

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of several microphones, some with blue and white patterns, arranged in a row. They are positioned against a dark, textured background.

MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH **IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

2025

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ANJA ANDUŠIĆ



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Introduction

This report brings together the findings of media monitoring carried out by partner organisations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, tracing how hateful and harmful speech circulates through traditional and social media spaces. Since 2021, the *Reporting Diversity Network (RDN)* has monitored these discourses at the regional level. This is the third reporting cycle, capturing developments from January 2024 to June 2025. The report offers a comparative analysis of all data collected, highlighting both regional patterns and country-specific differences. It examines hateful and discriminatory discourse in Western Balkan media by mapping the most frequently targeted groups, dominant narratives, and the key actors driving their spread.

Ethnicity and gender remain the most frequently targeted identities across the region. Ethnic hate continues to dominate in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, while gender-based hate is most visible in Albania and strongly present in Kosovo, where it often intersects with ethnic targeting. Serbia, meanwhile, stood out during this period for an intensified wave of political targeting. Hate against sexual minorities declined regionally. However, a significant rise in targeting journalists was noted, both in frequency and intensity.

These trends unfold against a broader backdrop of fragile civil liberties and media freedoms. The entire region remains marked as partially free, according to *Freedom House*, since *RDN* began monitoring, with scores ranging from the lowest-rated Bosnia and Herzegovina (52/100) to the highest-rated Montenegro (69/100). The situation is somewhat different when it comes to media freedoms, which are deemed satisfactory in Montenegro and North Macedonia, according to *Reporters Without Borders*. However, they are rated problematic in BiH and Albania and difficult in Serbia and Kosovo, where the situation has worsened, and journalists' safety is more often in danger.



Methodological approach

This report follows the same methodology as the previous *RDN* monitoring reports. *RDN* uses a broader concept of hate speech, primarily by not limiting the characteristics for identifying a targeted individual or group. The monitoring also includes harmful representations of marginalised groups.

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis were conducted, as in previous reports. The collected findings were classified according to the group or individual targeted, the generator of hate speech, the type of hateful and discriminatory discourse, the reach and visibility of the content, the type of media it was identified in, and the broader context of these events. In the sentiment analysis, aiming to scale the intensity of the recorded cases, they were classified according to the methodology of [George Washington University](#), on a scale from 1 to 6, from disagreement to calls for death.

Through qualitative analysis, we aimed to identify the primary hateful and harmful narratives, ways they operate, the events that trigger them, and the visual elements that accompany them.

Media monitoring covered content in traditional media such as newspapers, online portals, television and radio stations, as well as social media platforms, including *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *X*, *TikTok* and *YouTube*. Particular attention was focused on the statements of public officials and other public figures reaching large audiences, because of their influence on public opinion.

The monitoring process is conducted by media analysts in each country, who separately analyse each case. Software or AI solutions were not used for automated monitoring. Therefore, this research did not aim to collect all cases of hate speech in the region but instead focused on qualitative analysis of the most notable examples.

Narratives and sub-narratives

Quantitative analysis¹

On a regional level, a total of 611 cases of hateful and harmful speech were recorded during this reporting period. **Ethnicity and gender remain the two most targeted identities on a regional level**, as has been the case since RDN began monitoring in 2021. Together, these two categories still make up more than half of all recorded cases, while the share of cases in each of these categories remains almost unchanged compared to the previous reporting period. Cases against ethnicity made up 27.06% of all cases, while those targeting gender made up 25.44%.

Ethnic hate peaked in Bosnia and Herzegovina during this period, as it was recorded in more than half of all national cases (53.57%). In Montenegro (31.48%) and North Macedonia (30.77%), ethnic hate was recorded in almost a third of all national cases. In contrast, **gender-based hate speech prevailed in Albania (46.36%)**, making up almost half of all recorded cases in the country, and in Kosovo (26.95%), making up a fourth of all cases. However, in Kosovo, ethnic hate (24.82%) was also found in only slightly less than a fourth of cases.

