HOW WOMEN POLITICIANS OF FIJI ARE TREATED ON FACEBOOK

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MEMO98

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of women in parliament is consistently low throughout the Asia-Pacific region, and the Melanesia subregion is no exception. Excluding Australia and New Zealand, women currently occupy just 8.9 per cent of the seats in the 15 Pacific parliaments, which means that just 45 of the 505 seats are held by women. Many factors contribute to this situation, but studies suggest that one major factor may be the way that women are treated on social media. In one recent example from the end of 2020, Lenora Qereqeretabua, a high-profile woman politician in Fiji, was subjected to much-discussed defamation on social media. This led to a broader public discussion and the arrest of the perpetrator.

International IDEA has been focusing its attention on the Melanesia region for the past three years. The four Melanesian countries of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji are a highly appropriate subject for research on how women in politics are treated on social media. Facebook is the most popular social media platform in Melanesia. Fiji, for example, has around 520,000 users who can be reached by Facebook advertisements, which is about 78 per cent of the population.

International IDEA commissioned MEMO 98, a Slovak non-profit specialist media-monitoring organization, to analyse social media posts and comments to assess how women politicians—and women who aspire to be politicians—are treated on Facebook. The aim was to identify how they fare against their male counterparts and to evaluate whether women in politics face a greater challenge than men. As a pilot project, and due to time constraints, the initial study was limited to Fiji, but there are plans to extend it to other countries in the next stage.

The monitoring was conducted retroactively and focused on three time periods: (a) 15 September to 14 November 2018, the two-month period prior to election day in 2018; (b) 15 November to 13 January 2019, the two-month period after election day; and (c) 15 October to 13 December 2020, the two-month period closest to the conduct of the monitoring. Therefore, for six months, 17 public pages of the 12 most prominent women politicians, 28 public pages of 24 male sitting members of parliament, 2 public pages of social media influencers, 1 public page of a media entity and 6 public groups were monitored and analysed.[1] The research was carried out using public data provided by Facebook—as the most popular social media platform—using the CrowdTangle tool, which provides access to public groups and pages. As CrowdTangle only tracks public content, and does not monitor private personal profiles or private groups, we decided to focus on public pages (accounts) and groups. It would be informative in future to also research private groups and profiles, especially in connection with the topic of online violence against women.

Endnote

1   The criteria for the selection of female and male politicians comprised their prominence (all of them were sitting Members of Parliament), as well as the availability of a Facebook account. We did not include those who did not have a public account at the time of monitoring. The public pages of a media outlet, social influencers and public groups were selected based on their potential impact on Facebook, such as the number of followers, frequency of posting and number of interactions. For more information, see the Methodology (Annex 1).

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women are under-represented in Fijian politics but a record number (10 of the 51 available seats) were elected to parliament in 2018. At the same time, however, women's representation in leadership positions, up to and including party leaders, has significantly decreased.

The main objective was to evaluate how women politicians are treated in social media posts and comments.

The monitoring focused on the public pages of women and men in politics, social media influencers, media outlets and public groups on Facebook. The main objective was to evaluate how women politicians are treated in posts and comments. Posts and comments were classified as 'problematic content' when the authors used sexist, racist/ethnicity-based, threatful, politically victimizing or individually abusive language.

- In total, 2,603 posts and around 99,000 comments were analysed for problematic content. Almost 11 per cent of the posts were found to be problematic. Most of the problematic content (69.5 per cent), however, was identified in comments from the general public, rather than the posts or comments by other politicians, the media or influencers.
- Of all the problematic content (both posts and comments), the highest proportion (47.2 per cent) took the form of political victimization, where abusive or threatening comments targeting political beliefs, ideology or affiliation were directed at the politicians.
- No problematic content was identified in the posts by the women politicians, whereas 35 problematic posts were found on the pages of their male counterparts. This means that none of the women politicians monitored were perpetrators of problematic posts. Female politicians were less inclined to raise controversial issues or openly criticize their political opponents in their Facebook posts. By contrast, men expressed their opinions more openly and were sometimes more critical of their political opponents.

- Overall, there was four times as much problematic content related to the Facebook pages of male politicians (133 cases) compared to their female counterparts (32 cases). Problematic content was found at an average rate of 1.33 cases per woman politician compared to an average of 5.54 problematic cases per male politician (see Figure 1). Therefore, interestingly, the men were subjected to more online violence than the women. However, it is important to note that the vast majority of the problematic comments aimed at women politicians were in the sexist category.
- Among the categories monitored, the Facebook pages of the male politicians produced the highest number—almost half—of all the identified problematic cases, where problematic content was identified in the post itself, in both post and comments, or only in the comments (133 posts out of 285 or 46.7 per cent). The selected Facebook groups were next, with 98 problematic posts (34.4 per cent). The Facebook pages of the women politicians produced 32 problematic cases (11.2 per cent), see Figure 2.

Political victimization was the most common problem in the social media posts.

Figure 1. **Problematic Facebook posts, all three periods**
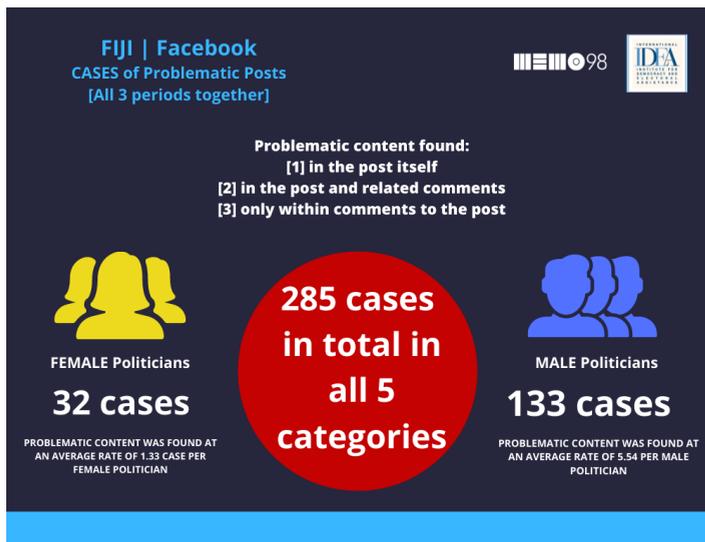
Source: Compiled by the authors

- Political victimization was the most common problem in the posts (see Figures 3 and 4). In 41 (47.2 per cent) of the 87 posts a problem was identified with the post itself. It is notable that two-thirds of these cases were targeted at men (31 compared to 10). The next most frequent problem was sexism, which was noted in 15 of the 87 posts (17.2 per cent), while personal abuse and racism (all against women) were each identified in 9 cases.

Figure 2. **Problematic Facebook comments, all three periods**

FIJI | Facebook
INSTANCES of Problematic Comments
[All 3 periods together]

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472
instances
in all 5
categories

FEMALE Politicians

53 instances

PROBLEMATIC CONTENT IN COMMENTS
WAS FOUND IN SOME 11 PER CENT OF ALL
PROBLEMATIC COMMENTS UNDER
FACEBOOK PAGES OF MALE POLITICIANS

MALE Politicians

323 instances

PROBLEMATIC CONTENT IN COMMENTS
WAS FOUND IN MORE THAN 68 PER CENT
OF ALL PROBLEMATIC COMMENTS UNDER
FACEBOOK PAGES OF MALE POLITICIANS

Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 3. **Types of problematic content**

FIJI | Facebook
POSTS | *TYPES of Problematic content*

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Problematic posts
[total categorized cases: 85]

41
Political
victimization

15
Sexist

15
Personal
abuse

14
Racist/
ethnically/
nationality-
based

0
Threats
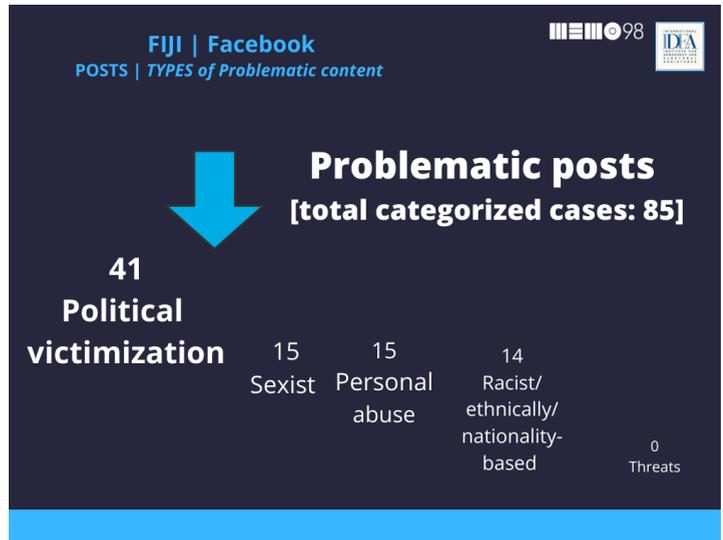
Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 4. **Types of problematic content, posts**

FIJI | Facebook
POSTS | *TYPES of Problematic content*

**Problematic posts
[proportion of total 87 cases]**

Not in English
2.3%

Racist/ethnically/nationality-based
16.1%

Political victimization
47.1%

Personal abuse
17.2%

Sexist
17.2%
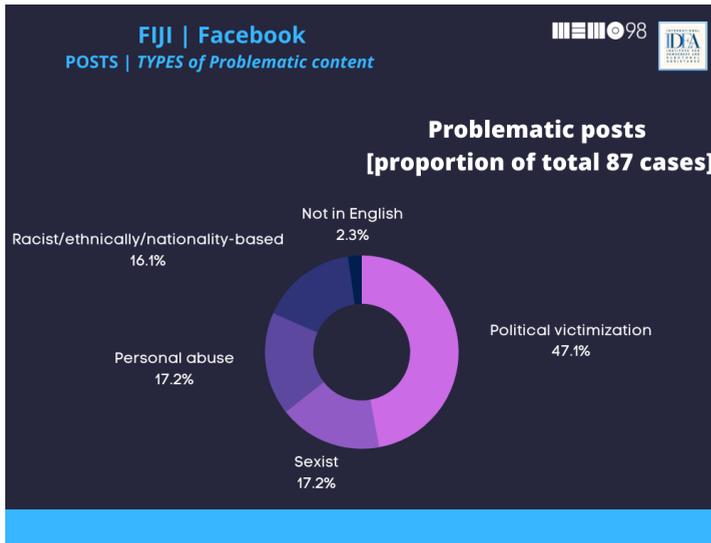
Source: Compiled by the authors

- In the comments, personal abuse was the most typical problem. There were 216 such cases (45.8 per cent) out of a total of 472 problematic comments (see Figures 5 and 6). Almost 90 per cent of these cases were attacking men (190) while women politicians were attacked in 26 cases. The second most problematic category was racist/ethnically or nationality-based comments (135), which made up 28.6 per cent of all the problematic comments. Once again, around 90 per cent of these (123) were targeted at male politicians. There were also 69 sexist comments (14.6 per cent).
- In a small number of cases during the monitoring, women politicians became the subject of smear campaigns, sexism or racism on Facebook. The most notable cases were those of Lenora Qereqeretabua, Riddhi Damodar and Lynda Tabuya (see below).
- Compared to their male colleagues, female politicians are treated in a less serious manner on Facebook. Comments on their posts touch on their appearance and/or personal qualities rather than their politics. In addition to the smear campaigns against the three women politicians mentioned above, there were a large number of stereotypical or sexist comments about the women, including about their appearance.

