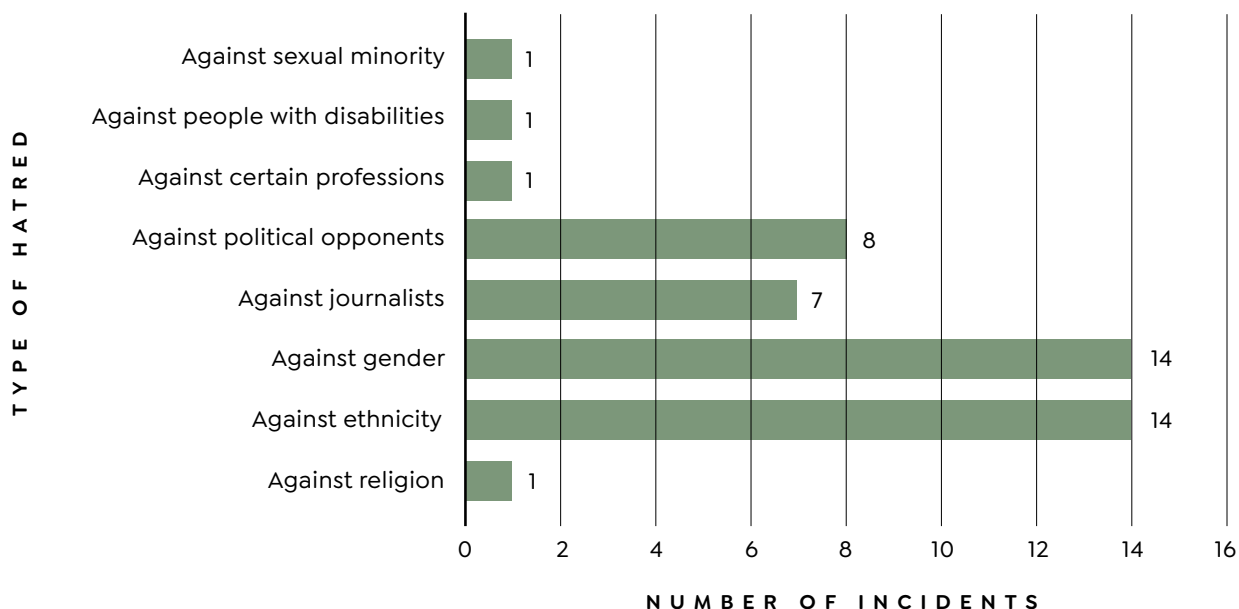
Chart 2. Number of incidents targeting multiple identity categories

Type of hatred	Number of incidents
Against sexual minority	3
Against people with disabilities	1
Against certain professions	2
Against political opponents	15
Against journalists	3
Against gender	11
Against ethnicity	21
Against religion	15
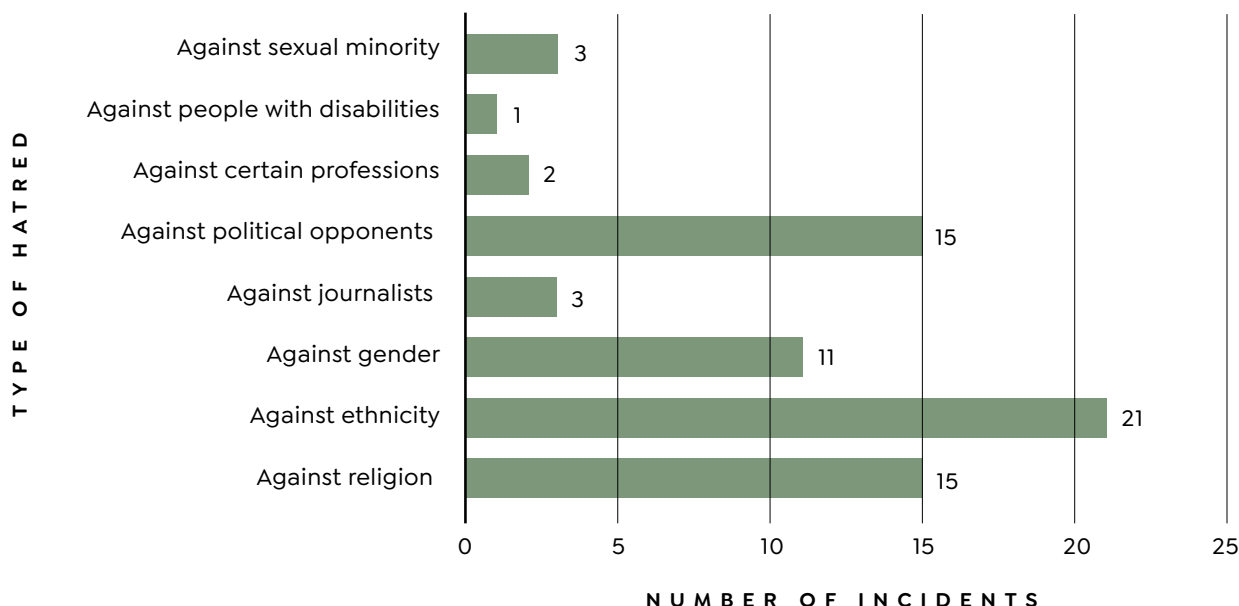
An analysis of the sources of hate speech indicates that many incidents involved multiple contributors, particularly in cases where politicians and institutions provoked public reaction through problematic remarks or actions. The most frequent contributors were politicians, political parties, and state officials, who were involved in 30 incidents. They were followed by journalists, media personnel, and media analysts, with 24 cases. Private individuals accounted for 11 incidents, while professors and other intellectuals were perpetrators in eight cases. Influencers, bloggers, and social media activists contributed to nine cases. In contrast, civil society organisations, celebrities, artists, and popular culture persons were involved in only three recorded incidents, representing a minimal share of the total. There were 32 cases in which multiple perpetrators were involved.

