

Hate speech patterns targeting Italian women politicians

EDMO Training Series on Identity-Based Disinformation - Module 2:
Disinformation about Women

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Domenico Cangemi
dcangemi@luiss.it

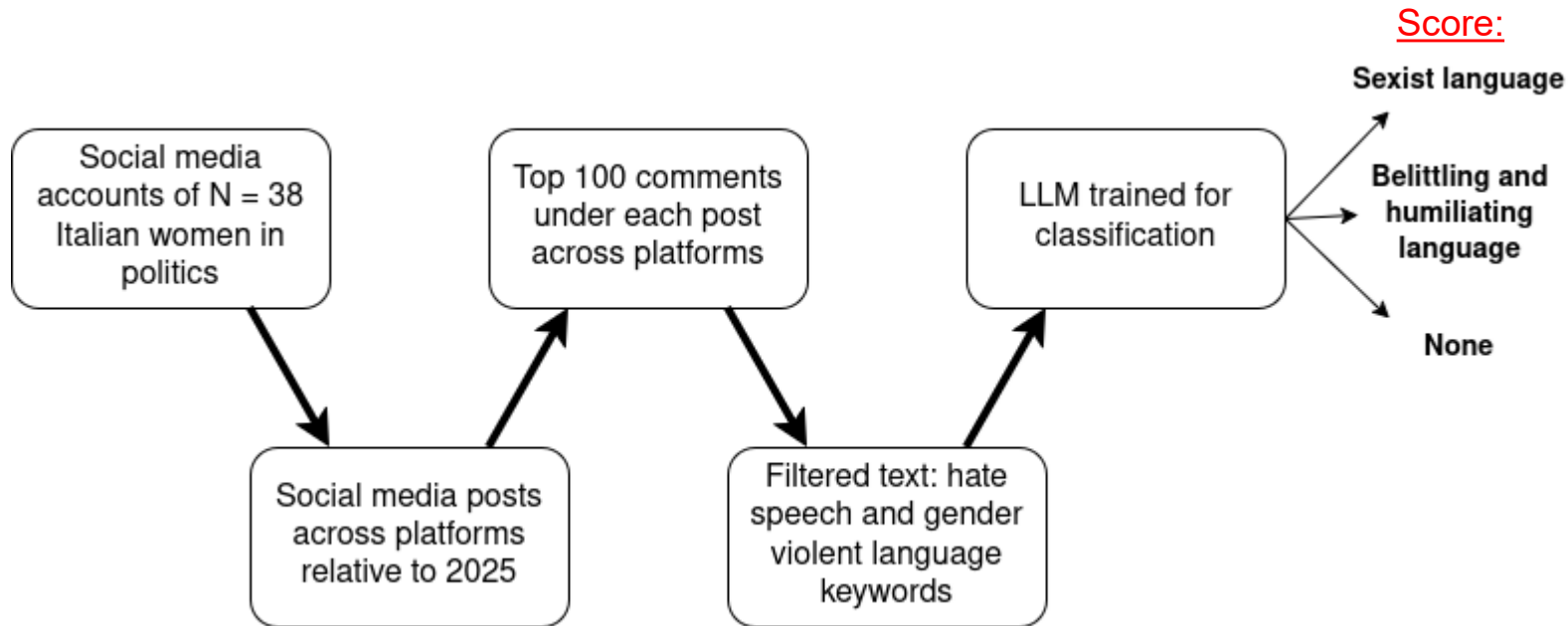


The study conducts a large-scale computational analysis across platforms addressing the following questions, among others:

How is gendered hate speech distributed across Italian women politicians? Is it concentrated on a few figures or spread uniformly? Does party affiliation matter?

Does gendered hate speech co-occur with disinformation narratives (conspiracy theories, fabricated rumors, coordinated campaigns)?

Can we identify recurring patterns in the language used?