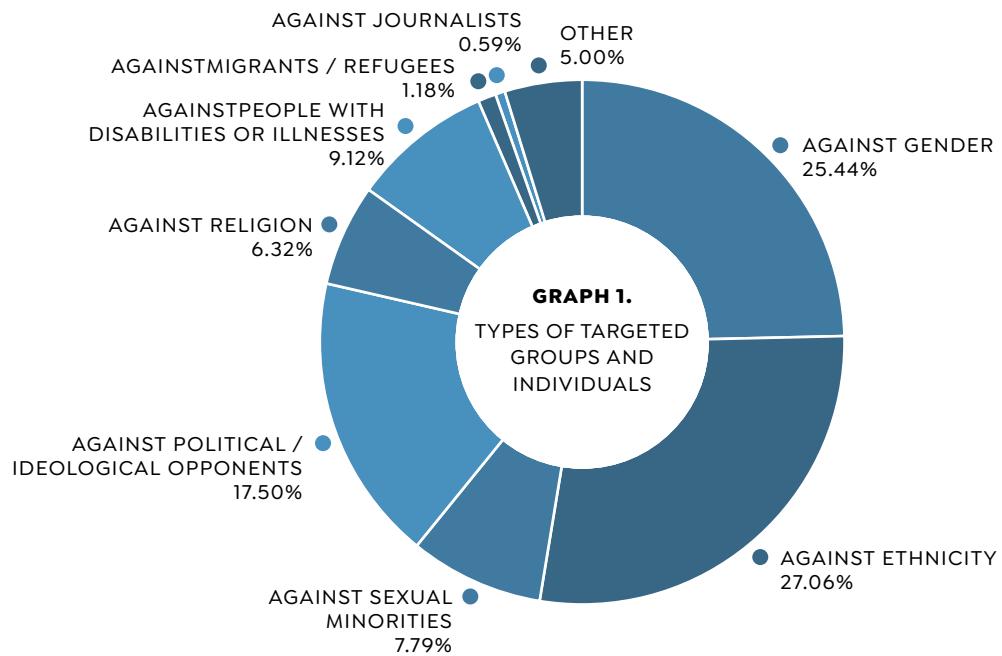
It is essential to note that **22.75% of documented cases on a regional level included hateful and discriminatory discourse intersectional in nature**. In such cases, groups and individuals were targeted for multiple overlapping identities. This is mainly reflected in cases where someone's gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation plays a role in the discourse used against them, even if it is not the sole reason why they are targeted. As in the previous report, these cases were included in calculations of other individual categories in the quantitative analysis to create a clearer picture of the results.

According to this calculation, **in Serbia, almost a third of all cases (28.40%) included elements of political targeting, making those deemed political opponents the most targeted group**. This is due to the increase of political targeting and political connotations in hateful and harmful speech in Serbian media, especially since the student blockades and the ongoing protests in the country started. However, gender hate remains dominant in Serbia as well, with every fourth case (24.69%) targeting women and gender minorities.

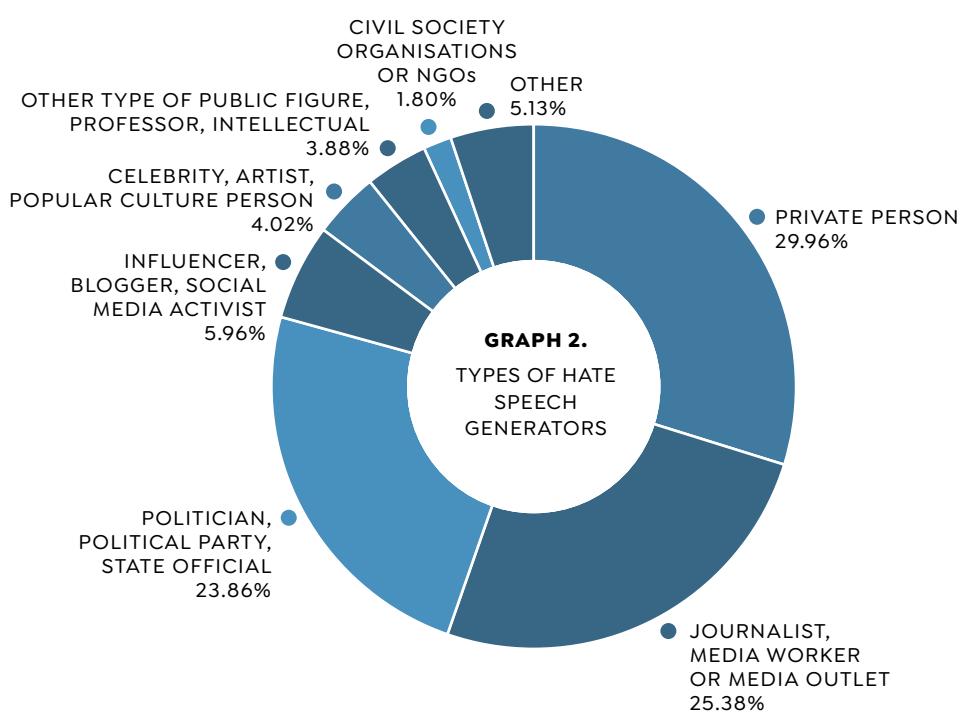
Regionally, political opponents remained the third most targeted group (17.50%). **Hate against sexual minorities continued to decline**, from 13.58% last monitoring period to now only 7.79% of cases. However, **hate against journalists continued to rise significantly**, from 4.3% last period to 9.12% now, making journalists the fourth most targeted group.

Apart from Serbia, politically based hateful discourses were exceptionally high in North Macedonia (25.64% of national cases) and Montenegro (19.44%), just as in the last monitoring period. Hate against journalists was highest in Albania (13.64%) and Kosovo (12.77%). Homophobic narratives remained highest in Serbia (17.28%), followed by Kosovo (9.93%).

1. The quantitative analysis for this report was conducted separately from those included in each national report. Therefore, some data may vary in comparison to the national reports. We processed the data in the same way as in previous regional reports for consistency.