Chart 3. Perpetrators of hateful and discriminatory discourse
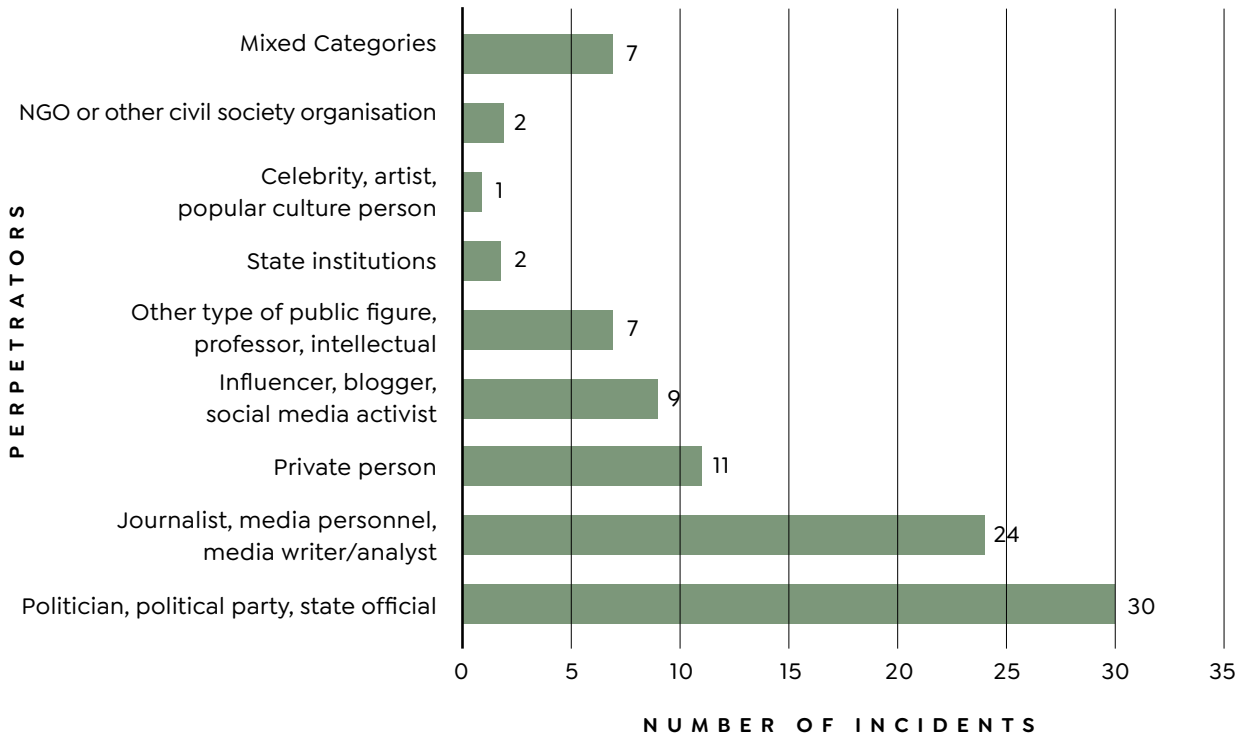
Breaking down hate speech and discriminatory language into distinct categories shows that the overwhelming majority of recorded cases fall into the sphere of verbal attacks, derogatory group labels, stereotypes, and overt hostility. These types of hate speech are recognised in categories of Negative group labelling, stereotyping and hostility, as well as Insults, while spreading harmful lies, misinformation, and disinformation follow with a significantly smaller number of cases. Yet, most of the cases are combined types. Threats usually go hand in hand with incitement to violence.