Compared to their male colleagues, female politicians are treated in a less serious manner on Facebook.

Figure 5. **Types of problematic content in comments, by number**
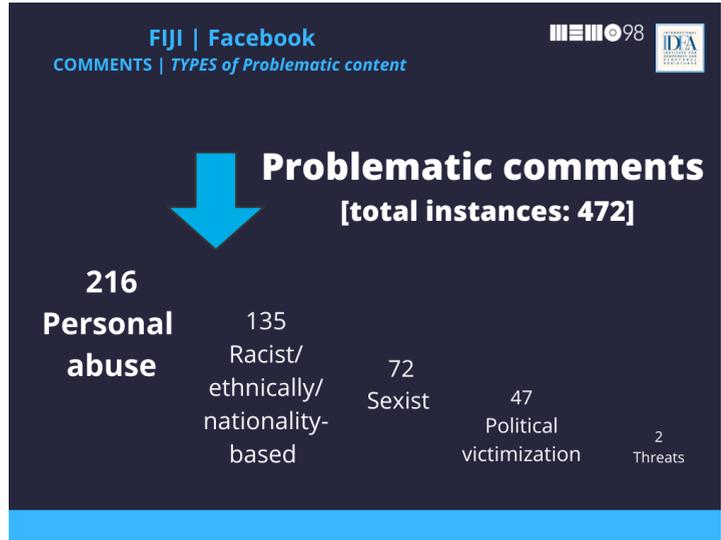
Source: Compiled by the authors

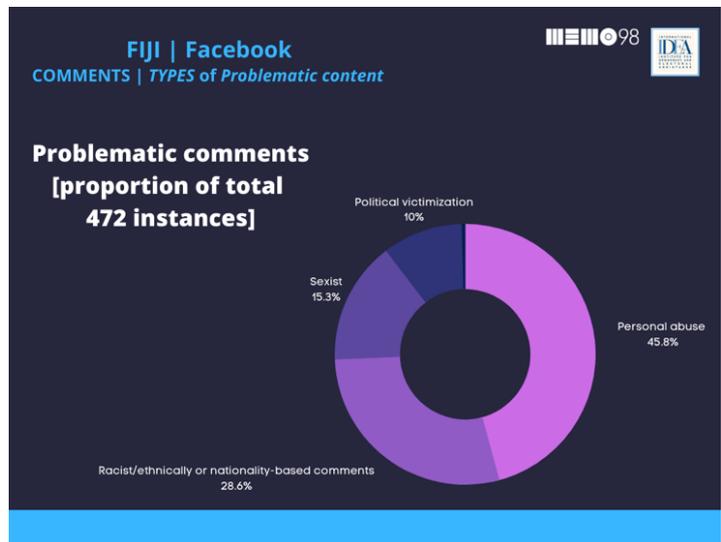Figure 6. **Types of problematic content in comments, percentage**

Source: Compiled by the authors

3. BACKGROUND

The analysis was conducted with a special focus on how women politicians are treated on social media, particularly in the context of elections. The monitoring team at MEMO 98 focused on the period leading up to the 14 November general elections (from 15 September to 14 November 2018) as well as the post-election period (from 15 November 2018 to 13 January 2019). In each case, the focus was on two-month periods for the sake of data validity. To enable comparative analysis, we also chose a two-month period in 2020, from 15 October to 13 December. Our hypothesis was that a political campaign prior to any elections is a good litmus test of whether there is any greater appearance of problematic content. We also wanted to compare this period with two other periods—one post-election and the other more recent.

Six political parties contested the 2018 elections, but only three—FijiFirst, the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) and the National Federation Party (NFP)—passed the threshold required to be allocated seats in parliament. The elections brought a record number of women into parliament. Women won 10 of the 51 seats (Baker 2019). Nonetheless, it should be noted that women have historically been under-represented in Fijian politics and remain so today. While there are no legal barriers to equal participation in elections, only 24 per cent of candidates were women in 2018, which represented an increase compared to 2014 (18 per cent) and 2006 (9 per cent). Despite the overall increase in the number of successful women candidates, women's representation in leadership positions (up to and including leaders of political parties) has declined significantly. While there are now more women Members of Parliament, the political environment continues to be dominated by men, and female politicians face online harassment (Baker 2019).

Women have historically been under-represented in Fijian politics and remain so today.

Social media use in Fiji

According to DataReportal, there were 634,100 Internet users in Fiji in January 2021, which is approximately 70.5 per cent of the population (Kemp 2021).

Figure 7. **Fiji: Mobile phone, Internet and social media use**

Source: Kemp (2021)

There were 610,000 active social media users in Fiji in January 2021. The number increased by 50,000 (8.9 per cent) between 2020 and 2021. Figure 7 shows that social media penetration stood at 67.8 per cent of the population in January 2021 (Kemp 2021).

Figure 8. **Facebook: Audience overview**
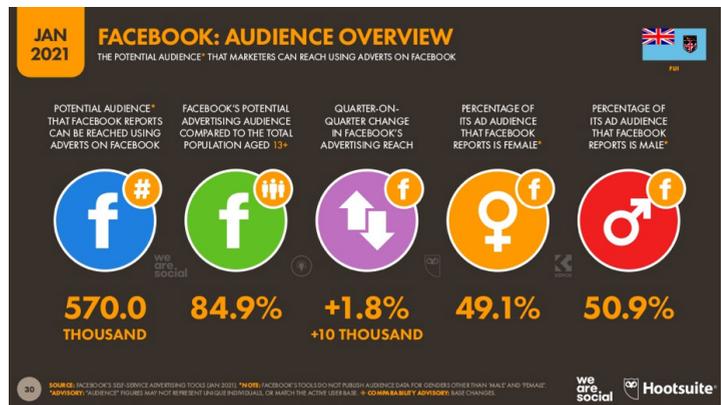
Source: Kemp (2021)

Facebook is by far the largest social media platform in Fiji (see Figure 9) in terms of active users.

Figure 9. **Social media market share in Fiji, September 2021**

Source: Statcounter (2021)

According to DataReportal, the number of people in Fiji who can be reached by adverts posted on Facebook is 570,000 (see Figure 8). Of these, 49.1 per cent are women (see Figure 8). In comparison, approximately 140,000 people can be reached by adverts on Instagram and 14,800 on Twitter. According to the same report, Facebook users had on average liked 16 posts, made 11 comments and shared 1 post in the preceding 30-day period. Women users were more active than men (see Figure 10). For the purposes of our monitoring, we decided to focus on Facebook.

Figure 10. **Facebook activity: Fiji**
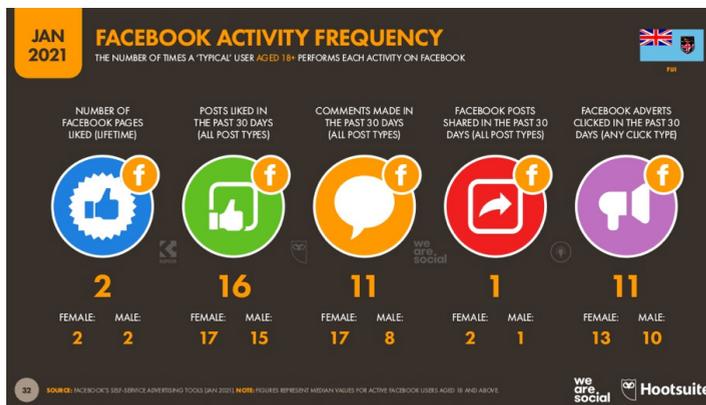
Source: Kemp (2021)

4. FINDINGS

In total, 2,603 posts and around 99,000 comments were analysed for problematic content in the posts themselves and their related comments during the three monitoring periods (703, 501 and 1,399 posts, respectively). Figure 11 shows that almost 11 per cent of the posts were found to be problematic, containing sexist, racist or threatening language, political victimization or personal abuse. Most of the problematic content (69.5 per cent) was identified in comments left by members of the general public rather than by politicians, the media or influencers. Of all the problematic content—both posts and comments—most (47.2 per cent) took the form of political victimization, or abusive or threatening comments targeted at political beliefs, ideology or affiliation directed at the politicians.

Figure 11. **Problematic posts: share and location, all three periods**

FIJI | Facebook
Problematic content - share and appearance
[All 3 periods together]

TOTAL POSTS ANALYZED
2,603

PROBLEMATIC CONTENT - APPEARANCE

Problematic posts
10.9%

In posts
13.3%

In posts & comments
17.2%

In comments
69.5%

Not problematic posts
89.1%
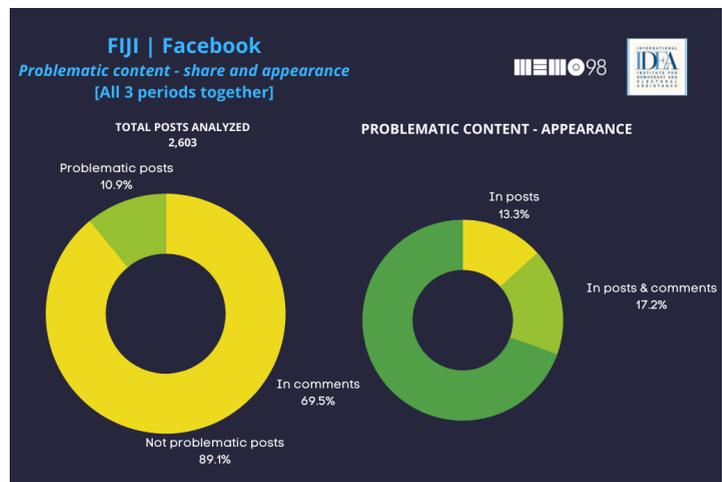
Source: Compiled by the authors

Overall, there was more than four times the amount of problematic content related to the Facebook pages of the male politicians (133 cases) than their female counterparts (32 cases). Problematic content was found at an average rate of 1.33 cases per woman politician and 5.54 cases per male politician. Interestingly, the men were subjected to more online violence than the woman. However, it is important to note that the vast majority of the problematic comments directed at women politicians were in the sexist category (see Figure 12).
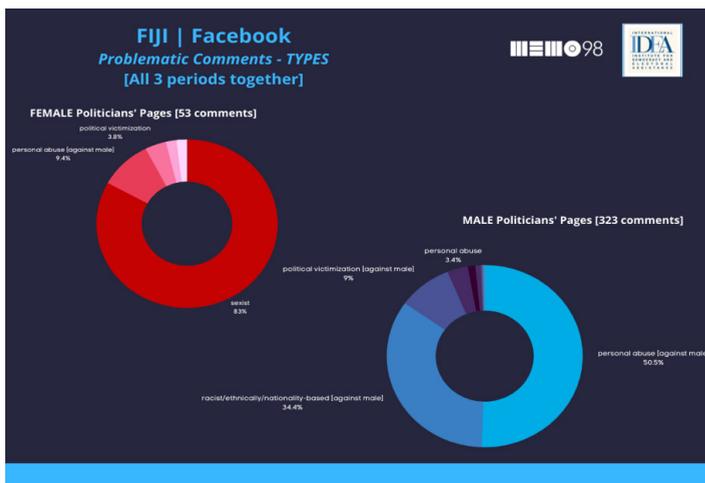
When women reported on their achievements or the events in which they had participated, the comments were similar for both ministers and opposition politicians. They were often superficial, referring to physical appearance or clothing. The most frequent comment from both male and female followers was 'beautiful'. These commenting patterns create the impression that women politicians are not taken as seriously as men.