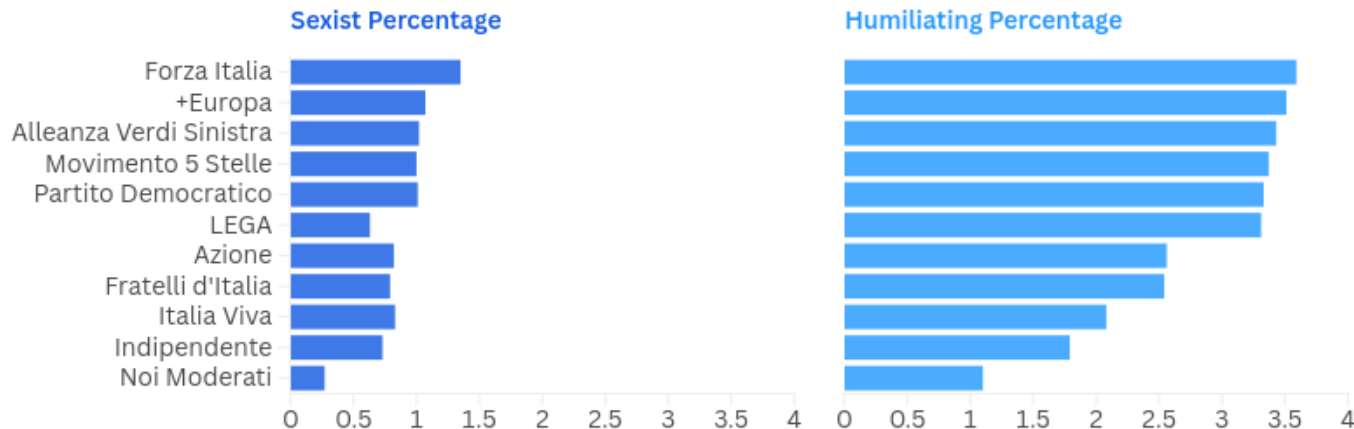


Total comments ~ 775k

Filtered comments ~ 35k

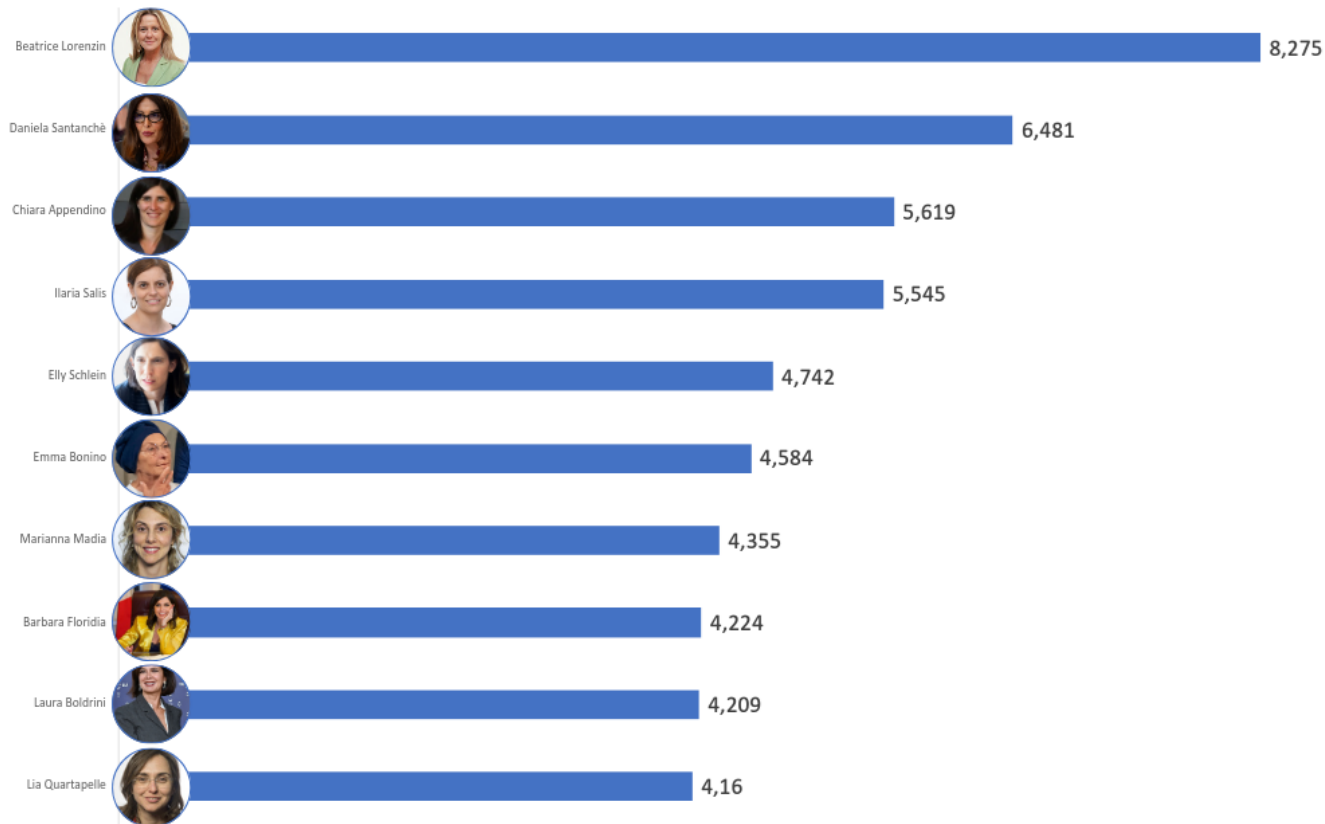
'Humiliating' category ~ 4x 'Sexist' category