Another striking aspect is the deliberate perpetuation of falsehoods, misleading narratives, and manipulative information, which accounts for just over one tenth of the documented incidents. These are powerful tools for deepening prejudice and harm caused by hateful discourses, and they often go hand in hand.

Negative group labelling, stereotyping, and hostility	43
Insult (personal, denigrating, humiliating)	53
Spreading of harmful lies, misinformation, disinformation	24
Misuse of personal data, half-truths, leaked information from state records	4
Threat, statements potentially threatening to safety	13
Incitement to violence	10
Inflammatory speech (conflict situation, repeated messages from different actors, prolonged by the same media)	20

Qualitative analysis

Sentiment analysis

Reported incidents were rated on a scale of one to six, with one being disagreement with a group and six being incitement of literal killing or elimination of a group. The average score was 3.25 for all cases, reflecting a moderate level of negative sentiments in the discourse. Almost 40% of the cases fell within the middle category 3- Negative Character, which typically encompasses non-violent negative rhetoric, such as verbal insults. This indicates that although most hate speech cases avoid directly urging violence, they still foster an atmosphere of exclusion and antagonism by spreading harmful portrayals and discriminatory behaviour. Insults in this category were mostly directed at women, with insulting verbal labelling, aiming to show that something is wrong with particular women. An illustrative example in which several traditional media took part, including the Public Service Broadcaster, Radio-Television of Montenegro, included false news with headlines "Women Use More Drugs Than Man". Malinformation was based on data from online testing presented at a conference, which was misunderstood or misinterpreted by journalists, leading to the wrong conclusion and stigmatisation of women in Montenegro. In addition, sensationalistic headlines contribute to the level of public influence that such articles have.

DEATH
4%

DISAGREEMENT
11%

VIOLENCE
20%

NEGATIVE
ACTIONS
15%

GRAPH 4.
SENTIMENT
ANALYSIS

DEMONISING AND
DEHUMANISING
11%

NEGATIVE
CHARACTER
39%
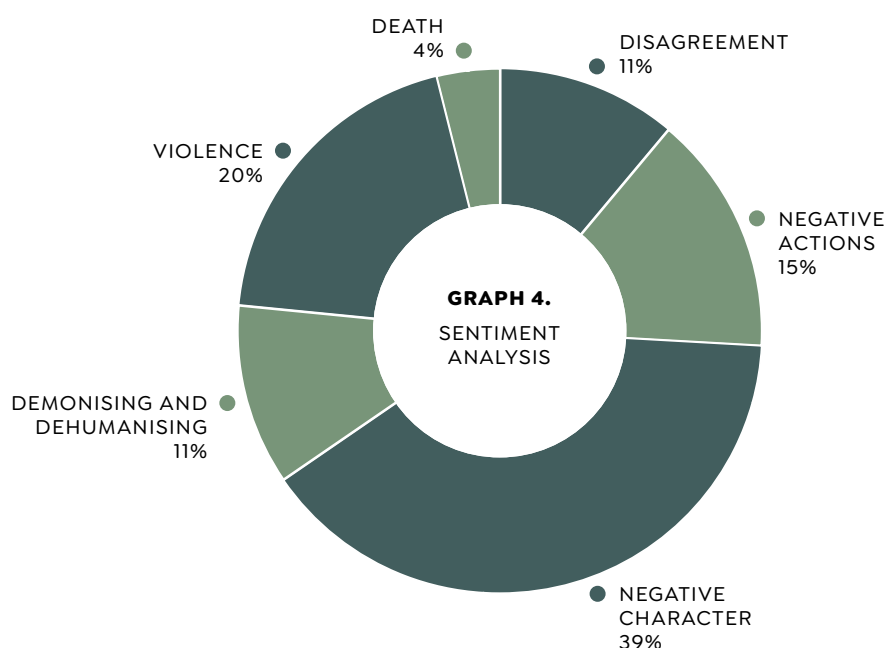
Milder cases of hate speech were observed in 25.9% of cases within categories of Disagreement and Negative actions. Such cases consist of statements of opposition or criticism that lack the strongly offensive or provocative undertones typically present in more severe forms of hate speech. Insults based on ethnicity and religion were also common, with insults towards Albanians, Bosniaks and Muslims.