Figure 12. **Types of problematic comments made to women and men politicians in Fiji**

FIJI | Facebook
Problematic Comments - TYPES
[All 3 periods together]

FEMALE Politicians' Pages [53 comments]
political victimization 3.8%
personal abuse [against male] 9.4%
sexist 83%

MALE Politicians' Pages [323 comments]
personal abuse 3.4%
political victimization [against male] 9%
personal abuse [against male] 50.5%
racist/ethnically/nationality-based [against male] 34.4%

Source: Compiled by the authors

The largest number of posts appeared in the third monitoring period, which could be explained by the growing popularity of social networks, in particular over the course of the past three years. Monitors analysed all the posts on the selected male and female politicians' public pages as well as the pages of selected influencers, media outlets and public groups. The monitors marked all the posts that contained problematic language and divided them into five categories: sexist, racist, threats,

political victimization and personal abuse.[1] Given that such language appears more often in the comments than in the actual posts, we also examined the comments under all the posts analysed. Our findings confirmed this assumption: there were 285 problematic posts, 38 of which were problematic on their own account. Of the 247 remaining posts, 472 problematic comments were found in the three monitoring periods.

Our research found no problematic posts on the women politicians' pages but 35 were found on the pages of their male counterparts (see Figure 13). Therefore, none of the women politicians monitored were perpetrators of problematic posts.

Figure 13. **Number of problematic posts, by gender**
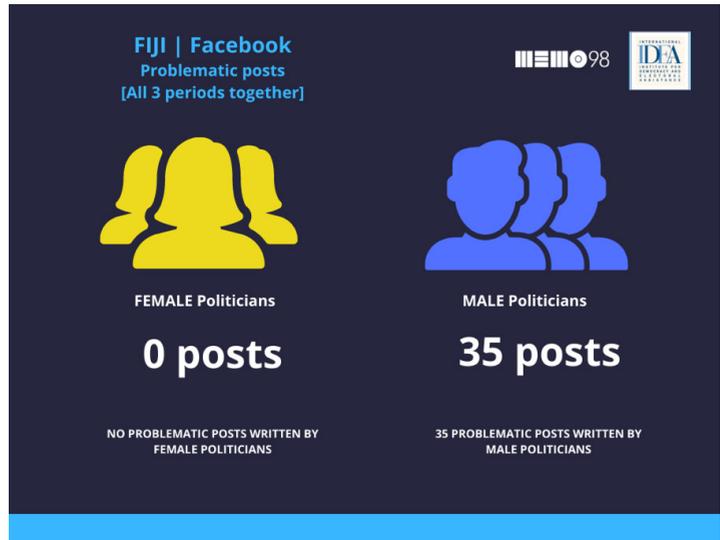
Source: Compiled by the authors

Problematic posts

Of the 285 problematic posts, 38 contained the problematic language in the text of the post, 49 posts contained the problematic language in both the text of the posts and the comments under the posts and 198 posts contained the problematic language only in the comments. We found 90 problematic posts in the first monitoring period, 63 in the second and 132—more than double the previous period—in the third. Given that the third period was outside of election time, this suggests that the frequency of problematic posts is increasing.

Figure 14 shows that the most frequent appearance of problematic posts was on the public pages of male politicians (133 posts in all three periods), followed by public groups (99 posts), female politicians (32 posts) and influencers (5 posts).

Figure 14. **Number of problematic posts by category**
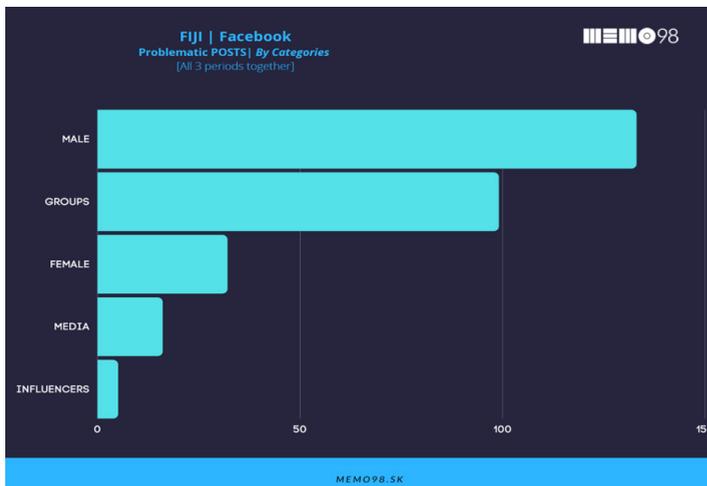
Source: Compiled by the authors

Problematic comments

When it comes to the use of problematic language in the comments, we found 199 such cases in the first monitoring period, 165 in the second and 108 in the third. The problematic comments appeared mainly on the public pages of male politicians (323 in all three periods), followed by public groups (81), female politicians (53), media outlets (12) and influencers (3) (see Figure 15).

As noted above, we divided all the problematic posts and comments into five different types of problematic language. To gain a better understanding of the male and female division when it comes to targeting Fijian politicians online, we decided to split each of the analysed types of problematic language by sex. We then analysed all five types of problematic language in respect of men and women politicians. Of the 285 problematic posts, 198 did not contain any problematic language in the text but only in the comments. The remaining 87 posts contained problematic language either only in the text of the posts (38 posts) or in both the text and the comments (49 posts). Figure 16 shows that 31 of the posts were politically victimizing male politicians, 15 were sexist against female politicians and 10 were politically victimizing female politicians.

Figure 15. **Number of problematic comments by category**
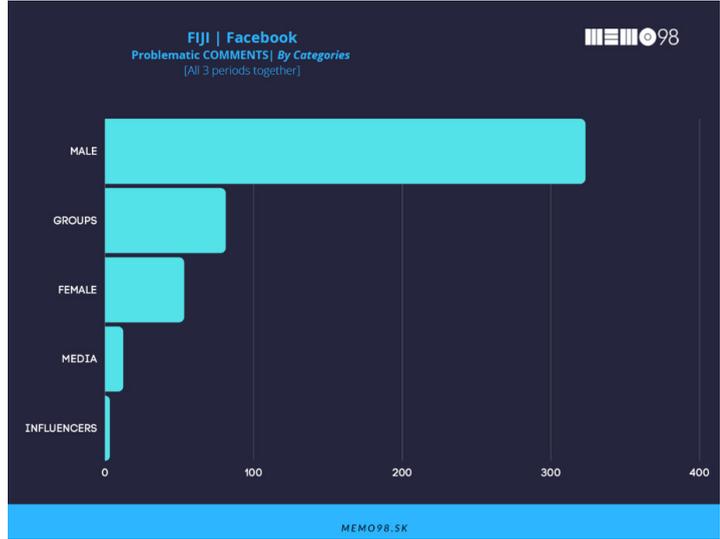
Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 16. **Problematic posts divided by the five types of problematic language**
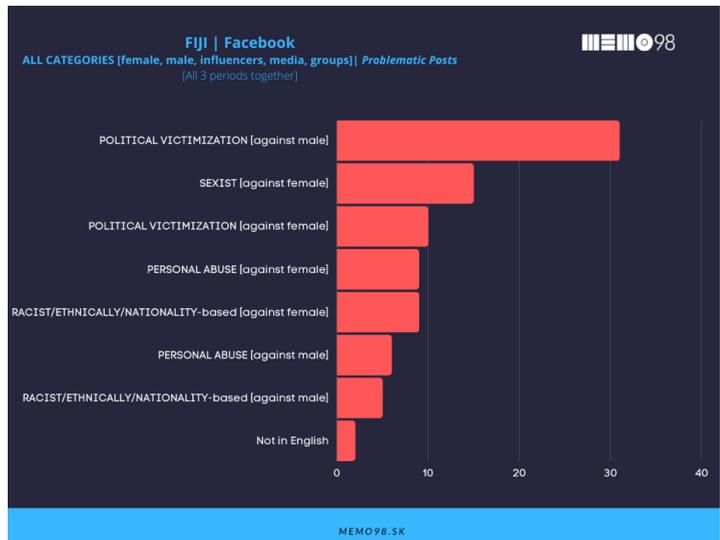
Note: This chart does not contain 198 posts that had problematic language only in the comments.
Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 17 divides the problematic comments in all three periods into five types of problematic language, and also reflects the female/male divide in the case of posts. In total, 190 comments were evaluated by the monitoring team as personal abuse against male politicians, 123 comments as racist (ethnically or nationality-based) against male politicians, 69 comments as sexist against female politicians, 38 as political victimization against male politicians and 12 comments as racist (ethnically or nationality-based) against female politicians.

