



Deliverable 10.1

Summary of Findings (WP10)



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			Leonardo Veronesi	are not direct policy measures but communication guidelines and strategic suggestions
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1. Executive Summary

This *Summary of Findings* is the main deliverable outcome of **Work Package 10 (WP10)** of the UNTWIST project. The aim of WP10 is to explore how online media tools can be harnessed to effectively communicate gender-based needs¹. The resulting policy recommendations and communication guidelines are designed based on the findings generated by the UNTWIST project with the goal to empower democratic actors to counter violent and reactionary messages and better communicate their proposals. In doing so, the WP contributes to **General Objective 3 (GO3)** – co-developing policy recommendations that enhance gender representation and reduce the appeal of extremist populism – and **Specific Objective 3 (SO3)**, by developing political communication strategies that broaden the reach and impact of inclusive policies. To do this, WP10 builds on a double approach combining a literature review conducted between March and September 2025 and a workshop with seven experts conducted on October 2025.

The report outlines and contextualizes the methodology and analytical approach, as well as the consecutive findings of WP10, which led to the formulation of 15 policy recommendations and communication guidelines divided into four broader sections (*Communication and Language; Platforms and Actors; Political Context; Scientific/Political Communication* – see [Section 6](#)). The recommendations are targeted towards members of the EP as well as transnational civil society organizations and media outlets, and can be summarized into several levels of action.

1. European Governance and Parliamentary Efforts

WP10 findings on this level point to a need to increase pressure to **reform platform design and governance to support democratic communication**. Policymakers should be aware of the central role digital platforms play in facilitating far-right political communication and should use their regulatory and institutional leverage to provide a more even playing field in social media communication. Importantly, previous UNTWIST findings show that initial voter attraction to right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) is driven less by gender identity discourses than by perceived and experienced material grievances and unmet needs, which are often gendered but not articulated in identity-based terms. Against this backdrop, the findings of this report also emphasize a need for political campaigns as well as media coverage to avoid **mirroring or reproducing far-right messaging** – on gender-based needs and beyond – as the literature shows that doing so tends to reinforce rather than weaken right-wing populist actors' (RWPAs) communicative reach, while obscuring the material concerns that democratic alternatives could more effectively address.

¹ The concept of gender-based needs was developed in WP1 of the UNTWIST project (see Rothermel et al., 2025).

2. Institutional Efforts at the International Level

The results from WP10 suggest a need for institutional support to **strengthen democratic actors' understanding of platform mechanisms**. This can be done through internal capacity-building trainings for political and media teams on interpretation of local political climates and contexts which shape the success of political communication tools. Implementers should also make sure to act in line with **legal and institutional frameworks** to ensure democratic values and standards in online environments. Further, the communication of evidence-based scientific findings should be structurally embedded within institutional practices and mandates, rather than relying primarily on time-limited project funding, in order to ensure continuity, sustainability, and long-term engagement with citizens. Institutions funding research on high-risk topics need to also ensure **researcher safety** and **institutional support**. Lastly, the results from WP10 also emphasize the need to go beyond online strategies and better integrate interdisciplinary and intersectional **online and offline efforts** to advance better representation of gender-based needs.

3. Strategic Democratic Messaging on Gender-Based Needs

WP10 provides several recommendations that should inform the compilation and strategic use of online political messaging around gender-based needs. These recommendations are relevant for communicators from high-level politics to media and civil society organizations. WP10 finds that messages should be accessible and aligned with democratic values. They should make use of recipients' affective reactions strategically but without mirroring right-wing populist strategies that tend to charge gender-based needs with moral or negatively loaded affective associations. Rather, messages should be grounded in scientific evidence and communicated through positive affective associations. To do so, WP10 results recommend making sure content is adjusted to local political contextual needs, responds to contextualized media debates and issues and – most importantly – responds to specific gender-based needs in particular policy fields (ranging from health, education to security). To assess needs, stakeholders are encouraged to draw on the resources from the UNTWIST projects' previous work packages, as well as on the forthcoming Policy Recommendation Handbook (D11.7), which provides a structured and accessible overview of the project's findings for non-academic audiences. In combination, these **policy recommendations and communication guidelines** enable democratic actors to more effectively promote gender equality and inclusivity in online environments.