'None' category ~ 6k



The *sexist* percentages by party are more varied; *humiliating* percentages are consistently higher across all parties

Politician-level



The top ten includes politicians from across the entire political spectrum: center-right, center-left, Five Star Movement.

Hate Speech Patterns

Recurring mechanisms that structure online abuse against women in Italian politics

“Sexist” vs. “Humiliating” patterns

Sexist language

Silencing

Animal insults

Sexually explicit insults

Physical appearance

Humiliating language

Shame

Useless / Incompetent

Trash / rubbish

Clown

Ideological

Comments labeled as ‘*sexist*’ tend to be shorter and more direct; they attack women’s bodies and see gender as weakness or perversion.

Comments labeled as ‘*humiliating*’ are more elaborate; they attack women’s public figure (corruption, political incompetence)

The command to be silent (*zitta / taci / stai zitta / muta*) runs through the entire dataset at an average rate of 7 %.

In several instances, it is coupled with domestic stereotype references (“*go back to the kitchen*”)

21.4%

Lorenzin: highest rate

Highest absolute counts: **Appendino** and **Schlein**,

380 and 302

respectively

Politician	Specific Form
Lorenzin	More than 1 in 5 hate comments; linked to anti-vax rage
Boschi	“Return to being the pretty silent doll” - silence fused with decorative role
Schlein	“Shut your mouth” - the second highest raw count
Appendino	“You’re convicted, you can’t speak” - highest count, conviction as silencing tool

Physical appearance attacks serve different functions depending on the target, but the mechanism is always the same: the body replaces the argument.

“Too beautiful”

Boschi: too attractive to be taken seriously. Her intellectual autonomy denied via Renzi association.

Sardone: several attacks mocking her for being aesthetically curated, *“the showgirl of the Lega.”*

“Too old / Ugly”

Boldrini: aging as irrelevance “old hen, witch.”

Santanchè: highest rate: 210 “*brutta*” (ugly), 85 “*lurida*” (filthy), 131 “*schifosa*” (gross). Language fuses physical appearance with corruption.

“Too short / Too strong”

Meloni: the “*short*” meme (47 comments) mentions her height for political delegitimization.

Silvia Salis: sarcastic “*bella sindaco*” (beautiful mayor) comments on the hammer-thrower-turned-mayor.

Animal insults

Animals	Targets
oca (goose), ochetta, starnazza	Schlein, Boschi, Piccolotti, Appendino
strega (witch), gallina (hen), capra (goat)	Boldrini, Lorenzin, Ronzulli
cagna (bitch): 73 instances (across 17 politicians)	Montaruli and Meloni (tie)
capra: 335 instances (across 29 politicians)	In descending order: Schlein, Ceccardi, Sardone, Appendino, ...

Schlein holds the quantitative record: 47 capra, 13 oca, plus the second highest silencing count (302). The combined animal + silence register makes her one of the most dehumanized politician in the dataset.

Corruption as permission for misogyny

A criminal conviction (more often, even an accusation) opens the floodgates for other types of abuse. Once corruption is established, all insults become permitted.

Santanchè: “ladra” (*thief*, 373 instances)

The word “thief” drives majority of the comment section and it is tied to physical appearance insults: 210 “brutta”(ugly), 85 “lurida”(filthy), 131 “schifosa”(gross)

38 almost verbatim copies of a single hate sentence, suggesting a strong coordination in her comments section.

Appendino: “condannata” (*convicted*, 186 instances)

Her manslaughter conviction (Turin, 2017) is the single most defining keyword. Every political statement is met with “*you’re convicted, you can’t talk*”. The conviction seems to function as permission for misogynistic language.