Figure 17. **Problematic comments divided by the five types of problematic language**
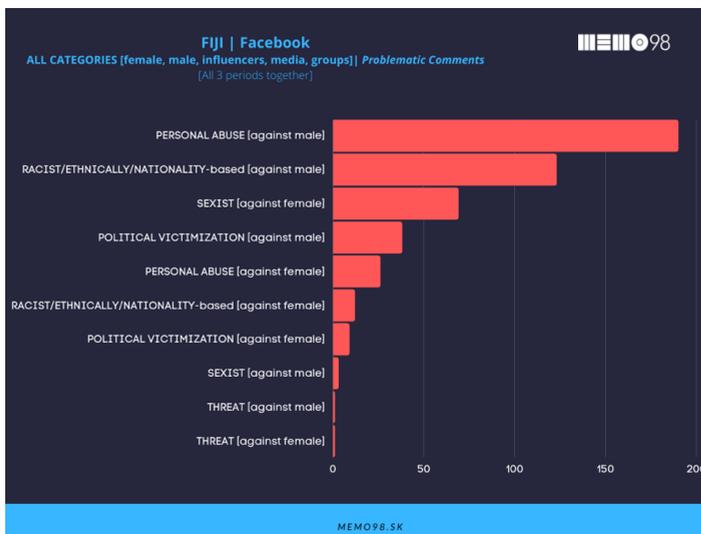
Source: Compiled by the authors

4.1 POLITICIANS

The monitoring team did not find any problematic language in the actual posts of the monitored female politicians but 32 posts did contain problematic language in the comments reacting to the posts across all three monitoring periods.

There were 133 problematic posts by the monitored male politicians in all three monitoring periods. The bulk of these (98 posts) contained problematic language in the comments reacting to the posts. In addition, 35 of these posts contained problematic language (for the type, see see Figure 18).

Figure 18. **Problematic posts by the monitored male politicians divided by the five types of problematic language**
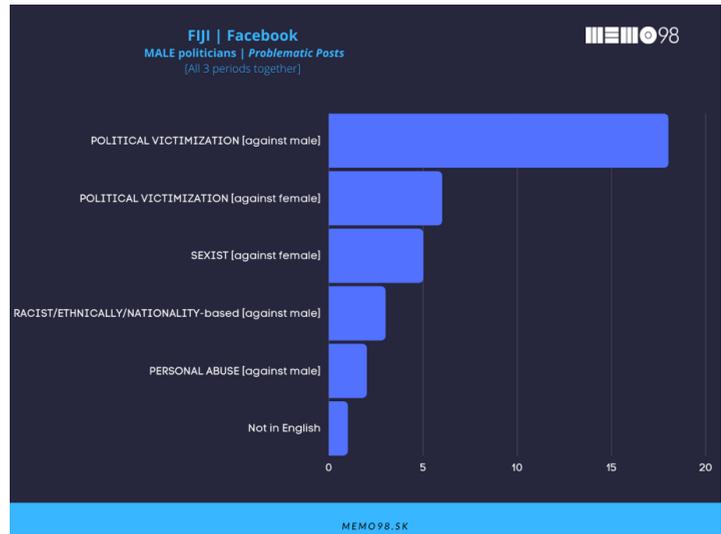
Source: Compiled by the authors

The monitoring team found 53 comments containing problematic language in the comments under the monitored female politicians' public pages. Figure 19 shows the division of these comments according to the five types of problematic language. Of the 53 comments, 44 were sexist against female politicians.

Like the posts, the most problematic language in the comments was found on the pages of the male politicians. We found 323 such comments in all three monitoring periods. Figure 20 shows the division of these comments according to the five types of problematic language. In all, 163 comments personally abused male politicians, 111 were racist (ethnically or nationality-based) and 29 politically victimized male politicians.

The women's empowerment agenda is popular in Fijian politics and often used by both female and male politicians in their Facebook posts. On most of the occasions when there was a critical or favourable post about a male politician, the discussion usually revolved around party policy. If attacked, it was usually party policy that was under fire. The only exceptions were the former leader of SODELPA, Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, and Prime Minister Bainimarama, who were constantly reminded of their alleged involvement in various coups.

Figure 19. **Problematic comments on female politicians'
pages divided by five types of problematic language**
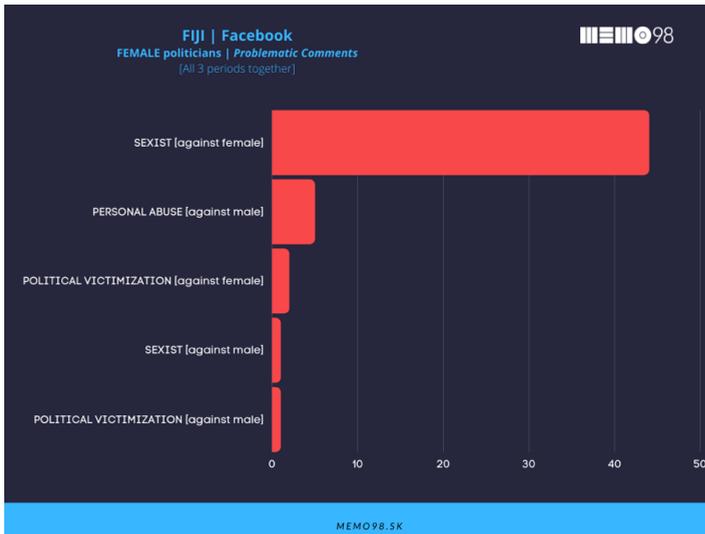
Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 20. **Problematic comments on male politicians' pages
divided by five types of problematic language**
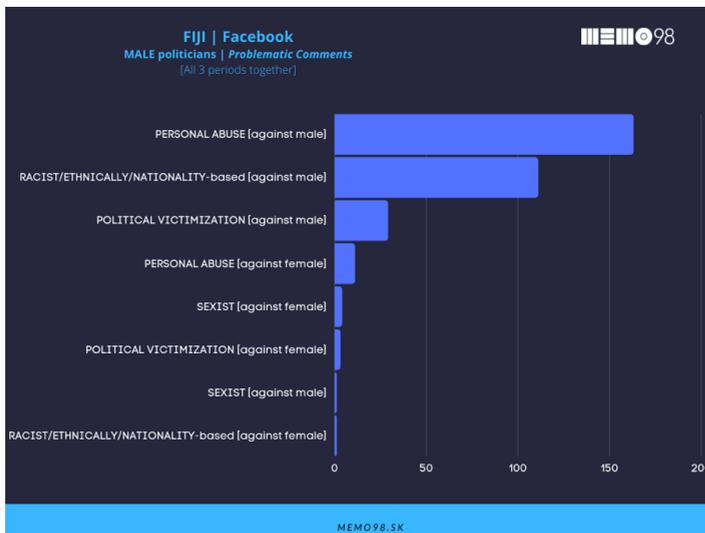
Source: Compiled by the authors

By contrast, women politicians on Facebook were generally treated in a less serious manner and comments on their posts usually touched on their appearance and/or personal qualities rather than commenting on or analysing their politics and the political and social content of their posts. For example, a comment under a video call posted by Lenora Qereqeretabua calling on people to register to vote said: 'Had to re-watch the whole video and concentrate on what she's saying because I was distracted by how shiny her lips were'. The monitoring team found problematic content addressed to both pro-government and opposition women MPs.

Women were frequently targeted on a personal level, and their physical appearance was also discussed.

Women were frequently targeted on a personal level, as in the case of Riddhi Damodar where how much she paid her housekeeper became a nationwide topic for discussion. Physical appearance was also discussed, such as comments on the dress worn by Lynda Tabuya for the opening of parliament following the 2018 elections. The most prominent case, however, involved the National Federation Party MP, Lenora Qereqeretabua, and rumours about the possible existence of a sex tape.

As noted above, women politicians were less inclined to raise controversial issues or openly criticize their political opponents in their Facebook posts. By contrast, male politicians were not afraid to express their opinions openly and were sometimes critical of their political opponents. Niko Nawaikula of SODELPA was especially prone to making negative comments about his political opponents. He produced numerous posts containing accusations against his opponents and raising highly sensitive issues around ethnic inequality, ethnic rights and corruption. The photographs that often accompanied such posts targeted certain individuals, especially in the eyes of commenters.

Former SODELPA leader Rabuka, who resigned from parliament in 2020, also initiated heated discussions and debates, which led to numerous insults on ethnic grounds being posted in the comments. In one post, for example, he refuted what he said were ethnically biased allegations from Prime Minister Bainimarama of FijiFirst that 'SODELPA was "only for the iTaukei"'. Rabuka called on Fijians 'to refrain from stereotyping and making generalisations about other communities and religions' (Swami 2018). This gave rise to a large number of hostile comments.

4.2 INFLUENCERS

The data analysis in the category of influencers is very much affected by the fact that we only looked at the public pages of two social media influencers: Peter Waqavonovono and Roneel Rohendra Kumar. There were only five problematic posts in all three periods: two of them in the category of political victimization, both on Roneel Rohendra's page; one with no problematic text but comments with problematic language, also on Roneel Rohendra's page; one post with sexist language, on Peter Waqavonovono's page; and one post containing personal abuse, also on Peter Waqavonovono's page. Similarly, there were only three comments with problematic language, two of which fell into the category of political victimization and one racist comment.

While the posts by the two influencers varied in content and type of message, most of the time the discussions generated on their pages contained no direct insults or abusive language. By way of comparison, two examples of polarized attitudes to women politicians are set out below. The first comment explains why sexism is unacceptable and should not be tolerated, while the second entry is a mockery of the Minister of Local Government for organizing a public opening of a restroom, which, given the Fijian context of sanitation and waterborne disease issues, is not as insignificant as the author tries to make out.

On **9 November 2020**, Peter Waqavonovono reposted a screenshot of an insulting comment about retired party leader Ro Teimumu Kepa. Ian Cocker, from one of the factions of the party previously led by Ro Kepa, wrote: 'Ro Teimumu wants power back lol… that **p**ower hungry old witch needs to retire and act her chiefly title back in Rewa (village)! All she does is stir the party into trouble!..'. The influencer used this post to publish a long explanation of why sexism is bad:

> …Fiji, attacking women leaders with nasty names is fundamentally wrong! Never in our History as a Nation have we had Fijians swearing at women online, calling female leaders porn stars, witches, cobras, carpark leaders and cobrich. Women Leaders, are Leaders! And like any other Leader, they deserve respect and a chance to carry out their policies/ideas. To attack them because they are female, and call them names that have scarred feminism and the suffrage movement for decades is absolutely uncalled for. It's as if people who throw around these comments didn't grow up with mothers! It's unacceptable that men can openly do this! For me, men who carry sexist views don't belong in SODELPA.
> (Waqavonovono 2020)

While the posts by the influencers varied in content and type of message, most of the time the discussions generated on their pages contained no direct insults or abusive language.

Notably, none of the comments beneath Peter Waqavonovono's post contained improper language or other problematic content.

The commenters ridiculed and diminished this activity by a woman minister.