Disagreement (sentiment 1), encompassing expressions that offend, belittle, or depict individuals or groups in a harmful way because of their identity, represents 11.1 % of the cases. Most of the cases were undermining the nationality or ethnicity of a certain group, indirectly, but in a clear way.

The level two incidents – Negative Actions, refer to cases involving hostile but non-violent behaviours directed at a group, accounted for 14, 8 % of all the cases. For example, independent MP Jevrosima Pejović announced on March 8th that she had submitted an initiative to introduce menstrual leave. The initiative aims to help women with two days of paid leave per month due to extremely painful cycles. Some comments regarding the proposal defended a traditional role for women, implying that they must endure everything. The proposed law is described as an injustice and is falsely presented as a right to skip work for seven days.

Level four – Demonising and Dehumanising, includes language that attributes inhuman characteristics to individuals or groups, making them seem subhuman or superhuman and inherently dangerous. Level four was observed in 9 incidents, which makes 11.1 % of the cases. This form of hate speech contributes to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of targeted groups by portraying them as fundamentally alien or threatening. This category was present in several instances following the mass shooting that took place in the small Montenegrin town of Cetinje on New Year's. At that time, pro-Montenegrin and pro-Serbian actors attempted to attribute the tragedy to the perpetrator's religious affiliation and nationality, linking his alleged religious and ethnic background with cults and national identity. Some even insulted the citizens of Cetinje, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and associated the murder with these identifiers.

Close to 20% of all the cases involved overt violence (sentiment 5). This group covers expressions that hint at or allude to bodily injury, showing that a notable share of hate speech instances lean toward endorsing or justifying violence directed at specific communities. There were two cases of targeting journalists with hate speech, one threat of violence against photo-reporter Savo Prelević and another case of actual physical violence towards journalist Ana Raicković. Both cases were committed by alleged criminals and businessmen suspected of corruption, about whom the victims had been reporting.

Level six – Death, which implies literal killing of the individual or a group, was present in three cases, making the 3.7%, including a case when a child sent disturbing threats involving slogans connected to the genocide in Srebrenica, implying carnage of Muslims and Bosniaks. Interestingly, one of the cases in this category was committed by a former Prime Minister and President of Montenegro, Milo Đukanović, when he threatened blood revenge in an interview on online media Antena M, due to the arrest of his allies suspected of organised crime.

Narrative analysis

Since the purpose of this project and its research component is to improve understanding of hateful propaganda models of media and communication in the Western Balkans, but also to improve ability of society to respond, develop counter-narratives and build resilience of citizens, it makes sense to consult the source such as the Council of Europe manual "WE CAN! Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives".

Within it, the term *narrative is* described as a structured and coherent account that interprets interconnected events, people, or pieces of information in a way that is understandable to the reader or listener. The combination of description and interpretation provides meaning to the story, linking individual occurrences to a broader collective context. Narratives play a central role in shaping, reinforcing, or challenging unequal social and political power relations, which underpin and legitimise hate speech, discrimination, and extremism. They frequently blend factual and fictional elements to ensure they appear credible, engaging, and persuasive.

In this research, we extended the focus beyond the narrow legal framing of hate speech, incorporating a wider range of discriminatory discourses commonly present in both media and public communication. This broader perspective enabled us to examine a variety of hostile narratives, especially those targeting gender, political or ideological positions, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and ethnic identity.

Drawing on the documented cases from the defined timeframe, we analysed the dominant hateful and discriminatory discourse as well as their sub-narratives in relation to each of the identified target groups.

Hate Narratives Overview

Ethnic discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia

Ethnicity in Montenegro remains the most common target of hate narratives, with 43.2% of the cases. Ethnic tensions remain most often directed against Albanians, Bosniaks, Serbs and Montenegrins.