Motherhood and the “Showgirl” comments

Motherhood

Meloni is the only politician whose maternal identity is systematically weaponized: *“how can you be a mother and do/say this?”* (191 instances)

The pattern is unique to Meloni and tied to geopolitics, with the Gaza conflict often serving as the trigger. Criticism of Italy’s foreign policy is channeled through sexist insults referencing her role as a mother rather than arguments.

“Showgirl”

Boschi is attacked simultaneously for being “too beautiful to be serious” and for not being beautiful enough. Her appearance is the axis around which all political commentary rotates.

The Berlusconi legacy extends this further: Ronzulli’s “masseuse” rumor (60 comments) has become a general frame for any woman linked to the center-right. It involves Bernini (7), Casellati (2), Boldrini and Meloni.

“At Arcore, they enter as showgirls and come out as ministers.”

The “Courtesan” case

A sexist insult of political origin circulates across the dataset as a meme, across parties and contexts.

ORIGIN

CGIL leader Landini uses “cortigiana”
against Meloni
38 instances on her profile



Boldrini: *“Courtesan of Hamas”*

Appendino: *“Convicted and also a courtesan”*

Ronzulli: *“Courtesan of Villa Arcore”*

A sexist insult introduced by a left-wing union leader becomes immediately available to everyone. Even those who theoretically defend the target use the term. The insult circulates as a meme, independent of political alignment.

Old hate

Politicians cannot post anything without the past returning:

Lorenzin + vaccines (2017)
Boschi + Renzi (2014-2016)
Boldrini + colf scandal (years ago)
Ronzulli + Berlusconi (d. 2023)

Comment sections conserve hate like an archive. The past is permanently available.

Bilateral Hate

Schlein and Salis receive significant hate from both political sides.

Schlein: “communist” from the right, “not left enough” from her base.

Salis: “criminal” from the right, “excessive” from the center.

“Inutile” (Useless) as the universal insult

The only word appearing in the top-10 keywords for every single politician regardless of party, age, role.

Average rate across politicians is 15%

Disinformation Narratives

Fabricated narratives

Invented or amplified personal rumors circulating as established facts.

“Meloni uses cocaine” 27 comments, 4 verbatim copies

Near identical phrasing suggests coordinated dissemination. Ties to geopolitical disinfo (“the Ukrainian cocaine addict”).
“Vergognati, serva di Israele e del genocidio” (“shame on you, servant of Israel and genocide”) appears verbatim 11 times.

“Ronzulli was Berlusconi’s masseuse” 60 comments across 6+ profiles

Migrates beyond Ronzulli to Bernini (7), Casellati (2), Boldrini (3), Meloni (3). Became a general term for discrediting any woman in the Berlusconi orbit.

“Boschi was an escort/showgirl” 28 comments

Anti-Vaccine narratives

102 comments with explicit vaccine references spread across 17 politicians. The narrative migrates beyond its origin (Lorenzin's 2017 law).

102

vaccine-related comments

Politician	#	Why targeted
Lorenzin	44	Author of 2017 mandatory vaccination law
Meloni	13	Government did not repeal the law
Ronzulli	10	Pro-vaccine tweet (Dec 2025, 2,087 replies)
Appendino, Sardone	4 each	M5S/Covid association; anti-gov context
Schlein, Castellone, Bonetti	2 each	Secondary spread

Core claims:

- Vaccines poison children ;
- Big Pharma profits ;
- mRNA as human experimentation

The anti-vax narrative fuses with the Soros/Gates/global elite conspiracy.

Immigration, Replacement Theory, Soros

Immigrants as Criminals (133 comments)

Targets Boldrini, Ceccardi, Meloni, Boschi, Salis (politicians from opposite positions). Used to attack pro-immigration figures (“protecting criminals”) and anti-immigration ones (“not doing enough”). The narrative ignores coalition.

Ethnic Replacement and “Islamic Invasion” (66 comments)

On Ceccardi (10), Meloni (9), Sardone (8), Boldrini (6), Picierno (4). Comments use inflated numbers, isolated events generalized.

The Soros Connection, 22 comments across 11 politicians

Boldrini (4), Bonino (3), Ceccardi (3), Schlein (2), Picierno (2), and 6 others. Delegitimize the politician as “bought” and “Soros’ whore”.

Thank you

Domenico Cangemi
dcangemi@luiss.it