On **28 October 2020**, influencer Roneel Rohendra Kumar reposted a *Fiji Times* article featuring the Minister for Local Government, Premila Kumar, who had officially opened a new restroom in Korovou village, with the comment: 'You want local government elections? Please hold your horse. Our Minister for Local Government is currently busy opening the restrooms' (Kumar 2020), see Figure 21. A comment below was supportive of such satirical criticism, adding: 'A high ranking official travelled from Suva to Korovou just to touch the public bathroom. What a waste of fuel (Fuel paid by taxpayer)'. The article itself gives a little context as to why this restroom was needed, not least, for example, that Fiji is part of numerous World Health Organization and UNICEF programmes to prevent typhoid, diarrhoea and dysentery through better access to sanitation and improved infrastructure, as well as the minister's claim that 'it will serve hundreds of people, including people with special needs'. Nonetheless, the commenters ridiculed and diminished this activity by a woman minister (for more background, see Singh 2020).

Figure 21. **Roneel Rohendra Kumar, Facebook page, 28 October 2020**
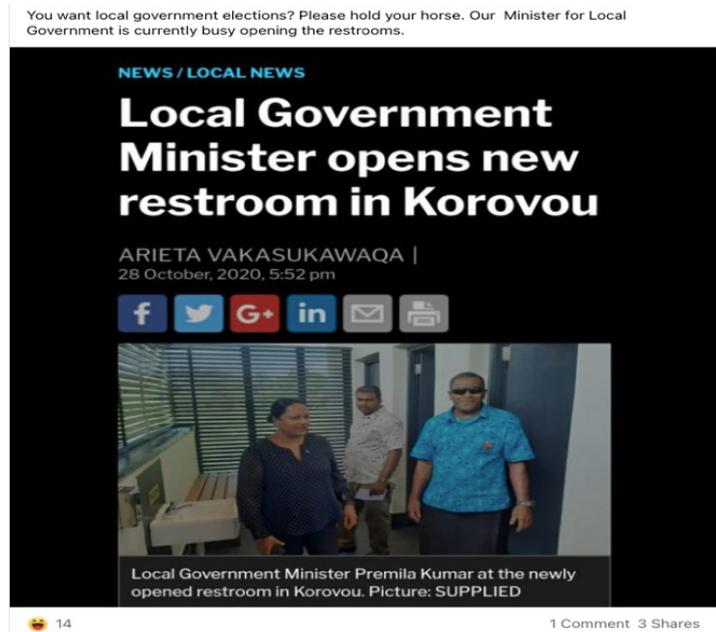
Source: Kumar (2020)

In a post from the second monitoring period, on **17 November 2018**, Roneel Rohendra Kumar posted about the poor prospects of the FijiFirst party winning the upcoming elections. Issues of inter-ethnic tensions and sexual violence against women were raised in the comments section.

4.3 MEDIA: ROSELYN KUMAR NEWS PAGE

Like the category of influencers, the data analysis of the media was also influenced by the fact that we only looked at the public web page of one media outlet, Roselyn Kumar News (see Figure 22).

Figure 22. **Roselyn Kumar News page**

Source: Facebook

There, 16 posts were evaluated as containing problematic language. In 10, there was no problematic language in the post, only in the comments under it. Six posts contained problematic language in the text: two of them were racist (ethnically or nationality-based), two were sexist against women and one was politically victimizing against women. There were 12 comments under the pages that contained problematic language. Compared to the public groups, however, the discussions were less hateful and offensive (see Figure 23).

On **27 September 2018**, the Roselyn Kumar News page published a post about forensic test results on the remains of a missing woman whose husband had been accused of her murder. Of the seven comments, six expressed grief or anger at the husband who had allegedly killed his wife. One comment, however, was a gif of a young boy asking theatrically: 'Do I have to go to jail now?' (see Figure 24). Given the context, it is easy to interpret the message as trivializing

Figure 23. **Problematic comments on the media page divided by the five types of problematic language**
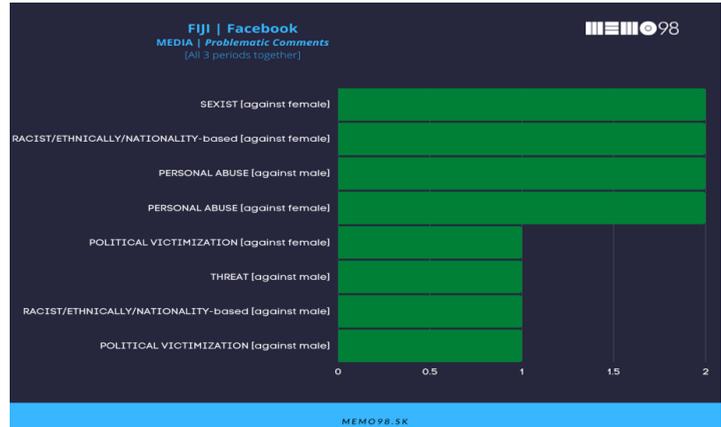
Source: Compiled by the authors

Such inappropriate humour downplays the seriousness of domestic violence as an issue and the importance of women's lives.

or mocking the killing of a woman. Such inappropriate humour downplays the seriousness of domestic violence as an issue and the importance of women's lives.

On **19 December 2018**, the Roselyn Kumar News page emphasized the ethnic origin of a woman found guilty of criminal activity: 'A Fiji born Indian woman who forced her underage daughter into prostitution about 1000 times over period of 18 months has had her sentence increased'. This fuelled negativity towards the revealed ethnicity, in this

Figure 24. **Anonymous Facebook comment, 'Do I have to go to jail now?', 27 September 2018**

case the Indian community in Fiji. Comments such as, 'She has made history for Fiji....Indians especially' followed. There were 87 comments, most of which did not contain inappropriate language. Some, however, used other racial slurs.

4.4 PUBLIC GROUPS

Public groups had the largest number of posts and comments. We therefore introduced additional criteria to narrow down the search and analysed only those posts that had 50 or more interactions. The second largest number of problematic posts and comments (after male politicians) were detected in this category.

In total, 99 posts were evaluated as containing problematic language, 57 of which contained no problematic language in the text but only in the comments under the posts. The remaining 42 contained problematic language in the text of the posts, among which: 13 politically victimized males; 8 personally abused a woman; 7 were racist (ethnically or nationality-based) against women; and 7 were sexist against women (see Figure 25).

Figure 25. **Problematic posts on the public group pages divided by the five types of problematic language, 50 interactions or more**
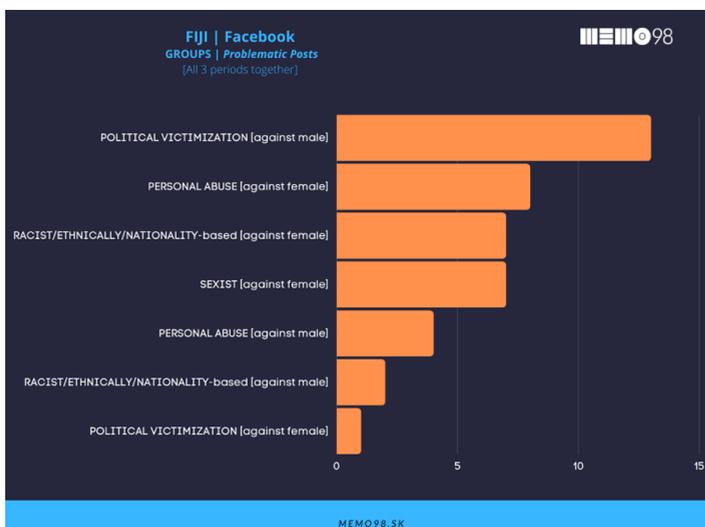
Source: Compiled by the authors

In total, 81 comments were evaluated as containing problematic language. The three most common types of problematic language were: personal abuse against males (20 comments); sexist language against women (19 comments); and personal abuse against women (13 comments). Full details are given in Figure 26.

Figure 26. **Problematic comments on the public group pages divided by the five types of problematic language**
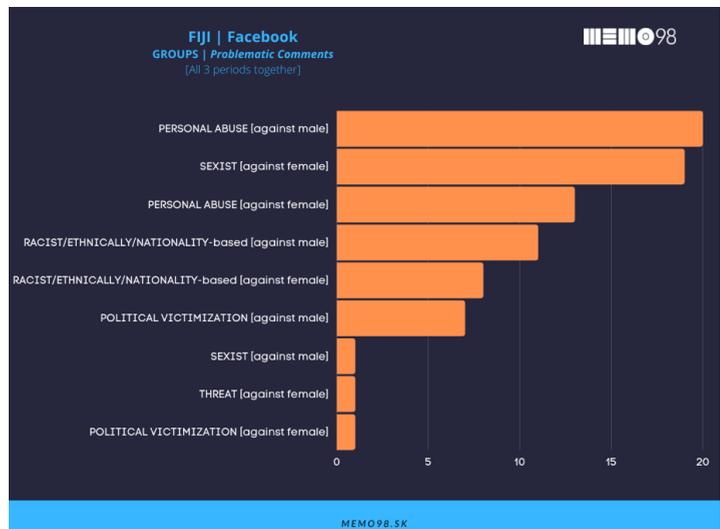
Source: Compiled by the authors

Many of the racist posts and comments have their basis in colonial and post-colonial inter-ethnic relations between Indigenous Fijians and the Fijians descended from those brought from India by the British to work as labourers on sugarcane plantations, who are now referred to by some as Indo-Fijians. There is also a religious issue. Christianity was widely adopted by Indigenous Fijians, while Hinduism and Islam were brought to Fiji by Indian indentured slaves in the 19th century. During all three monitoring periods, there were a number of contested or popular political posts where the discussion boiled down to either ethnic or religious comments. At some point, derogatory remarks or insults would appear, as well as labelling and mockery between comment leavers who were apparently from different backgrounds. Arguments would often start in English and then switch to local languages. The monitoring team came across some shocking comments and reactions, such as shaming

and blaming rape victims. Cases of violence against women were frequent; these were usually condemned online, but there were instances where victims were mocked or accused of provoking violent conduct by their abusers.