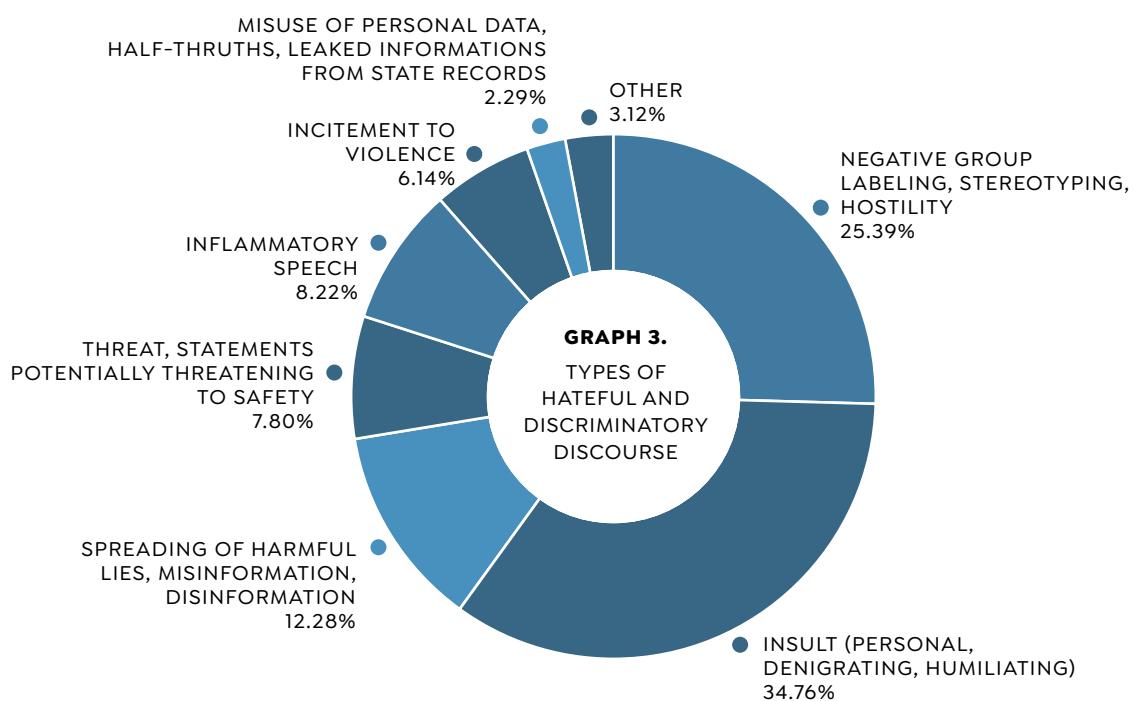


The main generators of hate speech in the region during this period were private persons (29.96%), namely users on social media platforms or anonymous commentators spreading hate speech on online portals. Journalists, media workers and media outlets follow closely, generating a quarter of all recorded hate speech regionally. Hate generated by politicians, state officials and political parties rose slightly, from 20.40% previous period to now 23.86%. **Together, private persons, media and political actors generated almost 80% of the hateful and harmful discourse RDN recorded during this period.** Other significant generators of hateful content included influencers, bloggers, and social media activists (5.96%), celebrities, artists and popular culture persons (4.02%) and public figures, professors, and intellectuals (3.88%).



Insults were the dominant type of hateful and discriminatory discourse recorded, making up more than a third (34.76%) of all cases regionally. Negative group labelling, stereotyping, and hostility, which were dominant in the last period, have now decreased, but were still present in a quarter (25.39%) of the cases recorded in the region. The remaining cases included harmful lies, misinformation, and disinformation (12.28%), threats and statements potentially threatening safety (7.8%), and the misuse of personal data, as well as half-truths and leaked information from state records (2.29%).

However small, RDN did record a rise in inflammatory speech (from 6.59% last period to now 8.22%) and incitement to violence (from 5.04% last period to now 6.14%). This is particularly concerning as it moves beyond hateful expression into the encouragement of physical harm. Unlike insults or stereotypes, which, while harmful, usually remain at the level of verbal abuse, incitement to violence legitimises or calls for physical attacks, often against whole groups of people, while inflammatory speech can normalise hostility and lower the threshold of acceptability of violence or calls for violence in public space.



Narrative analysis

1. Ethnic hate narratives

Ethnic identity remains the central framing for hateful and harmful narratives across the region. Apart from **ethnicity remaining the primary target of hate in the media since the beginning of RDN monitoring in 2021**, recorded in over a quarter (27.06%) of all cases regionally in this period, **political, social and cultural topics, and often even isolated situations are routinely ethnicised**, turning ordinary events into identity conflicts. This is especially profound in regions most affected by unresolved war trauma, such as the ethnically divided Bosnia and Herzegovina, or when it comes to relations between Kosovo and Serbia. In North Macedonia, ethnic division between Albanians and Macedonians is often the main framework for interpreting social and political situations. It is important to note that **ethnic hate is also among the most intense forms of hate speech regionally**, with an average sentiment of 3.20 (only hate targeting journalists is higher in intensity, with an average sentiment of 3.39).

Mainstream media, tabloids, and political figures play a central role in normalising and amplifying ethnic hate, often giving legitimacy to hateful or even extremist narratives. However, even when that is not the case, any mention or insinuation of ethnicity, or the mere representation of ethnic diversity, often leads to hate on social media platforms as well. These **platforms often act as a multiplier for ethnic hate**, especially unmoderated comment sections of traditional media accounts, influencers, podcasters and other accounts with a large following that spread harmful content, pages acting as traditional media accounts that share informative content, but are not registered as media outlets, meme pages and fringe online communities on less moderated platforms such as *Telegram*, where far-right extremist narratives are spread rapidly.