Gender discrimination- Sexism, Sexual harassment, Misogyny, Transphobia

Sexism and misogyny remain the most common form of gender discrimination in Montenegro, with 30.9% of the cases. Women who are politically exposed are the most common victims, but there's also discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people, including homophobia and transphobia.

Political / Ideological opponents

Narratives against political/ideological opponents are also amongst the most common types, with 28.4% of cases involving such narratives. Out of 23 in total, 15 cases involved other types of hate narratives, such as ethnic/religion/gender based insults, meaning that perpetrators of hateful discourse are ready to use all kinds of personal insults. Hate narratives targeting political and ideological opponents have long been present in Montenegrin politically divided societies.

Attacks on Journalists

During the monitoring period, there were several violent attacks on journalists as well as pressure coming from the institutions. The attacks on journalists have increased in the past several years, as evident in the Safe Journalists database of attacks. Reporting Diversity Network data indicate that the hate speech narratives disseminated in the public have very high sentiments, and involve a call for violence. This finding is in line with the increase in cases registered by the Safe Journalists Network.

Ethnic Subnarratives

Revisionism of the Chetnik movement and denial and relativisation of crimes against non-Serb people in the Balkans

In this monitoring period, the relativisation of the crimes of the Chetnik movement and the glorification of its representatives continued, which was also noticed in previous reporting periods. However, the situation became additionally complicated after high-ranking dignitaries and other representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) openly glorified war criminals such as Pavle Đurišić. Politicians, representatives of pro-Serbian options, also participate in this glorification and relativisation of crimes, triggering events of unethical reporting by pro-Serbian portals and hateful comments.

The president of the municipality of Pljevlja, Dario Vraneš, posted a photo on his Instagram story with the song "Get ready, get ready, Chetniks". Among others in the photo are the president of the municipality of Nikšić, Marko Kovačević, and the NSD member of parliament, Jovan Jole Vučurović. "A small but chosen squad", wrote Vraneš along with the posted photo, also referring to the Chetnik movement.

Several cases were triggered upon Metropolitan of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, Joanikije, emphasised that Pavle Đurišić, a member of the Chetnik movement who ordered numerous massacres of the Muslim population in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, was a "great hero". Other members, such as Metropolitan Metodije of the Eparchy of Budimlja-Nikšić (Serbian Orthodox Church), continued the historical revisionism initiated by his colleague Joanikije.

Another striking example was triggered by the Diocese of Budimlja-Nikšić of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, which celebrated Blagoje Krušić, a member of the Chetnik movement and the "Black Hand" during the First World War in Serbia. The diocese organised the consecration of his monument in Banjani village in the municipality of Nikšić on the Christian holiday of Saint Cyril of Alexandria. Marko Kovačević, a pro-Serb, nationalist mayor of Nikšić attended the liturgy and consecration. Metodije described Dragoljub Mihailović, leader of the Chetnik movement and Pavle Đurišić as "heroes" and "the first guerrilla fighters in Europe against fascism", ignoring historical evidence of their crimes against civilians and minorities (e.g. Muslims and partisans) during World War II.

These events were followed by online support and problematic writings by pro-Serbian articles. The unregistered, pro-Serbian portal IN4S republished this column under the title "We Are All Pavle Đurišić", written by priest Ognjen Femić. In this column, Pavle Đurišić is described as a "great fighter for our people", and both his name and deeds, as well as the Chetnik movement itself, are glorified. The Chetniks are referred to as "Western allies", and it is claimed that the greatest Western democracies celebrate the Chetnik movement as their only ally during World War II in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. As further justification for celebrating the Chetniks, it is mentioned that Serbia has rehabilitated the Chetnik movement, while the state of Montenegro is criticised for not also honouring Đurišić. The pro-Serbian portal Barski info published a highly problematic column titled "When the Truth (About Pavle Đurišić) Hurts", signed by the editorial staff. The article claims that Montenegro is disturbed by Pavle Đurišić, even though in Serbia, it has been declared that this was an "anti-fascist and freedom-loving" movement. The piece then moves on to criticising minorities in Montenegro, stating that "Greater Albania" is being promoted.

Ethnic- Religion Narratives Against Muslims and Respective Ethnicities

Thirteen cases involved both religious and ethnic discrimination, which makes for 37.1% of all the cases involving ethnic narratives and 81.2% of all the cases involving religious narratives, suggesting that these two categories are often intertwined in Montenegrin society and media. Out of 13 cases, 11 involved narratives against Islam and Albanian or Bosniak ethnicities, respectively and/or relativisation of the crimes committed against non-Serbs in the Balkans. Seven cases out of 13 (53.8%) were perpetrated by politicians or other public figures, such as religious figures, which were usually followed by the promotion of harmful narratives online, through comments and articles.