2. Introduction

This *Summary of Findings* is the main deliverable outcome of **Work Package 10 (WP10)** of the UNTWIST project. The aim of WP10 is to explore how online media tools can be harnessed to effectively communicate gender-based needs and relevant policy responses, while empowering democratic actors to counter violent and reactionary messages. As such, WP10 builds on the previous research-based work packages of the UNTWIST project, which have examined how gender-based needs are discussed in academic literature (WP1), voiced by voters (WP2 and WP8), assessed through existing surveys (WP3) and represented by political actors (WP4). Using these insights, WP10 shifts the focus from research on gender-based demand (academia, voters, surveys) and supply (parties) towards **developing concrete strategies to communicate findings about both the gaps in gender representation and the ways to fill them**. This focus complements the activities conducted in WP9 through citizen science workshops by combining recommendations and insights from citizens with expert insights from political communication studies. Together, these insights help to **develop explicit strategies for democratic policymakers to respond to voters' gender-based needs and demands in ways that rest on and reinforce democratic principles, thus strengthening the EU's value system and diminishing the appeal of right-wing populist parties (RWPPs)**.

In doing so, WP 10 contributes to **General Objective 3 (GO3)** – *co-developing policy recommendations that enhance gender representation and reduce the appeal of extremist populism* – and **Specific Objective 3 (SO3)**, by *developing political communication strategies that broaden the reach and impact of inclusive policies*. The generated insights will be included in UNTWIST's Toolkit and Policy Recommendations Handbook for political parties and institutions.

The following section of this report ([Section 3](#)) provides detailed information on the rationale behind the development of **communication guidelines** that enable democratic actors to more effectively promote gender equality and inclusivity in online environments. It first outlines the theoretical understanding of political communication which underlines the activities ([3.1](#)), which, in turn, inform the report's focus on three communication pillars (*Disprove, Co-opt and Create*) ([3.2](#)). Section [3.3](#) discusses the conceptual approach that couples this theoretical lens with UNTWIST's focus on gender and the insights from previous work packages. The following two sections discuss the process and findings of WP10's research design consisting of a **systematic literature review** of political communication efforts ([Section 4](#)) and an **expert workshop** with seven experts from different sub-disciplines of political science, gender studies, sociology, social psychology and communication studies ([Section 5](#)). The final section ([Section 6](#)) summarizes these insights and culminates in a list of policy recommendations and communication guidelines before providing further implications that embed WP10 within the broader context of UNTWIST ([Section 7](#)).

3. Conceptualization and Background

Political communication scholarship has evolved alongside major socio-cultural and technological transformations, shifting from early models of direct persuasion to more interactional and cognitively oriented approaches, increasingly emphasizing processes such as interpersonal influence, selective exposure, agenda-setting, priming and framing². In recent decades, the digital transformation of the media landscape has profoundly reshaped the conditions under which political communication operates, rendering traditional frameworks based on centralized mass media increasingly obsolete (Robison, 2019). The rise of the Internet and social media has turned audiences from passive consumers into active “prosumers”, who directly create and circulate political content within personalized, networked spaces (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). As a result, political communication now operates within complex digital ecologies shaped as much by interpersonal dynamics and platform design as by message content. While social media empower users to produce and disseminate information, algorithmic curation and strategic messaging simultaneously constrain audience agency, fostering echo chambers, polarization, and emotionally charged content. These transformations in actors, audiences, and content call for a rethinking of how political communication functions in today’s socially and algorithmically mediated environment (Young & Miller, 2023).