Across the region, targeted **ethnic groups, often minorities, were portrayed as enemies, a threat to the majority, culturally inferior, or undeserving of their own historical and cultural heritage**. In several cases, **media reporting on crime emphasised the ethnicity of alleged perpetrators**, even when irrelevant. Such was the case when *Klix.ba*, the most popular portals in Bosnia and Herzegovina, reported about a woman who was attacked in Sarajevo, allegedly by the family of her late husband, emphasising they were Roma. Beyond being unprofessional, this framing reinforced harmful stereotypes and fuelled hate in the comment section, which was filled with offensive language. This is particularly damaging for groups such as Roma, who are otherwise largely invisible in the media, making such coverage their primary form of representation. A similar case was recorded in North Macedonia, when the informal group Patriotsko društvo (Patriotic Society) shared an unsourced infographic on Instagram, linking crime and corruption rates to cities with predominantly Albanian populations, accompanied by the caption “who is surprised,” triggering further hateful reactions.

Harmful narratives also included claims that multiethnic towns or regions belong only to one of the ethnic groups that inhabit them. **Ethnic hate is also used as a scapegoating tactic, in attempts to divert attention from major events that concern the public or divert the blame to a whole group of people**. For instance, the kidnapping and murder of a 14-year-old Vlach girl in North Macedonia was met by accusations that “the Vlachs sacrificed her to frame Ljupco Palevski”. In a similar case in Serbia, Ninoslav Cmolić, Head of the Criminal Police Directorate, commenting on the alleged murderer of a two-year-old girl who went missing on TV Informer said “It is such a personality profile, there is no empathy, the IQ is very low. Again, that area itself is strange to us, the dialect, the speech, they are Vlachs.” In this way he insulted Vlachs and other people living in Eastern Serbia, calling them stupid, strange, and insinuating they are violent and not to be trusted.

As ethnic-based hateful and harmful narratives are well established and persistent across the region, they are also frequently weaponised to delegitimise political opponents, protesters, journalists, activists and civil society. This happens in cases where targets belong to a minority group, but even when they don't, they are accused of being aligned with an ethnic group perceived as the enemy. This was especially present in North Macedonia and in Serbia, where students and citizens protesting were often labelled as “ustaše” by the pro-regime media.

Unresolved issues and trauma from the World War II and nineties wars continue to fuel ethnic hate across the region. This is especially seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, through selective remembrance, relativisation of war crimes, glorification of war criminals, and the perpetual genocide denial. Important religious and national holidays, but also commemorations of war crimes and the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica, are common trigger events for a rise in ethnic hate.

The adoption of the *United Nations Resolution on Srebrenica* in May 2024 designated 11 July as the International Day of Remembrance of the Srebrenica genocide and condemned its denial. Although the resolution reaffirmed established court rulings and did not attribute collective guilt to Serbia or Serbs, it triggered a sustained media and political campaign framing it as an attack on the nation. Slogan “We are not a

genocidal nation" dominated tabloids, public officials' social media accounts, and public spaces across Serbia and Republika Srpska (BiH), while coverage portrayed commemoration as anti-Serb hostility. In 2025, around the commemoration of [30 years since Srebrenica](#), the same narrative re-emerged in the context of mass protests in Serbia, where genocide denial was repurposed to discredit students, activists, independent media, and civil society, linking dissent to alleged efforts to impose collective responsibility on Serbs.

Rising ethnic tensions were also frequently fuelled by historical revisionism, particularly in Montenegro, where it often originated from religious figures and church representatives, as well as public officials. Leading figures of the Serbian Orthodox Church have used religious authority to promote nationalist reinterpretations of history, including the glorification of WWII war criminals, as a means of political mobilisation. When amplified by certain media outlets and aligned political actors, these narratives contribute to deepening social polarisation in the country.

Sports events, especially international matches, are also common trigger events for ethnic hate. Games where regional teams are playing each other often result in hateful chants in the stands, sometimes even violent incidents. Hate quickly follows on social media as well, in content referencing the game. Sometimes tabloids further promote nationalist messages with sensational headlines, further fuelling hate speech in the comments.

2. Hateful narratives against gender

Sexist, misogynist, and patriarchal narratives remain deeply embedded across the region, as cases targeting gender make up a quarter (25.44%) of all RDN recorded during this period. Gender-based hate was **especially dominant in Albania**, where almost half (46.36%) of the national cases included some form of targeting based on gender identity. Still, it was also significant in Kosovo (26.95%) and Serbia (24.69%). These narratives show a systemic pattern of sexism, stereotypical depictions and objectification, and the weaponisation of gender to silence women in public life and reinforce patriarchal gender roles across all countries in the region.

Some of the most persistent and harmful narratives appear in **media reporting on gender-based violence** (GBV). Across the region, unprofessional and unethical coverage frequently prioritises sensationalism over ethical sensitivity, especially when reporting on femicide and domestic violence. Media outlets often publish graphic details of violence and disclose private information about victims and their families, further traumatising survivors while contributing to the normalisation of GBV. By framing such cases as isolated tragedies, the media continuously fail to address GBV as a systemic issue or to hold institutions accountable for failing to protect women.