4.5 NETWORK MAPPING ANALYSIS

Figure 27. **Network mapping with Gephi and CrowdTangle**
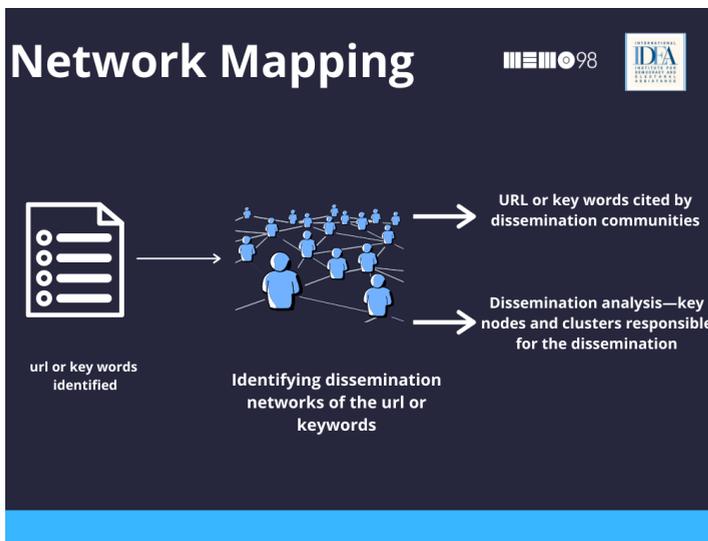
Source: Compiled by the authors

We used an open-source network mapping tool, Gephi, to identify the occurrence and spread of key words—in our case the names of three women politicians—in groups and pages that CrowdTangle tracked for a period of three years (31 December 2017 to 31 December 2020). In this way, we were able to identify the Facebook public groups in which the key words appeared most frequently (for more detail, see the Methodology in Annex 1). The network charts also showed us which accounts shared content with each other most frequently (e.g. are clustered together).

Lenora Qereqeretabua
On the appearance of the key word Lenora Qereqeretabua, the map in Figure 28 indicates that her name was shared most frequently by Facebook public groups such as Fiji Exposed Forum and Fiji News Link, which were clustered together (shown in purple), as well

> **Cases of violence against women were frequent; these were usually condemned online, but there were instances where victims were mocked or accused of provoking violent conduct by their abusers.**

as Bula Fiji (pink), the *Fiji Times* and *Fiji Today* (dark grey) and the National Federation Party Facebook account, along with Lenora Qereqeretabua's account (green).

Figure 28. **Network map tracking the occurrence of the key word *Lenora Qereqeretabua* in groups or pages, 31 December 2017 to 31 December 2020**

Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 29. **Network map tracking the occurrence and spread of the key word *Lynda Tabuya* in groups or pages, 31 December 2017 to 31 December 2020**
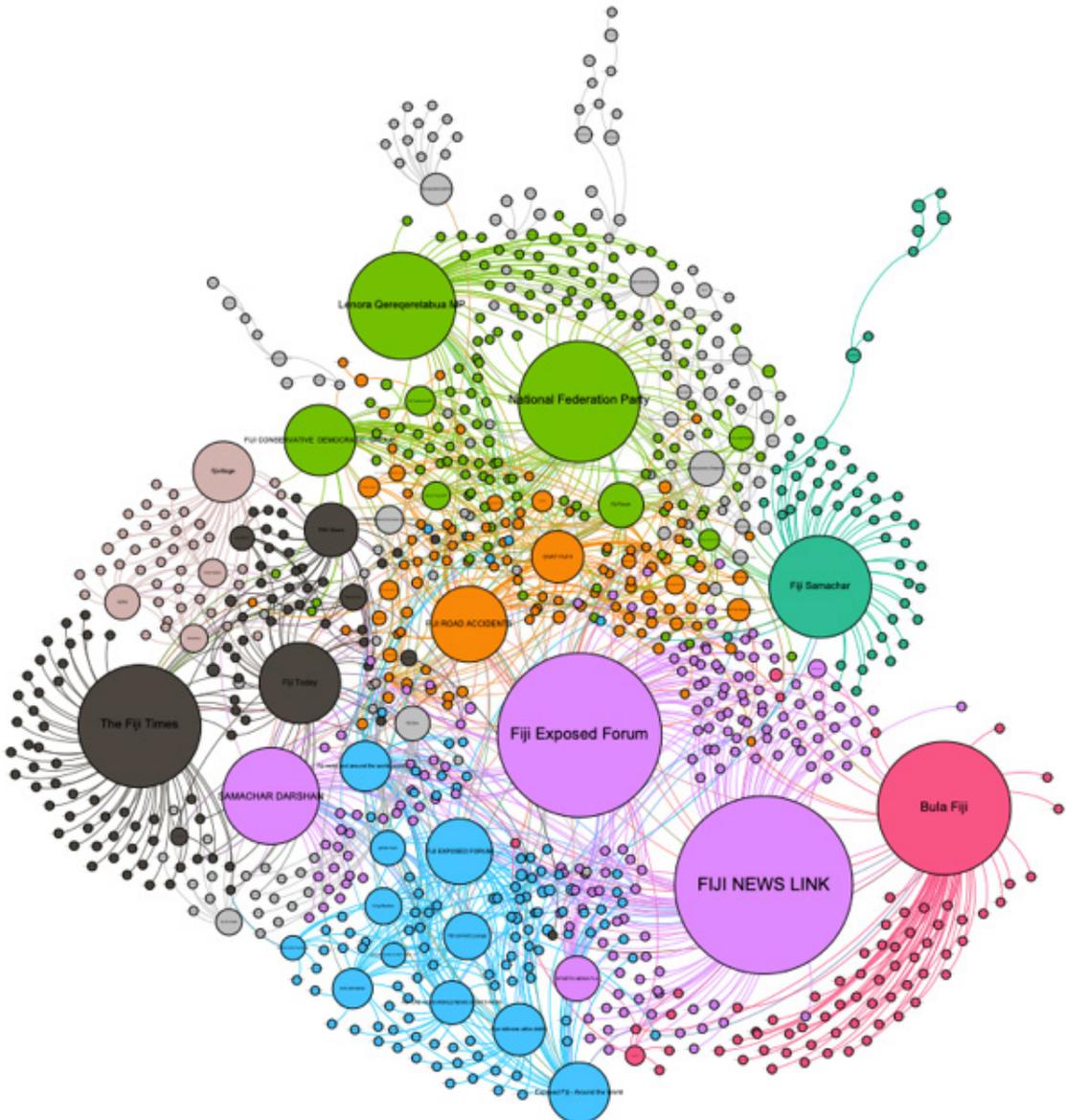
Source: Compiled by the authors

Lynda Tabuya

Like Lenora Qereqeretabua, the appearance of the key word Lynda Tabuya in the map in Figure 29 shows that her name was also shared by the Fiji Exposed Forum and the Fiji News Link Facebook public groups (clustered together in purple) as well as Bula Fiji (in green). It should be noted that Lynda Tabuya's name was mentioned much less frequently than Lenora Qereqeretabua's in the period 31 December 2017 to 31 December 2020.

Riddhi Damodar

Riddhi Damodar was the least mentioned of the three women politicians evaluated. Like the other two, Riddhi Damodar was also mentioned most frequently on the Fiji News Link and the Fiji Exposed Forum Facebook public groups (see Figure 30).

Figure 30. **Network map tracking the occurrence and spread of the key word *Riddhi Damodar* in groups or pages, 31 December 2017 to 31 December 2020**
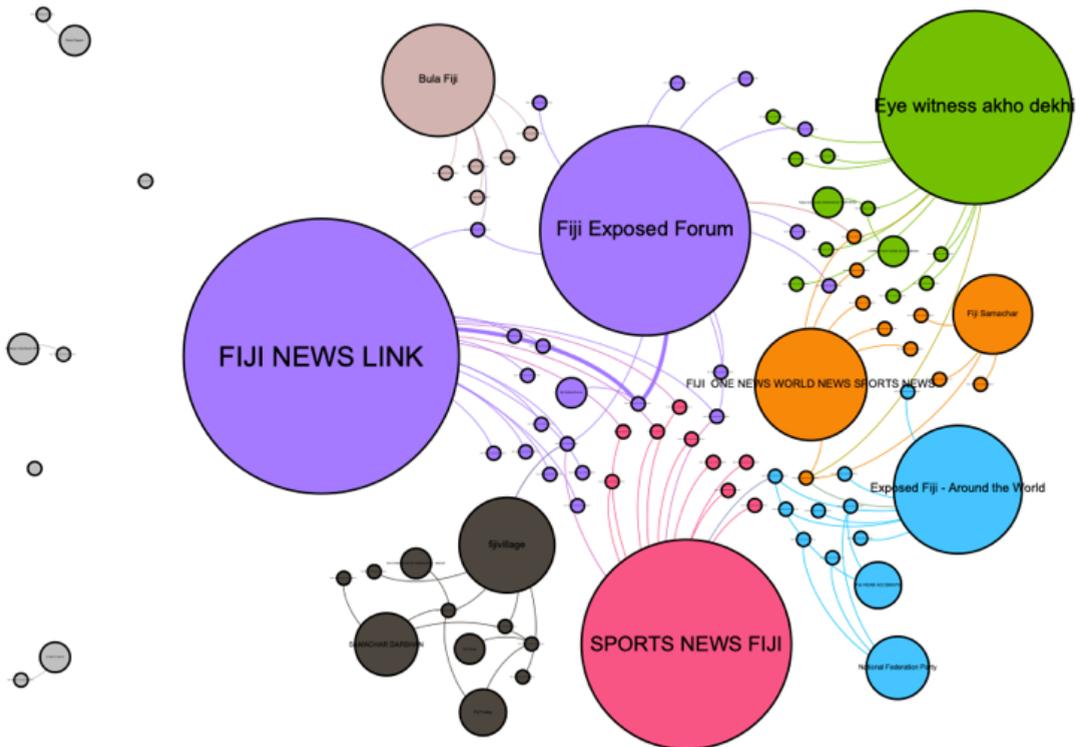
4.6 THE CASE OF LENORA QEREQERETABUA

In late 2020, Lenora Qereqeretabua was subjected to highly defamatory comments on social media related to her past. This led to widespread public discussion and the arrest of the perpetrator—a high school teacher. It was this incident that prompted our interest in conducting the pilot research in Fiji. The teacher was consequently fired by the Education Minister, Rosy Akbar, for posting derogatory comments on social media about Qereqeretabua. He continued his claims in a series of Facebook posts and he repeated the claims in an interview with the *Fiji Times* on 30 October. Qereqeretabua denied the claim. A serious concern was the impact that posting such unsubstantiated claims might have on less well connected or more vulnerable victims.

A further post followed on the Fiji Exposed Forum on **28 October**. It claimed that the police had confirmed that the then suspended high school teacher ... would continue to be questioned at CID Headquarters in Suva. There were some critical comments about Lenora: 'Lenora should also be investigated. If it's true, then she would be a very bad influence to our kids and the country'. (Other comments are not in English but laughing faces indicate scolding or ridicule.) The above comment generated 82 replies but nothing out of the ordinary, just the usual insults between commentators on religion, language, circumcision, and so on.

On the same day, another post was published on the forum about Minister Akbar, who had said that she was unaware of the derogatory posts published by the high school teacher about Lenora Qereqeretabua. The post was accompanied by a few very strong comments: 'f— liar, stop telling lies Akbar, it's time for you guys to prepare for the worst to come'; 'Minister of Education your system is pathetic. A lot of racism going on and your decision is biased. If it was an iTaukei teacher it would be a different story altogether i.e. half pay or no pay at all'.