Such transformations are particularly relevant to the UNTWIST project, which not only seeks to identify and define citizens’ gender-based needs but also aims to develop strategic tools that empower policymakers and practitioners to better understand these needs and communicate relevant policy responses effectively vis-à-vis challenges posed by RWPPs politics. In this framework, WP10 plays a central role by using insights from political communication research to translate the empirical results generated by the UNTWIST project into practical, actionable guidance for democratic actors seeking to communicate gender-based needs and policies addressing them in ways that counter the regressive, exclusionary narratives advanced by right-wing populist agents. Right-wing populist messaging has indeed attracted growing scholarly attention in recent years because it seems particularly effective in reaching diverse audiences (e.g., Kakavand, 2024; Völker and Saldivia Gonzatti, 2024). In online political communication especially, right-wing populist communication – often operating outside formal party structures through influencers, media outlets, advocacy groups, or other digital intermediaries – has become key in the production and normalization of exclusionary discourses around and beyond gender (Rothut et al., 2024a). For this reason, although the UNTWIST project as a whole focuses on right-wing populist *parties* (RWPPs), WP10 intentionally expands this perspective to encompass the broader ecosystem of right-wing populist actors active in online communication. These actors are particularly important in supporting and amplifying

² For a detailed overview of the development of political communication research over the last century, see Young and Miller (2023).

the stances promoted by RWPPs, and since they often operate outside formal party structures, they can shape public debates in ways that require distinct communication strategies – making it essential for policymakers to consider both RWPPs and RWPA dynamics when designing interventions.

To capture this broader set of players, WP10 refers to them collectively as right-wing populist actors (RWPAs), who are characterized by nationalist, conservative or protectionist right-wing positions and employ a populist rhetoric/style that claims to represent the “ordinary people” against corrupt or out-of-touch elites. While differing across national contexts, they commonly emphasize national identity and sovereignty, promote restrictive immigration and security-focused policies, and challenge liberal or progressive agendas such as multiculturalism, feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, or environmentalism. Many also advocate for economic protectionism and, in the European context, demonstrate varying degrees of Euroscepticism by opposing deeper supranational integration in favor of national control. Importantly, when engaging with political communication literature, we also use the term *far right*³ to align with existing scholarly classifications and to better reflect the wider communicative ecosystem in which these narratives circulate – particularly across digital platforms. In this way, the report tries to acknowledge and take into consideration the informal and formal ties that have been exposed between RWPAs and RWPPs and shown to be crucial especially in regard to online communication.

It is within this challenging communicative terrain that WP10 positions its core objective: strengthening democratic actors’ communication capacities around gender-based needs and policies, particularly within polarized online spheres populated by RWPAs’ messages. To move in this direction, the first step undertaken by the work package leaders at the University of Bern (UBERN) was to establish a clear and shared understanding of what constitutes (online) political communication in today’s context.

3.1 Political Communication: A Situated Definition

Political communication is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses the production, transmission, and interpretation of messages related to politics and governance (Norris, 2015). At its core, it involves a set of interrelated components: the actors who create and circulate messages (politicians, parties, media organizations, activists, and citizens); the media and technological channels through which these messages are disseminated (ranging from traditional mass media to digital and algorithmically mediated platforms); the messages themselves, which vary in content, framing, and intent (informative, persuasive, mobilizing, or delegitimizing); and the

³ The term *far right* is widely used in the literature but remains highly contested, with ongoing debate about its precise definition and conceptual boundaries (Pirro, 2023). In this work, we do not adopt a specific definition of our own; rather, we use the term as a proxy to identify and draw on scholarship examining the communication of actors commonly classified in this category, while acknowledging that different authors may employ the term with varying nuances.

audiences who receive, assess, and reinterpret these messages, often reintroducing them into (online) circulation through their own communicative practices (Young & Miller, 2023). These interactions unfold through a series of dynamic and multidirectional processes. Communication flows downward, from institutions and elites toward citizens; horizontally, among political and media actors who negotiate meaning and power; and upward, from public opinion and grassroots engagement back toward political authorities. This reciprocal flow highlights the inherently interactive nature of political communication, where message production and reception are continuously intertwined (Norris, 2015).