Victim-blaming narratives are a common occurrence in the comment sections of media reports on GBV, especially in cases of sexual violence, often suggesting the victims provoked the attack or failed to adhere to conservative behavioural norms, therefore deserving the violence they endured.

Image-based sexual abuse² remains a widespread form of digital sexual violence in the region, disproportionately affecting women, especially those active in public life. Women who expose these practices are often targeted themselves, as illustrated by the case of Kosovo journalist Ardiana Thaçi Mehmeti, who faced harassment after investigating the AlbKings Telegram group, and members of the Serbian feminist organisation Osnažene, who were attacked after researching similar groups. In some instances, media reporting further contributed to harm by shifting responsibility onto women. A notable example is the Serbian daily *Kurir*, which published a front-page blaming women for the abuse they endured, under the headline "Sad: Girls on Telegram offer their erotic photographs for 35€ a month," featuring a photo of a woman in her underwear.

2. Image-based sexual abuse is the nonconsensual taking, sharing, or threatening to share sexually explicit images or videos of a person. It is often referred to as "revenge pornography", however this term is not entirely accurate and may be harmful for those who have endured it.

Across all six countries, women in public life, especially politicians, journalists and activists, are persistently targeted because of their gender in attempts to undermine their credibility and discourage their participation in public debate. These attacks commonly rely on sexist insults, comments about appearance, and assertions that women do not belong in their professions or positions of authority, reinforcing restrictive patriarchal norms.

For instance, Albanian MP Edmond Spaho targeted a colleague during a session by telling her, “You seem fierce, as if you’ve been beaten. Has something happened? Tell us so we can support you”. In this way, not only did Spaho relativise gender-based violence, but he also suggested that any assertive behaviour from a woman must be the result of domestic trauma. Furthermore, North Macedonia’s first woman president, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, was subjected to ageist attacks, while female journalists were belittled by their colleagues in ways that further encouraged hostile responses.

Anti-gender and anti-feminist narratives also remain visible throughout the region, frequently promoted by conservative and religious figures. Framed as calls to protect national identity, morality, and “traditional” or “family” values, these narratives depict efforts to advance women’s and LGBTIQ+ rights as existential threats linked to Western influence. In Serbia and North Macedonia in particular, the term “gender ideology” is used to delegitimise gender equality initiatives and the potential legal distinction between sex and gender, portraying them as ideological impositions rather than human rights issues.

Trans women and other gender minorities (such as transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people) remain a very marginalised group, almost invisible in the media. As any kind of representation is lacking, the very few public figures usually receive harsh backlash for being in public. Such was the case with [Edona James, the first trans woman to compete on Kosovo’s most-watched reality TV show, Big Brother VIP](#). Her popularity reached large audiences, leading to the many transphobic comments she received, even death threats.

3. Hateful narratives against political and ideological opponents

Political targeting continued to rise across the region, accounting for 17.50% of all recorded cases, up from 14.8% in the previous monitoring period. It was particularly pronounced in Serbia, where nearly a third of national cases (28.40%) involved political targeting, and in North Macedonia, where it appeared in every fourth recorded case (25.64%). By contrast, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where ethnic hate remains the dominant form of harmful discourse, political targeting was rare, representing just 2.38% of cases.

Political actors were the primary generators of this type of harmful discourse, while media outlets frequently acted as amplifiers, repeating these messages often without providing context, normalising aggression in public communication. Although political actors are often both perpetrators and targets, those deemed political or ideological opponents were also activists and, in some cases, ordinary citizens and journalists.

In Serbia, the rise in political targeting intensified following the outbreak of student university blockades and mass protests after the collapse of a train station canopy in Novi Sad that killed 16 people. Heightened political crisis and polarisation fuelled sustained targeting in pro-regime media. Beyond the region-wide practice of delegitimising political opponents through labels such as “enemies” or “traitors,” political actors, activists, students, and protesters in Serbia were routinely called “extremists,” “terrorists,” “fascists,” or “Nazis”.

Some similar patterns of targeting emerged in North Macedonia. Protests triggered by a nightclub fire in Kočani, where 61 people were killed, were portrayed as politically orchestrated attacks on the government. Political targeting also increased in the context of the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections.

In North Macedonia, political hate is closely intertwined with ethnicity, as political actors are frequently targeted as representatives of ethnic groups, namely Macedonians and Albanians. Across the region, other identities were also weaponised as political tools, particularly in Serbia, where political targeting often overlapped with entrenched ethnic and gender-based hateful narratives.

In Albania, political targeting likewise peaked during the May 2025 parliamentary elections, characterised by ridicule and insults, often originating from high-ranking public officials. Notably, Prime Minister Edi Rama repeatedly used mocking and demeaning language toward *Democratic Party* opponents, referring to opposition leader Sali Berisha as a “swamp owl”. This rhetoric prompted a reciprocal response when opposition strategist Chris LaCivita shared an image of an owl capturing a mouse on X, implicitly portraying Rama himself as prey.