Vladislav Dajković, pro Serbian politician, reacted using insults and unfounded accusations towards the Bosniak Party when the Bosniak Party asked for historical marking of the massacre of the Muslim population in the village nowadays called Tomaševo. Dajković stated that the Bosniak Party aims to label Serbs "genocidal nation", and that "there are more proofs for Jasenovac than Srebrenica". Dajković wrote on his X account, getting huge reach, retweets, and supportive comments that further spread harmful narratives against Bosniaks and Muslims.

On September 4, the pro-Serbian portal Borba republished an article from the unregistered portal Srpska 24, titled "Concert for Nermin - Islamisation of Podgorica", in which ethnic and national insults were directed at the candidate of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) for mayor of Podgorica in the upcoming local elections. Additionally, the article contained hate speech and discriminatory views against members of the Islamic community and, in general, against religious and national minorities in Montenegro.

Although the media and politicians should serve as corrective forces in society and set examples, in Montenegro, the situation is mostly the opposite. Problematic narratives are at the epicentre of political developments- numerous political, religious, and other figures actively promote hate speech, discrimination, and even incitement to violence, which only deepens divisions and undermines the stability of Montenegrin society.

Gender subnarratives

Discrimination Against Women In Public Space

When it comes to gender-related narratives, which, both in this and in previous monitoring cycles, recorded the highest number of incidents after ethnic narratives, a particularly prominent sub-narrative is the hate speech and insults directed at successful women in politics, activism, and journalism. Former Minister of Education Vesna Bratić, for example, was subjected to repeated attacks. Irena Radović, who at the time was a candidate for Governor of the Central Bank of Montenegro and has since assumed the position, was targeted in articles published by the portal *Aktuelno.me.* These articles, in a distinctly misogynistic manner, manipulated facts from her private life to discredit her.

On the Facebook page of Narodna Sloga, a shameful attack against the director of MANS, Vanja Ćalović, was published. On this page, a picture of a Dalmatian dog digging in the sand of Velika Plaza is posted, along with a caption that says "Not even a grain of the Velika Plaza". This is a clear reference to the smear campaign that the DPS conducted against Vanja Ćalović in 2014, when a photo of a woman with an obscured face engaged in sexual acts with a Dalmatian dog was published on the front page of the Informer newspaper. The article asked Vanja Ćalović to confirm whether she was the woman in the photo. At the time, Ćalović had two dogs, and this was a vile and mean-spirited smear campaign by the DPS against her through the Informer newspaper. The Informer newspaper was closed in 2016.

MP Jevrsoima Pejović was also attacked several times. Besides becoming a victim of public misogynistic outrage upon proposing a law that would enable women with extremely painful periods to have sick leave during that time of the month, she also received insults upon publicly criticising problematic agreements that Montenegro signed with the UAE.

Political opponents subnarratives

Opponents do not choose their means when attacking

Attacks on political opponents are a frequent occurrence in Montenegro, and this represents one of the most diverse categories, with victims including activists, journalists, civil society representatives, politicians, and institutional officials. In half of the cases, the perpetrators were politicians or influential public figures, while in 31.3% of the cases, the perpetrators were media outlets, their columnists, or journalists. What stands out in this category is that most cases of attacks on political opponents are combined with attacks based on another identity marker: ethnicity, religion, or gender. The perpetrators do not hesitate to use disinformation and lies to discredit their opponents.

For example, pro-regime, pro-Serbian portal Borba published an article in which students protesting since the mass murder in Cetinje at the beginning of January were insulted. Students protested against the government's slow response to the tragedy, which they say caused further victims. z claimed they insulted the deceased in Cetinje by making noise at a billboard, but in fact, the students had announced they would make noise outside the Government building to signal that their demands remained unmet.

Attacks on journalists

An aggressive attacker on a journalist was prosecuted

During the monitoring period, attacks on journalists became increasingly frequent, including some of the most aggressive incidents in recent years-such as the physical assault on crime section editor Ana Raičković by controversial businessman Zoran Bećirović, his son, and his bodyguard. Raičković reported on Bećirović, a fact considered to be related to the attack. The attack involved both verbal and physical violence, and the Montenegrin judiciary prosecuted the perpetrators, who were sentenced to prison.