Crucially, political communication is context dependent (Lilleker, 2006). The structure and functioning of the media system – its ownership models, regulatory environment, and technological infrastructures – shape both the logic and the reach of communication. In today's networked media environment, digital platforms and algorithmic filtering mechanisms profoundly affect visibility, engagement, and agenda-setting, mediating not only who speaks but also what and how messages gain traction in the public sphere. Taken together, these dimensions emphasize that political communication cannot be reduced to message transmission alone, but must be understood as an interactive, contextually embedded process linking actors, media, messages, and audiences in the co-construction of political meaning and influence (Hatakka, 2019).

In short, in this research we intend political communication as the ***interactive and context-dependent process through which political actors, media systems, and audiences produce, circulate, and interpret messages that shape political understanding, participation, and power relations within a given sociotechnical environment.***

Given the policy-oriented and practice-driven nature of this work package, our focus lies on identifying concrete communication strategies that enable **democratic actors** to more effectively communicate online to promote gender-based needs and policies addressing them. Accordingly, **we concentrate on communication guidelines and practices – examining communicative actions, message features, and content design.** At the same time, we acknowledge the crucial role of structural dimensions – such as platform design and regulation as well as broader societal political developments – in shaping the wider online communication environment. The research report therefore centers on insights that provide directly applicable communication tools. However, where relevant, we also include important contextual limitations to these strategies, which emerged throughout the research process and are thus integrated into the recommendations for the different areas of action.

3.2 Systematizing Communication Strategies (Disprove, Co-opt, Create)

Given the breadth and diversity of the scholarship on political communication – spanning both academic research and practitioner-oriented perspectives – we narrowed our conceptual focus in order to serve the specific objective of this project: developing a practical toolkit for democratic actors to support the design of effective online communication strategies on gender-related issues. These strategies should both respond to hostile and exclusionary narratives and communicate gender issues – along with the related policy proposals addressing them – in an engaging and inclusive manner. To this end, we developed a conceptual approach designed to systematize existing insights and practices around three strategic pillars: *Disprove*, *Co-opt*, and *Create*.

Each of these pillars represents a distinct communicative approach that form a continuum from reactive strategies that challenge RWPA content to proactive approaches that build independent, inclusive narratives. The first, ***Disprove***, encompasses evidence and strategies aimed at addressing Right-Wing Populist Actors' (RWPAs) exclusionary, and/or misinformative content – such as anti-gender narratives and communication campaigns – through fact-based refutation, reframing, or corrective engagement (Freelon and Wells, 2020; Camargo and Simon, 2022; Vériter, 2025). The second, ***Co-opt***, refers to communicative practices that strategically engage with RWPAs narratives by capturing, reshaping, or mirroring elements of their rhetorical and affective styles to neutralize their appeal or redirect their emotional force (Brown et al., 2023; Rothut et al., 2024b; Schmid et al., 2025). Finally, the third pillar, ***Create***, focuses on proactively shaping inclusive and democratic discourses, highlighting how progressive actors can develop their own narratives and “communication identities”, rather than merely reacting to exclusionary or extremist frames (Ferguson and Olechowski, 2023; Pavan and Earl, 2025). Together, these three dimensions, which are explained in more detail below, offer a comprehensive framework for understanding and strengthening democratic, gender-sensitive communication in digital environments.

3.2.1 Disprove

The disprove category encompasses communication strategies and practices aimed at countering misinformation, polarization, and hate speech in public and online discussions of social issues. These approaches seek to challenge false or exclusionary claims, expose manipulative rhetorical techniques, and reduce the persuasive power of hostile or misleading content. While traditional *debunking* strategies focus on correcting false information through factual evidence, more recent methods such as

*inoculation*⁴ and *nudging*⁵ go further aiming at pre-empting misinformation or encouraging more reflective engagement with digital content (Banas and Bessarabova, 2023). In practice, disprove strategies vary in their target audiences, areas of application, and effectiveness, with outcomes ranging from successful attitude change to potential backfiring effects. Overall, they rest on the premise that empowering audiences to critically evaluate and resist manipulative communication is a key step toward enhancing democratic resilience and fostering more informed, inclusive public discourse.