On **12 November 2020**, a post on the Fiji Exposed Forum was published where Lenora Qereqeretabua denied the defamatory allegations. The post attracted 83 comments, around 70 per cent of which were very supportive.

A serious concern was the impact that posting unsubstantiated claims might have on less well connected or more vulnerable victims.

Figure 31. **Lenora Qereqeretabua (MP) fell victim to a high profile online slander**

4.7 THE CASE OF LYNDA TABUYA

A post published on the Fiji Exposed Forum during the second monitoring period (**10 December 2018**) accompanied by a picture of SODELPA Member of Parliament Lynda Tabuya reads: 'Prettiest member of our parliament' (see Figure 32). Of the 127 comments on the post, around 30 are humiliating, such as: 'only outside…inside evil to the core', and so on.

A post published earlier (on **26 November 2018**) was about an article from the *Fiji Sun* reporting on the dress Tabuya wore for the opening of parliament. The article cited some undisclosed sources commenting on the appropriateness of the dress. It included a comment from the leader of the opposition that he saw nothing wrong with Tabuya's dress, and that he had seen a lot of women in foreign parliaments dressed in such a way. The comments under the post were overwhelmingly supportive and either complimented her or tried to shift the discussion on to policy (Fiji Exposed Forum 2018c).

On **9 November 2020**, a post on the Fiji Exposed Forum condemned the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma, and Tabuya for their posts on social media in which they advised Hindu devotees to think about the significance of Sunday to Christians when celebrating Diwali, advising Diwali observers to wait until early Monday morning to light firecrackers. Such a bold statement created uproar online and generated 441 comments.

Figure 32. **'Prettiest member of our parliament', post on Fiji Exposed Forum, 10 December 2018**

In contrast to the divisive post, there were many comments along the lines of: 'Happy Diwali' and 'Keep up the love and peace Fiji....♥'. Naturally, many condemned the comments, such as: 'Well that was very disrespectful and so ignorant of the Methodist Church officials and Tabuya'. There were also supportive comments, however, such as: 'This is simply blown out of proportion. Hon. Lynda has apologised, and we should end it there. No need to debate over it'.

Another post on the same topic was published on **10 November 2020**, in which Hindu religious leaders expressed their dismay over Tabuya's comments about Diwali. There were many angry and abusive exchanges between the commenters on racial grounds.

On **11 November 2020** another post criticized Lynda Tabuya, using derogatory remarks (see Figure 33). This generated offensive comments, such as: 'F**k lynda a****le lady', and comments on her appearance: 'She looks like Tom boy. I think'. Others sought to diminish her: 'I don't think she was RACIST!!....But STUPID, YES!!!. Especially if 'EDUCATED and SMART FIJIANS' (mostly those from the opposition bench) have reacted strongly against it, and not forgetting FIJIANS around the world. She Has said SORRY, Let's wait and see the NEXT SOCIAL MEDIA Drama She creates!!...FUTURE DEPTY PM

!!😂😂😂😂. I didn't put re, because now it feels as the discussion moved from MP being racist to not thinking through her comment about firecrackers and Diwali celebration'.

Figure 33. **Facebook post, 11 November 2020**

4.8 THE CASE OF RIDDHI DAMODAR

On 21 October 2018, a post appeared on the Fiji Exposed Forum emphasizing Riddhi Damodar's Indian origin:

> Some iTaukies are saying Fijians go back to India when our mother land is Fiji while they are supporting a lady who was born in India only came to Fiji after her marriage previously to Mr Damodar; iTaukies and Fijians should stand up and say hey we don't want any India born candidate in our parliament, Fiji is for Fijians only.

The post was illustrated with Damodar's picture and the text: 'Reject NFP, This is politics, not Bollywood Riddhi, Karara jawab milega' (see Figure 34). In the comments, the overwhelming majority showed support for women politicians, but the author of the post insulted one

Figure 34. **Reject NFP, This is politics, not Bollywood Riddhi**

of the supporters, diverting the discussion on to her own family and threatening to 'rip [her] in two pieces'.

A similarly racist, anti-women candidates post was posted on the Fiji Exposed Forum on **21 October 2018**: 'Let's be realistic. I would choose someone who could represent the country and look after the Citizens of Fiji. I will choose any Fijian over her'. Racist and sexist comments followed, such as: 'She's playing the gender card, pretending she's in it for women empowerment'; 'Riddhi should not be allowed in parliament. She is from India'; 'Most beautiful candidate. . . Lol some people!!!'.

There were further anti-Riddhi Damodar posts on the Fiji Exposed Forum on **4 November 2018**. The post (see Figure 35), which included her photograph, was captioned: 'Why waste vote on me… Vote for Fiji First'. It attracted more sexist comments: 'She is a cutie aye…Bi-man must be seeing something more in her 😜'.

Figure 35. **'Why waste vote on me…Vote for Fiji First'**

4.9 OTHER SEXIST POSTS AND COMMENTS

On **23 September 2018** there was a post on the Fiji Exposed Forum about the politician Tupou Draunidalo who had given a television interview explaining why she had quit the party leadership and founded a new political party. The monitoring team found this sexist comment under the post: 'The reason why we don't want women in politics…they won't forgive easily. Bad for health both personally and politically'.

On **28 September 2018**, there was a post on the Fiji Exposed Forum about a clash between two women politicians. Some of the comments suggested that it is not women's business to discuss politics. One user provided an illustration with a religious motif, claiming that it is a woman's role to comfort, teach and nurture; and a man's role to provide for the family, protect the family and lead the family: 'Husband is above wife in the pyramid, not partners'.

Figure 36. '…[P]liz keep the girlfriend & return me the dog'

Under a standard promotional post by one of the political parties, posted on **22 October 2018**, 'Cost of living is so high. Lots of families in Fiji find it hard to save. Vote Sodelpa for the betterment of Fiji', one user left a sexist joke: 'Girlfriend & dog missing. If found; pliz keep the girlfriend & return me the dog. Thanks' (see Figure 36).

Similarly, on **24 October 2018** there was an insulting post about a woman journalist who had interviewed one of the male candidates:

> Just saw ... and I gotta say this woman is really stupid. Why would you hire an idiot woman who lacks common sense and has absolutely zero knowledge about journalism. She was interviewing Biman Prasad but she didn't even give him a chance to answer the questions and kept on interrupting him. She absolutely lacks professionalism. Is this what the journalist of Fiji are like?

Many of the comments that followed were on her appearance: 'Show off.... she thinks she is very beautiful....shit'; 'This lady is very intelligent and beautiful.😍', and so on.

Under a post calling on people to vote for a female minister, there was a sexist comment: 'Mmmm nice lips' (see Figure 37). No one had previously discussed the facial features of a male politician.

Figure 37. **Comments on Facebook, 10 November 2018**

Endnote

1   For the purpose of our research, we defined problematic language as including sexism, racism, threats, political victimization or personal abuse. We were inspired by the definitions elaborated in the methodology of similar research conducted during the 2018 elections in Pakistan, *Online Participation of Female Politicians in Pakistan's General Elections 2018*, conducted by the Digital Rights Foundation and Democracy Reporting International, see Digital Rights Foundation et al. [n.d.], <https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Booklet-Elections-Web-low.pdf> , accessed 10 November 2021.

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Annex 1.
METHODOLOGY

Monitoring periods

First monitoring period:	15 September 2018 to 14 November 2018
Second monitoring period:	15 November 2018 to 13 January 2019
Third monitoring period:	15 October 2020 to 13 December 2020

The quantitative analysis focused on all the posts[1] generated by monitored entities (certain women and men politicians, two influencers and a media outlet) and related comments during the three monitoring periods.[2] For the public groups, we focused on the posts with at least 50 interactions. The Facebook metadata, such as the number of posts and interactions (reactions, comments and shares), was obtained with the assistance of CrowdTangle.[3] As CrowdTangle only tracks public content, and does not include private personal profiles or private groups, we focused only on public pages/accounts and groups. Although we understood that it would be interesting to research private groups and profiles, especially in connection with the topic of online violence against women, scraping data from private accounts and groups involves various ethical concerns that have to be addressed, not least the nature of consent, properly identifying and respecting expectations of privacy on social network sites, and data anonymization prior to public release, all of which require sufficient time and resources.

The monitoring also focused on the thematic structure of the posts. The qualitative analysis assessed the level of originality of the posts, more precisely whether the posts were initiated by the account holder or reposted from some other (known or unknown) source. The monitoring was carried out by human coders who divided the relevant posts into four categories:

Original (the monitored subject is the author)
Taken from another source (credited)
Taken from another source (not credited)
Unknown origin

The qualitative analysis focused primarily on posts and comments about women politicians (with a similar approach used towards male politicians) to analyse the potential presence of violent online behaviour, ranging from online harassment and public shaming to the desire to inflict physical harm, including sexual assault. The monitoring was conducted by human coders who divided the relevant posts and comments into five different categories (see Table 1).

Table 1. Glossary of problematic content

Problematic content

Category of problematic content (abusive or unwelcome comment)	Definition and example
Sexist [against female, against male]	Any comment that is demeaning, discriminatory, abusive or derogatory towards an individual/group because of gender or gender presentation. This includes comments on the appearance that imply a gendered element.
Racist/ethnicity-based [against female, against male]	Any comment that is demeaning, discriminatory, abusive or derogatory towards an individual/group because of nationality, race, ethnicity or linguistic identity. This includes slurs, jokes or references to stereotypes that are racially charged.
Threats [against female, against male]	Any comment directed towards an individual/group that articulates an intention to cause injury or results in reasonable fear of harm. This includes threats of sexualized violence directed at individuals.
Political victimization [against female, against male]	Any abusive or threatening comments targeting the political beliefs, ideology or affiliation of an individual. This does not include disagreements along partisan lines, but it does include comments that serve to ridicule political beliefs rather than legitimately challenge them.
Personal/Individual abuse [against female, against male]	Comments directed at the individual's personal characteristics, appearance, family life or other non-political aspects of their life.

Network mapping

We used an open-source network mapping tool, Gephi, to track the spread of key words within groups or pages on CrowdTangle. Network mapping with Gephi allowed us to see in which groups our key words received most interactions, and which groups/pages shared the key words the most frequently. It was also possible to use network graphs to identify:

* which accounts shared certain URLs most frequently;
* which URLs were shared most often between those accounts;
* which accounts shared content most frequently with each other (e.g. were clustered together).

Definitions:

* *Nodes* are the circles/dots in a network map. Here, nodes are both accounts and links.
* *Edges* are the lines that connect the nodes. In our case, the edges are the connection between the entity and the URL that it shared.