4. Targeting of journalists

Journalists are increasingly targeted across the region, with several countries noting a significant surge in both the frequency and severity of recorded cases. While these cases accounted for 4.3% of all recorded cases in the previous monitoring period, this share more than doubled to 9.12% this period, placing journalists among the four most targeted groups. The proportion was even higher at the national level in Albania (13.64% of national cases) and Kosovo (12.77%). **Regionally, attacks against journalists also ranked highest in intensity, with an average sentiment score of 3.39** on a six-point scale, reflecting the prevalence of direct calls for violence and death threats.

RDN documented a wide range of incidents, from physical attacks accompanied by hateful speech and attempts to obstruct journalists' work, often by politicians or public officials, to verbal abuse during field reporting and harassment in comment sections on online portals and social media. **Women journalists were particularly exposed in this way, frequently targeted for their professional work through sexist and misogynistic insults.** Some cases also involved prolonged digital harassment and cyber attacks. Several Serbian journalists were targeted through spyware surveillance and smear campaigns in pro-regime media.

Investigative journalists reporting on crime and corruption were particularly exposed. Albanian journalist Ola Xama faced sustained threats after her work exposed corruption linked to Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj and his family. One article labelled her a “hired assassin,” and her home address was publicly disclosed. However, journalists and media workers dealing with less sensitive topics were also targeted. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, meteorologist Nedim Sladić received death threats, as he said, solely for doing his job – weather forecasting.

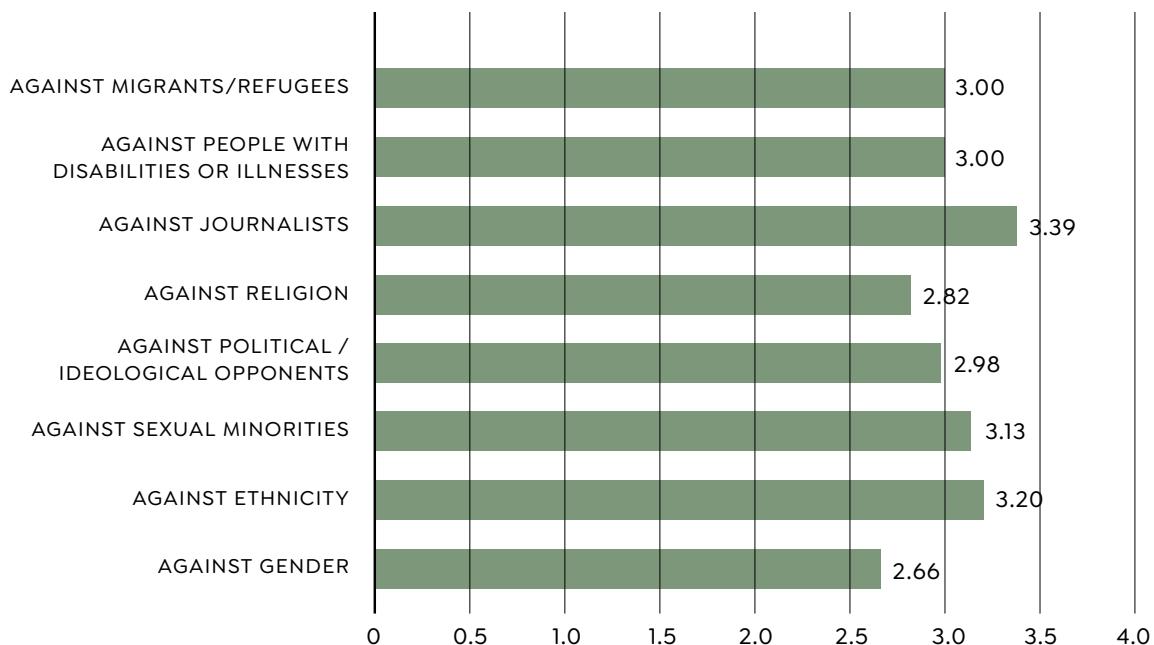
In Kosovo, journalist Vullnet Krasniqi was targeted after rapper Gold AG used offensive language against him during a live television debate. Following the broadcast and a critical Facebook post by Krasniqi, he also received repeated death threats from TikTok users.

These findings align with broader regional data. **According to the SafeJournalists network, 279 attacks and threats against journalists and media outlets were recorded across the region in 2024, 127 of them in Serbia alone.** The number of incidents has been increasing in the past several years, throughout 2025 as well, particularly in Serbia, where journalists reporting from mass protests were subjected to police violence and physical assaults while working on the ground.