3.2.2 Co-opt

The co-opt strategies focus on capturing and reshaping RWPAs' narratives through *imitation*, *mirroring*, or *partial incorporation* of their rhetorical and affective styles. The underlying rationale is that democratic actors may strategically engage with the communicative logics of RWPAs – adopting similar tones, formats, or framings – to neutralize their appeal or redirect the discourse toward more inclusive ends. However, one challenge in identifying co-opt strategies is that political actors rarely conceptualize or label these practices as deliberate communication strategies. As a result, such approaches are often more implicit and less systematically theorized than those under the *Disprove* pillar. At the same time, there are ongoing scientific debates surrounding such strategies, as some scholars have raised concerns about their potential to contribute to “mainstreaming” of far-right ideas and styles into broader political communication (Brown and Mondon, 2020). In assessing co-opt strategies, therefore, we take these discussions into account and remain attentive to both the potential benefits and the risks associated with adopting elements of RWPAs' communicative practices.

3.2.3 Create

The create strategies refer to communication practices employed by mainstream or democratic political actors to proactively shape their own narratives, rather than responding to or countering those of RWPAs. The central rationale behind this category is to identify and analyze techniques that enable democratic actors to set the agenda and frame issues in ways that reflect their own values and priorities. Therefore, the main actors of interest for this category are mainstream parties, democratic political organizations, and (progressive or liberal) social movements (Pavan and Earl, 2025). Overall, this category seeks to identify and evaluate the communicative practices that enable democratic actors to proactively shape the discourse by developing resonant,

⁴ Pre-bunking (or inoculation) is a preventive communication strategy that prepares audiences to recognize and resist misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech. It focuses on exposing common rhetorical tactics and patterns used to manipulate opinions, thereby strengthening people's ability to identify and reject such messages before they take effect (Cook et al., 2017).

⁵ Nudging is a behavioral intervention to address political disinformation online by subtly shaping the choice environment in which users encounter information. Drawing on insights into cognitive biases and decision-making heuristics, nudges encourage more reflective and informed engagement – such as verifying sources or reconsidering before sharing – without restricting choices or altering economic incentives (Konstantinou et al., 2019).

issue-driven narratives. These narratives aim to strengthen public engagement and counterbalance reactionary frames through positive agenda-setting of messaging that is inherently pro-democratic, rather than reactive to anti-democratic agendas set by other actors.

3.3. The Conceptual Focus of WP10: Gender, Political Communication and Democracy?

The central aim of WP10 is to empower policymakers and practitioners to communicate gender-based issues and policy proposals in today's highly digitized and polarized media environment. This focus is in line with and directly supports the overarching goals of the UNTWIST project: *(i) to identify and clearly define gender-based needs – providing policymakers with a concrete understanding of the issues that matter to citizens and how they can address them through policy, taking into account their gendered dimension; and (ii) to develop strategic tools that enable democratic actors to effectively communicate their commitment and intended strategies for addressing such needs through inclusive and evidence-based policymaking.*

In the first phase of the UNTWIST project, our consortium focused on the former objective, identifying gender-based needs, thoroughly mapping areas requiring attention, and highlighting issues where gendered dimensions are particularly salient. Building on these insights, the current phase – and WP10 in particular – translates this knowledge into practice, creating a practical toolkit for policymakers and practitioners, enabling them to clearly and effectively address the identified gaps in gender-based needs and develop communication strategies to convey to the public their commitments and planned actions.