Visibility analysis

The channels used to convey hate speech offer additional understanding of the ways hateful narratives are disseminated. Situations where such content appears solely within one outlet are rare; rather, it is largely distributed through several avenues. Analysis of the presence of hate speech across different platforms in Montenegro shows that the vast majority of cases, 71 out of 81 (87.6%), were shared through multiple platforms. Online portals were present in 67 of the multiple platform cases (94.3 %), and in 63 cases (88.7 %), social media were one of the channels of dissemination. This occurs primarily because various media outlets and politicians are present on different social networks, allowing cases of hate speech and other problematic discourse to reach a much wider audience than is the case with traditional media. A particular concern is unregistered portals, some of which maintain a strong online presence, including activity across multiple social media platforms.

By comparison, cases where hate speech or harmful narratives were distributed through only one source account for a total of 10 cases (12.3%). This indicates that the prevailing pattern is the distribution of the same problematic narratives on diverse platforms.

Online portals are also the most prevalent channel when it comes to single-medium cases. Out of 10 single-medium cases, 6 were distributed via online portals, while the remaining 4 appeared on social media.

Traditional media, i.e. television, newspaper and radio, accounted for 30 cases, but all of these cases were distributed via multiple channels, meaning that traditional media as a single dissemination channel didn't appear in any case.

Chart 5: Types of dissemination channels
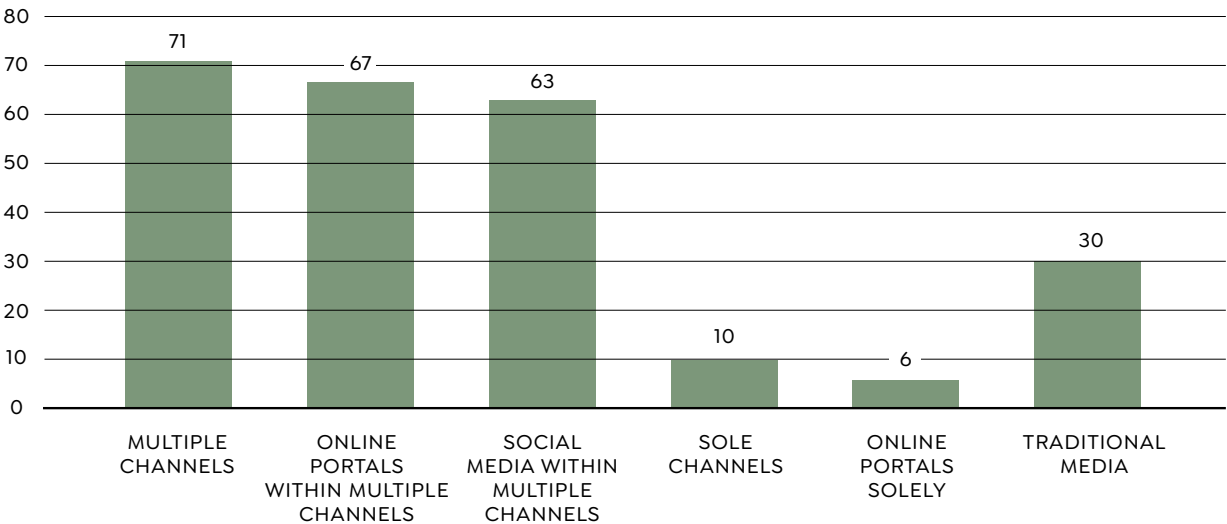
Comparative analysis

A comparative analysis of hate narratives in Montenegro reveals a deeply rooted culture of intolerance and discrimination across ethnicity, gender, political ideology, and nationalism. What stands out is the ethnic and religious-based discrimination combined with the historical revisionism, which deepens societal divisions around the issue of ethnic identity.

Ethnic discrimination, racism, and xenophobia remain prominent, with numerous incidents reflecting Montenegro's ongoing struggles with ethnonational tensions. These narratives often combine direct insults and derogatory portrayals of ethnic groups with political and historical accusations, intertwining historical revisionism and nationalism. This is particularly evident in attacks against ethnic Albanians and in the denial or distortion of historical crimes, such as the Srebrenica genocide, which perpetuate stereotypes and fuel nationalist sentiment.