Sentiment analysis

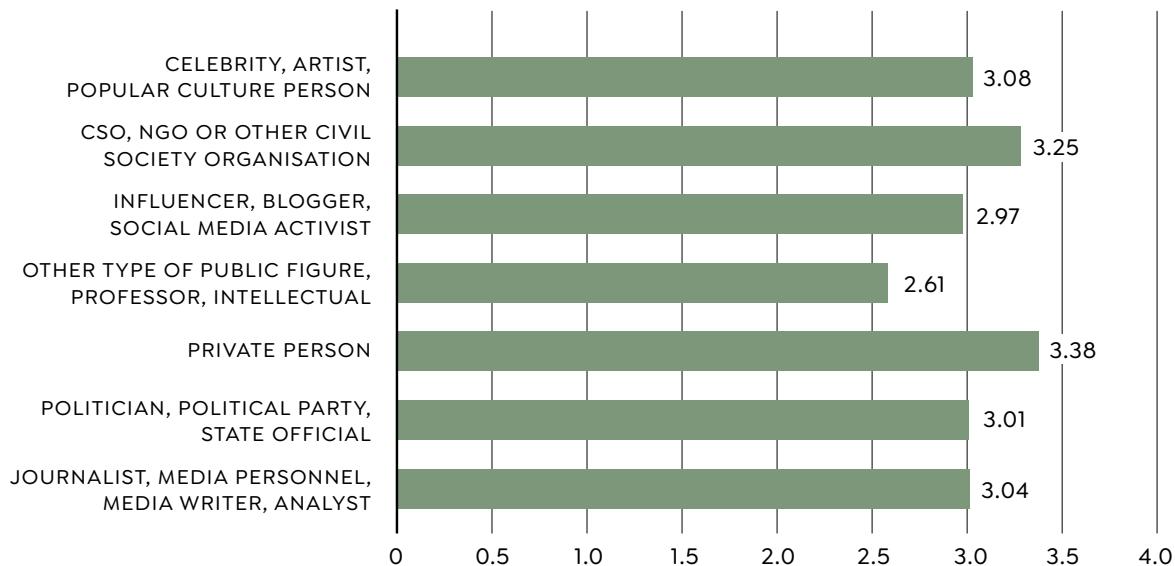
Reported cases varied in their intensity, which is why *RDN* conducts a sentiment analysis to distinguish the cases based on the intensity of negative emotions they conveyed. The purpose of this analysis was to capture the overall subjective attitude conveyed in each instance of hateful and harmful speech. Average sentiment scores were calculated both at the country level and the regional level, and further examined in relation to target groups and the actors generating the harmful content.

Cases were assessed using the [George Washington University methodology](#), which ranks content on a scale from one to six according to the intensity of the sentiment expressed. A score of one indicates the lowest level of negativity, while a score of six represents the most extreme form, including explicit calls for killing or the elimination of a group. Media monitors in each country applied this scale to the cases identified within their national context. Some cases could not be meaningfully assessed using this framework, as their content did not align with the scale's criteria, and were therefore excluded from this part of the analysis.



Graph 4. Average sentiment score per targeted group

The regional average sentiment score reached 3.07, marking a slight increase compared to the previous monitoring period (2.92). The highest average intensity was recorded in Montenegro (3.33), while the lowest was observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2.85). **At the regional level, cases targeting journalists were the most intense, with an average score of 3.39, followed by ethnic hate (3.20) and hate targeting sexual minorities (3.13).** Examining the most targeted categories within each country reveals a similar pattern. Hate directed at journalists recorded the highest intensity in Kosovo (3.46), Montenegro (3.40), and Albania (3.08). Ethnic hate reached its highest intensity in North Macedonia (3.60), Serbia (3.33), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2.81). Political targeting also showed particularly high intensity in Montenegro (3.38), while gender-based hate generally scored lower across the region, ranging from an average of 2.11 in North Macedonia to 3.20 in Kosovo.