To do so, this work package seeks to identify concrete communication strategies that enable democratic actors to counter reactionary, exclusionary, and anti-gender representation that threaten to entrench gender hierarchies while simultaneously advancing more democratic representation of gender-based needs. This dual focus – defensive and proactive – acknowledges the complex dynamics of contemporary digital communication, in which RWPA and anti-democratic actors effectively mobilize emotional and identity-based appeals to shape public discourse (Betz and Oswald, 2021). Crucially, findings from WP1 to WP5 show that effective strategies for countering RWPA cannot rely solely on rebutting adversarial narratives: to strengthen democratic resilience, democratic actors must also put forward affirmative and credible communication frameworks that address citizens' gender-based needs and expectations. Indeed, results from these WPs indicate that the shift from mainstream parties toward RWPPs is driven largely by unmet material and socio-economic needs, expressed through gendered experiences rather than primarily symbolic or identity-based motivations. These insights provide essential grounding for WP10, highlighting a growing disconnect between citizens' everyday concerns and the priorities reflected in party agendas. This gap underscores the need for communicative strategies that not only challenge exclusionary narratives but also offer substantive, gender-responsive

policy communication. Building on the project's findings about gaps in gender representation, more effective communication on the structural causes of disillusion and lack of trust is needed to rebuild trust in democratic approaches to gender-based needs.

Accordingly, WP10 advances this objective by concentrating on improving the communication of gendered issues, addressing a key gap identified throughout the project: **structural gender perspectives often remain overlooked in policymaking (beyond dedicated gender equality actions)**. This gap has long been discussed by gender scholars, who have highlighted that the lack of gender salience extends across the entire policymaking process – not only in how policies are designed and implemented, but also in how politicians and institutions communicate about them (Castanho et al., 2025). This gender blindness is also reflected in mainstream political communication research, where gender – if addressed at all – is often reduced to a demographic or topical variable rather than recognized as a fundamental political and social dimension that shapes policy priorities, collective identities, and value-based narratives (Osei-Appiah, 2021). By focusing on more effective, context-sensitive communication, WP10 aims to ensure that gender-based needs are not only acknowledged in policymaking but also meaningfully integrated into democratic dialogue – countering regressive narratives and strengthening democratic values.

All these insights from earlier work packages therefore shaped the conceptual and methodological design of WP10, ensuring alignment between theoretical framing and methodological implementation. The work package combines two complementary components: first, an in-depth literature review maps existing evidence on online political communication strategies, focusing on how democratic actors can **disprove** misleading or exclusionary narratives, **co-opt** certain communicative dynamics without replicating harmful content, and **create** new, progressive discourses that resonate in digital spaces; second, an expert workshop brought together six scholars specializing in political communication, gender studies, and far right research to collaboratively explore effective approaches for conveying gender-based needs and related policy proposals addressing them. In addition, a testimony from another scholar who could not participate in the meeting was collected for further triangulation of the results.

Through this combination of an extensive literature review and an expert workshop, WP10 includes both historical insights and contemporary perspectives on the challenges of gender-sensitive political communication. The research design was explicitly developed in order to include an interdisciplinary lens. The contributions included in the literature review draw on multiple strands within the social sciences including sociology, political science, communication and media studies, political psychology, and cognitive and behavioral science. Similarly, the expert workshop brought together participants from different disciplinary backgrounds (political science, gender studies, sociology, social psychology and communication studies), along with a practitioner from the third sector, fostering an exchange that linked research-based

knowledge with grounded practical perspectives. To sum up, this triangulation across sectors, disciplines, and time, was intentionally designed to generate a richer and more actionable understanding of how gender-related communication strategies develop and operate in practice. Specifically, interdisciplinarity enables the integration of diverse analytical lenses – each discipline offering distinct assumptions, methods, and models of effective communication – thus widening the range of potentially valuable insights. Bringing together experts from both academia and the third sector further broadens this perspective, allowing us to combine conceptual knowledge with practitioner experience and thereby identify approaches that are both theoretically sound and practically feasible for policymakers. Finally, adopting a longitudinal perspective makes it possible to assess not only what has changed over time but also what has (or has not) proven effective in past attempts to communicate gender-based issues, ensuring that the recommendations emerging from WP10 are evidence-based and attuned to current communicative realities. The concrete proceedings and results are detailed in the following sections, starting with a report of the literature review ([Section 4](#)) and expert workshop ([Section 5](#)), which informed the formulation of final findings and resulting communication guidelines and policy recommendations outlined in [Section 6](#).