It is not possible to determine whether the interactions were organic or bots, or which users posted links to groups.

Monitored actors

17 Facebook public pages of 12 women politicians
28 Facebook public pages of 24 male politicians
1 Facebook public page of a media outlet
2 Facebook public pages of selected influencers
6 Facebook public groups

List of monitored actors

Female politicians (17 public pages of 12 female politicians, with number of followers)

Adi Litia Qionibaravi (7,160)
Anne Dunn (5,100)
Lenora Qereqeretabua MP (30,140)
Lynda Tabuya (89,850)
Mereseini Rakuita (9,450)
Rakuita Mereiseni (510)
Premila Kumar (2,700)
Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa (50,800)
Roshika Déo (480)
Roshika Deo (160)
Roshik DEO (80)
Rosy Sofia Akbar (15,120)
Rosy Akbar (2,660)
Rosy Sofia Akbar (60)
Salote Radrodro MP (7,250)

Selai Adimaitoga (40)
Veena Bhatnagar (900)

Male politicians (28 public pages of 24 male politicians, with number of followers)
Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj (1,530)
Aseri Radrodro MP (13,210)
Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum (30,130)
Bill Gavoka MP (15,230)
Dr Atonio Lalabalavu (3,870)
Dr Ifereimi Waqainabete (10,240)
Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama (97,110)
Fiji PM Frank Bainimarama (22,620)
Frank Bainimarama is The Man (17,590)
Frank Bainimarama (320)
Inia Seruiratu (980)
Inosi Kuridrani (5,190)
Jese Saukuru MP (2,600)
Jone Usamate (720)
Mikaele Leawere MP (2,740)
Mitieli Bulanauca (1,680)
Mosese Bulitavu (14,690)
Niko Nawaikula (41,900)
Peceni Vosanibola MP (720)
Pio Tikoduadua MP (15,760)
Professor. Biman C. Prasad MP (10,250)
Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka (80,480)
Rabuka: My Story & My Vision for Fiji (1,900)
Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu (7,510)
Ratu Suliano Matanitobua (5,200)
Ratu Tevita Navurelevu MP (570)
Ro Filipe Tuisawau (10,590)
Simione Rasova MP (1,030)

Influencers (2 public pages of social media influencers, with number of followers)
Roneel Rohendra (630)
Peter Waqavonovono (21,670)

Media (1 media page, with number of followers)
Roselyn Kumar News (71,080)

Groups (6 public groups, with number of members)
Fijileaks (1,195)
Fiji EXPOSED FORUM (35,350)
Fiji Exposed Forum (61,000)

Fiji Exposed Forum (28,370)
Fiji Exposed Forum 2021 (41,450)
...fiji exposed forum... (15,310)

List of monitored topics (25)

Agriculture
Army, military
Business, economy
Culture
Catastrophes, incidents, accidents
Celebrities
Charity
Corruption
Crime
Education, science
Environment
Gender
Healthcare
IT, digitalization
Judiciary
Media
Minorities
Politics
Religion
Social issues
Society
Sport
Transport, infrastructure
Violence against women
Others

Endnotes

1   Where the post was a video, only videos of a length shorter than 30 minutes were monitored.

2   In the categories Female and Male politicians only 'relevant' comments were analysed where the thread contained 100 or more comments. Where the thread to post contained 99 comments or fewer, all the comments were analysed.

3   CrowdTangle is a social media analytics tool owned by Facebook. It 'tracks influential public accounts and groups on Facebook, Instagram and Reddit'. The tool does not track every public account and does not track private profiles or groups, so its data is not representative of performance across the entire platform. The data reflects public interactions (likes, reactions, comments, shares, upvotes and three second views) but does not include reach or referral traffic. It does not track ads unless those ads begin as organic, non-paid posts that are subsequently 'boosted' using Facebook's advertising tools. Because the system does not distinguish between paid and boosted content, some high-performing content may have had paid distribution. CrowdTangle also does not track posts made visible only to specific groups of followers (see Beakley n.d.).

Annex 2.
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CrowdTangle	A Facebook tool to help understand, analyse and report on what is happening across social media. It is used to follow public content across Facebook, Instagram and Reddit, and to compare the performance of public accounts over time. It is also used to track referrals and find wider trends to understand how public content spreads on social media. CrowdTangle only tracks publicly available posts.
DataReportal	Reports produced by Simon Kemp and Kepios, with the support of various partners, including Hootsuite and We Are Social. Designed to help people and organizations all over the world (in more than 200 countries) to find the data, insights and trends they need to make more informed decisions.
Facebook profile, page and groups	A **profile** is a place on Facebook where anyone can share information about herself/himself. A profile is needed to *create a* **page** or help manage one. **Pages** are places on Facebook where artists, public figures, businesses, brands, organizations and non-profits can connect with their fans or customers. When someone likes or follows a page on Facebook, they can start seeing updates from that page in their News Feed. You must have a profile to create a **group** or to help manage one. **Groups** are a place to communicate about shared interests with certain people. You can create a group for anything—your family reunion, your after-work sports team, your book club—and customize the group's privacy settings depending on who you want to be able to join and see the group. When you join a group on Facebook, you starting seeing content from that group in your News Feed.

Melanesia	A subregion of Oceania in the south-western Pacific Ocean. It extends from the island of New Guinea in the west to Tonga in the east, and includes the Arafura Sea. The region includes the four independent countries of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.
MP	Member of Parliament
Social media	Web- or mobile-based platforms that allow for two-way interactions through user-generated content and communication. Social media are therefore not media that originate only from one source or are broadcast from a static website. Rather, they are media on specific platforms designed to allow users to create (generate) content and to interact with the information and its source.
Social media influencer	A user who has a number of followers and manages to establish credibility on a specific platform and influence/persuade others to act based on her/his recommendations. An influencer has the tools and authenticity to attract many viewers consistently and can motivate others to expand their social reach.

About the authors

Rasťo Kužel is a media and election expert with over 22 years of international experience. Since 1998, he has been running MEMO 98, a media-monitoring organization with extensive experience of delivering analyses on behalf of international institutions as well as technical assistance to different electoral stakeholders. Rasťo has worked as a media and election analyst, consultant and trainer, participating in a number of election observation missions and projects. For the last six years, Rasťo has focused intensively on the issue of online disinformation in the context of elections as well as on the role of social media during elections and ways to tackle their negative impact on elections. He co-authored a White Paper on *Social Media, Disinformation and Electoral Integrity* to guide the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in this area and has been working on a UNESCO/UNDP guide *Elections & Internet, Social Media, Social Messaging, and AI: A Guide for Electoral Practitioners.* Drawing upon his experience in media monitoring, Rasťo wrote a media monitoring toolkit developed thanks to the Council of Europe.

Ivan Godársky holds a master law degree from the Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. He participated in the Open Society Foundation programme Street Law aimed at increasing legal awareness of students and teachers. Since 1998 he has been working in Slovak-based media organization MEMO 98, focusing on media monitoring (of both traditional and social media), technical assistance, advocacy and lately disinformation. As a consultant and trainer, Ivan has taken part in several media and legal activities in the framework of the European Union, United Nations, Council of Europe and other international organizations, such as NED, NDI, OSI, IMS and EED, mostly in former Soviet Union and Balkan countries. In addition, he has been working as a media analyst in the OSCE/ODIHR and EU Election Observation Missions in some 40 missions, most recently in Sri Lanka, the United States and Kyrgyzstan.

Branislav Kohn works as a data analyst leading MEMO 98's work in the area of analysing media monitoring data and preparing data visualizations. A graduate of the Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Informatics at Comenius University in Bratislava, Branislav has worked as an RPA (Robotic Process Automation) developer, familiar with the database maintenance, database and programming software (Python, C++) as well as data visualization (Tableau).

Michal Hollý has an engineer's degree in information technologies and works at the National Competence Centre for High Performance Computing (NCC for HPC) of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The NCC, established in 2020 within the EuroCC project (implemented by the Slovak Academy of Sciences) and analyses, implements and coordinates all necessary activities towards providing tailored services to end users from the academic sector, public administration, industry and SMEs. The NCC has worked with MEMO 98 in the area of network analysis and data visualization.

Analysts

Olena Sadovnik is a media consultant and content monitor. As a Fulbright scholar, Olena received M.A in Communications from St Rose Rose College in the US, where she studied media ethics and journalism. Upon returning to Ukraine, Olena managed large-scale media development projects in Ukraine and abroad, funded by the European Union, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, US State Department, etc. Since 2018 Olena works as senior media analyst with MEMO 98, specializing in quantitative and qualitative content analysis, including user generated content in social media.

Veronica Laputska is a Co-founder of the EAST Center in Warsaw and Senior Media Analyst at MEMO98. In her current capacity, Veronica has initiated, implemented and carried out multiple projects dealing with democratization, elections, propaganda, digital influencers and media studies. Her research interests and expertise also include study of the nationalism and politics of memory, visual and Jewish studies. Previously Veronica has cooperated with OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the EU East StratCom Task Force, the Council of Europe, the Digital Communication Network, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, other NGOs and international funds; and worked in business consulting and academia.

Kira Kalinina holds a bachelor journalism degree from the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow and keeps educating herself in the sphere of media. Worked as a journalist for eight years in different outlets, including English- and German-language ones. Since 2018 she has been participating in several MEMO 98 projects and in ODIHR Election Observation Missions as media analyst, most recently in North Macedonia.

About the organizations

INTERNATIONAL IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mission to advance democracy worldwide, as a universal human aspiration and enabler of sustainable development. We do this by supporting the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. Our vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable and deliver sustainable development to all.

MEMO 98

An internationally recognized, independent, non-profit specialist media institution with 22 years of experience conducting media monitoring and research and assisting civil society groups. Using tested and approved methodologies and tools, we provide media analysis and media monitoring with tangible results, in particular during election periods. Having participated in more than 120 election observation missions and about 150 media and election-related projects and training in more than 55 countries (in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Balkan countries, but also in Africa, Asia, South America and the Middle East), our experts provide assistance on media, electoral and other democratic arrangements.

The number of women in parliament is consistently low throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Many factors contribute to this situation, but studies suggest that one major factor relates to the way that women are treated on social media. This report aims to identify how women politicians fare against their male counterparts on social media and to evaluate whether women in politics face a greater challenge than men.

Overall, there were four times as much problematic content related to the Facebook pages of male politicians (133 cases) compared to their female counterparts (32 cases). It is important to note that the vast majority of the problematic comments aimed at women politicians were in the sexist category. Compared to their male colleagues, female politicians are treated in a less serious manner on Facebook. Comments on their posts touch on their appearance and personal qualities rather than their politics.