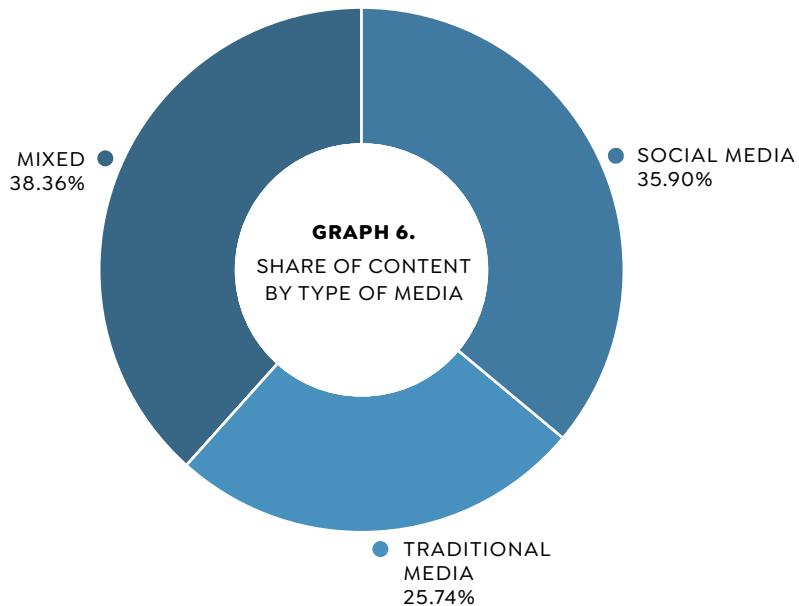


Graph 5. Average sentiment score per hate speech generator

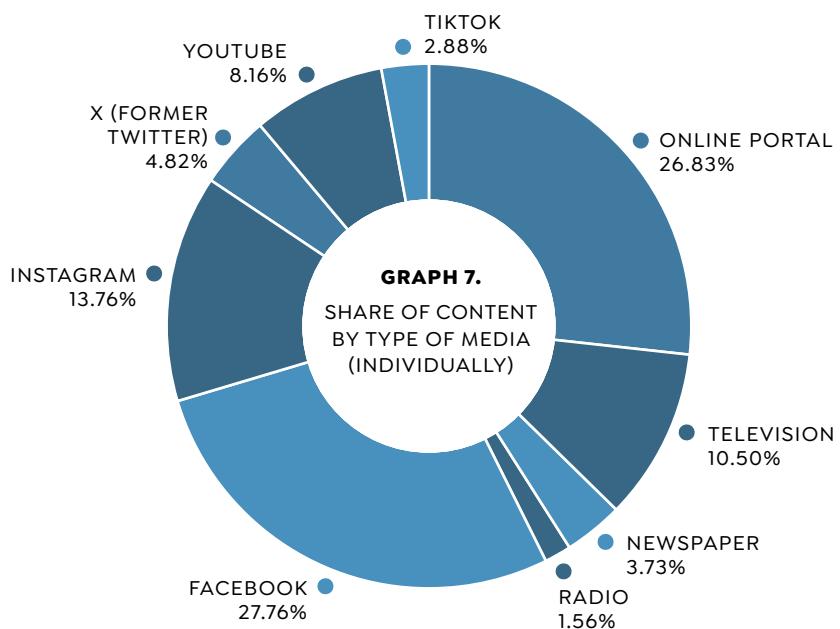
In terms of sources, the most intense cases of hate originated from private persons, primarily social media users, with an average score of 3.38. This points to how weak regulation and moderation of online spaces can contribute to a lack of accountability, enabling the spread of highly charged hateful content. When compared with other key sources, media outlets and political actors, private persons emerged as the most intense generators of hate in each country, with one exception. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, political actors recorded the highest average intensity (3.00), surpassing both media and private persons, while in Kosovo, the highest average sentiment was shared equally by private persons and media outlets, both scoring 3.16.

Visibility analysis

The monitoring covered both traditional media outlets and social media platforms, with particular attention given to highly visible cases, namely those that reached national news or gained significant traction online. **In several countries, the majority of recorded cases originated on social media, most notably in Kosovo, where 73.28% of cases were identified on these platforms**, and in North Macedonia, where social media accounted for 61.31% of all reported cases. In contrast, **traditional media dominated in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where 89.61% of cases were recorded exclusively in mainstream outlets**, as well as in Serbia, where this share reached 50.98%. Albania (85.57%) and Montenegro (80.25%) showed a different pattern, with most cases appearing across both traditional and social media. At the regional level, the largest share of cases (38.36%) circulated simultaneously across social media and traditional outlets, while more than a third (35.90%) were recorded only on social media and a quarter (25.74%) solely in traditional outlets.



When broken down by platform, **more than half of all cases recorded regionally originated from Facebook (27.76%) and online news portals (26.83%)**. A further quarter came from *Instagram* (13.76%) and television channels (10.50%). The remaining cases were distributed across *YouTube* (8.16%), *X* (4.82%), print media (3.73%), *TikTok* (2.88%), and radio stations (1.56%).



Within traditional media, the majority of cases were published by national outlets with the largest audiences in each country, ensuring high visibility. Hateful or discriminatory posts and comments on social media often had a more limited reach. Nevertheless, comment sections on online portals and social media platforms remain a key space for the spread of hate speech and are frequently left unmoderated. Given that META and other social media companies are far from effective in removing hate speech in regional languages, such content often remains permanently visible unless actively reported by users.

Conclusion

Ethnicity and gender continue to be the most frequently targeted identities, together making up over half of all recorded cases of hateful and harmful speech across the Western Balkans. Ethnic hate remains particularly prominent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, where **political, social, and cultural issues, even isolated incidents, are routinely framed through an ethnic lens**. This is especially pronounced in contexts shaped by unresolved war legacies, such as the deeply divided society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, tense relations between Kosovo and Serbia, and the persistent ethnic polarisation between Albanians and Macedonians in North Macedonia.

Simultaneously, **sexist, misogynist and patriarchal narratives** remain dominant in Albania, as well as Kosovo and Serbia. However, they are quite similar across the whole region, with **reporting on gender-based violence remaining one of the main issues**, prompting really harmful narratives, including blaming the women for the violence they endured. **Women in public life are routinely targeted through sexist insults** focusing on their appearance, and attempts to undermine their credibility, while those who expose abuse are often targeted themselves.

A defining regional trend of this reporting period is the **sharp rise in targeting journalists**. Targeting of the press has more than doubled since the last reporting cycle. Crucially, attacks against journalists recorded the highest sentiment, as many cases featured direct calls for violence and death threats. This highlights a dangerous trend where the media's role as a public watchdog is being met with increasingly inflammatory and violent rhetoric against them.

Political targeting continued to rise across the region as well, especially in Serbia, where it reached an intense peak as civil protests and a political crisis unfolded. Hate aimed at political opponents, but also public figures in general, often also targets their other identities, such as gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

The region continues to face unresolved historical trauma, political and social polarisation, and deeply rooted patriarchal structures. While **hate against sexual minorities has seen a regional decline**, showing slight improvement, the radicalisation of political discourse and especially the heightened targeting of journalists, suggests new worrisome trends.





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