4. Literature Review

The literature review – conducted over a six-month period (March-September 2025) – aimed to map existing research on online communication strategies that help democratic actors **respond to violent, exclusionary, and reactionary messages while effectively promoting progressive and gender-related issues**. In line with the goals of the UNTWIST project, the literature review sought to generate insights and practical recommendations on how these strategies can be adapted to **strengthen democratic communication on gender-based needs in digital environments**.

To achieve this, we combined keyword searches in major academic databases (Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar) with expert input from UNTWIST consortium colleagues specializing in political communication, who provided guidance on key authors and relevant studies. The next section ([4.1](#)) outlines the methodological steps of the data collection process, including keyword selection, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the operationalization of the three conceptual pillars – *Disprove*, *Co-opt*, and *Create* – used to categorize the strategies identified. In addition, we describe the analytical procedures applied to the selected corpus to extract and synthesize the main findings ([4.2](#)).

4.1. Data Collection and Analysis

The literature search and selection process were guided by the three conceptual pillars introduced earlier (*Disprove*, *Co-opt*, and *Create*: theoretical basis, see [3.2](#)), each representing a distinct strategic approach to (online) political communication. This framework enabled a structured examination of different communicative practices, which can inform practical recommendations for democratic and gender-progressive actors operating in digital environments. An overview of the operationalization of these three pillars is offered in [Figure 1](#)⁶.

To ensure the focus and coherence of the review, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied to filter relevant academic contributions across all pillars. Studies were excluded if they focused solely on far-right communication without discussing counterstrategies, or if they addressed forms of extremism other than far-right (e.g., religious extremism). Similarly, only research examining online communication dynamics was included, while studies centered exclusively on offline strategies were excluded. Contributions dealing primarily with platform-level interventions – e.g., deplatforming, algorithmic friction, or content moderation – were also excluded, as the review focused specifically on communicative strategies and message framing rather than technical or regulatory mechanisms.

⁶ For a detailed outline of how each pillar was operationalized, as well as the full set of keywords used to guide the initial phase of the literature selection process, see the Annex (Sections [9.1](#) and [9.2](#), respectively).