The significant tensions in the past year also revolved around ethnic identity, with a rise in tensions between Montenegrin and Serbian identities, but involved religious identity as well.

Gender discrimination is also pervasive, with sexism, sexual harassment, and misogyny deeply embedded in society. This is reflected in derogatory depictions of women in politics, attacks on activists, and threats against female journalists, all of which contribute to the objectification and marginalisation of women.

Political and ideological polarisation further intensifies societal division, with individuals targeted for their beliefs through negative discourse, ad hominem attacks, and vilification of figures or ideologies. Nationalist movements, including the Chetnik movement, amplify ethnic and nationalist tensions, often reinforced by historical revisionism and the glorification of controversial figures.

Incidents range from direct attacks, verbal harassment and physical threats, to more subtle forms of discrimination in media portrayals and public discourse. Despite their simplicity, these narratives are highly effective in promoting intolerance, relying on stereotypes, stigmatisation, and misinformation to target ethnic and religious minorities, women, political opponents, and sexual minorities.

Preventive and ex post actions to combat hate and disinformation narratives

During the monitoring period, in 2024, the implementation of new media and audiovisual laws and the Media Strategy took place.

The implementation of the new media and audiovisual services laws was supposed to introduce a strong response to the spread of hate speech, ensuring expedited judicial proceedings and strengthening the role of regulatory bodies and self-regulation. The new Media Law, among other things, enables expedited judicial proceedings for the spread of hatred towards all communities, not just minority groups, as well as expedited proceedings based on a party's request for the protection of specific rights, and not solely on the prosecutor's initiative. One year after the adoption of new laws on audiovisual media services and the national public broadcaster, authorities have still failed to ensure their effective implementation. Parliament has yet to appoint new members to the Agency for Electronic Media Council, and the public call for RTCG Council members, whose mandates expire in June, was only issued in May, despite the law requiring this in February, as noted by the European Commission.

The European Commission (EC) also highlighted concerns over the appointment of the RTCG General Director, previously contested in multiple court rulings, and his subsequent permanent appointment in August 2024, citing transparency and legal procedure issues and calling for judicial resolution. Meanwhile, the public broadcaster shows a political shift, with fewer critical voices toward the authorities.

Montenegrin institutions have faced challenges in effectively preventing or addressing various forms of public hate speech, including content that is hateful, discriminatory, misogynistic, or otherwise harmful. Although the legal framework, particularly the Criminal Code, covers most cases of hate speech and discrimination, the rate of case processing and the number of individuals held accountable remain disproportionately low compared to the prevalence of hate speech nationwide. The majority of initiatives to combat disinformation, identify and counter harmful and hateful content, and promote media literacy in Montenegro are primarily driven by civil society organisations

Conslusion

Over the past ten years, Montenegro has witnessed a continuous escalation of hate speech, discrimination, and the spread of disinformation, particularly through digital channels such as online media, mobile applications, and social networks. Hostile narratives targeting gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and ideology have gained significant visibility, leaving damaging consequences for an already divided society. Non-traditional media outlets, certain political figures, and influential individuals on social media remain the main sources of this harmful content, often without any accountability.

Although legislation to address these issues exists, its application is weak and does not provide an adequate response to what is an urgent and dangerous challenge to social peace and stability. Public authorities show limited commitment, resources, and determination in preventing and tackling hate speech. While police and prosecutors have acted in some of the most severe cases, their responses are inconsistent, reactive rather than proactive, and often come only after strong pressure from civil society, the media, or the broader public. Even when cases are prosecuted, the penalties imposed are insufficient to deter future instances of intolerance, misogyny, and hate-driven rhetoric.

Civil society organisations, together with a small number of responsible media outlets, are among the few actors consistently working to document and counter hate speech and disinformation, raise public awareness, and strengthen citizens' media literacy. However, their efforts are undermined by unstable, project-based funding and a lack of systematic support, making it difficult to sustain professional and long-term work in this field. Closer and more structured cooperation between state institutions and civil society is urgently needed to address discriminatory and hostile narratives in the public space.

Tackling hate speech, discrimination, and disinformation in Montenegro requires a comprehensive and sustained approach. This includes reinforcing the legal framework, ensuring more efficient and consistent action by law enforcement and the judiciary, supporting civil society, and cultivating genuine collaboration across sectors. Without such coordinated measures, the ongoing spread of harmful narratives will continue to deepen societal rifts, weaken democratic processes, and endanger social cohesion in Montenegro.

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