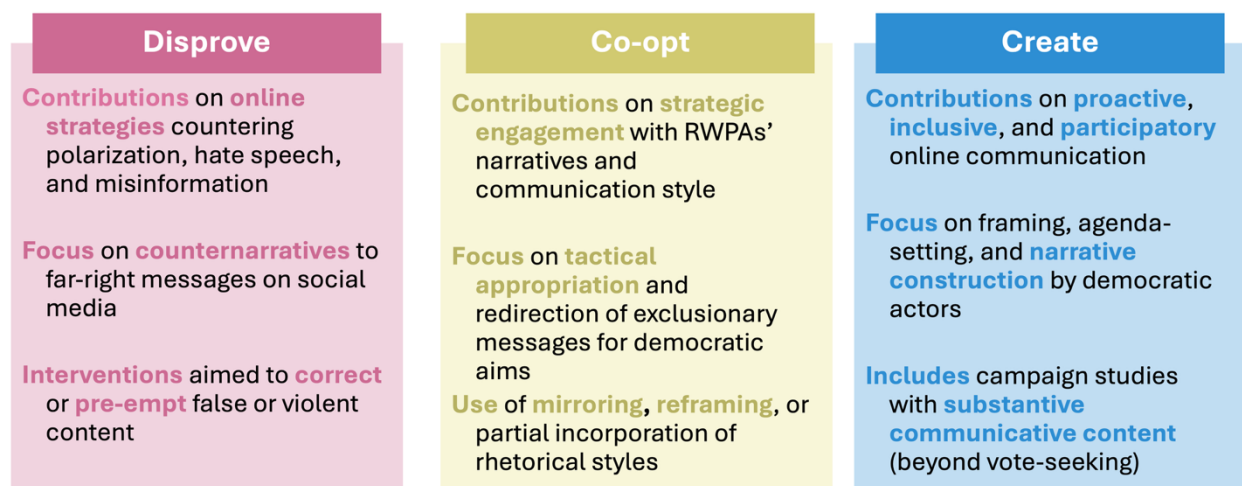


Figure 1: Overview of the operationalization of the three pillars Disprove, Co-opt, and Create

The initial list of papers that were collected following this operationalization consisted of 40 papers for each category (120 in total). By excluding papers that through cross-checking were found to not fit the criteria and excluding repetitive papers (on the same topic by the same authors), the final list of articles consisted of 66 papers in total (see distribution across pillars in [Table 1](#) below).

Table 1: Summary of the literature analyzed

Pillar	N# Articles
Disprove	27
Co-opt	20
Create	19

(see Annex, [section 9.3](#) for the full list of articles)

To analyze the selected articles, one researcher in the team conducted a deep reading of all texts focusing specifically on identifying: a) the communicative strategy that was covered, b) the assessed effectiveness of the strategy, c) the appearance and treatment of the exclusionary and regressive content (and communication styles), d) the role of gender, and e) the actors applying the strategy and the targeted audience.

4.2 Main Findings (Research Insights and Gaps)

One consistent finding throughout the research is that aspects emphasized in the analysis are covered unevenly across the articles. Due to the nature of the respective pillars (*Disprove*, *Co-opt*, *Create*), some aspects are more present in some rather than other texts. For example, regressive content and communication strategies are explicitly not present in the articles included under the *Create* pillar, which do not seek to counter or emulate RWPAs' political communication, but instead focus on broader democratic communication practices. Further, not all articles assess the effectiveness

of the strategies they examine. Those that do mainly belong to the *Disprove* pillar, which includes a variety of meta-reviews. While articles under the *Co-opt* pillar do touch on effectiveness, they approach it differently, emphasizing the risks of these mirroring strategies and their potential to unintentionally mainstream right-wing narratives (see 4.2.2). Lastly, not all papers cover gendered topics, which made up for quite an underrepresented aspect, which, in turn, informed our strategy for the expert workshop as outlined in [Section 5](#). The following sub-sections list the main findings separated by pillars.

4.2.1 Disprove

The literature under the *Disprove* pillar addresses different communication strategies to disprove far-right messages or communication such as hate speech, misinformation, or fake news. The majority of these articles⁷ focuses on *misinformation* as the main issue. Apart from misinformation, *fake news*⁸ and *disinformation*⁹ are mentioned more than once in the literature¹⁰, while *corruption*¹¹ as well as *hate speech*¹² are each mentioned in one article. The literature identifies a range of communication strategies for countering far-right messaging, as summarized in [Table 2](#). The table reports both the total number of articles for each strategy, as well as an indication of each specific article (referenced by numbers in squared brackets). The numbered references, which refer to the articles associated with each pillar, are used consistently throughout the report. The annex ([section 9.3](#)) provides the complete numbered reference lists for all three pillars.

Table 2: Overview of disprove strategies mentioned in the literature collection

Disprove strategy	N# Articles (specific articles listed in Annex, section 9.3)
Inoculation / Pre-bunking	16 articles: [1] , [3] , [4] , [8] , [10] , [11] , [13] , [14] , [16] , [17] , [18] , [21] , [22] , [23] , [25] , [27]
Factchecking	13 articles: [3] , [9] , [10] , [12] , [14] , [15] , [16] , [17] , [18] , [22] , [23] , [24] , [27]
Debunking	13 articles: [1] , [3] , [4] , [13] , [14] , [15] , [16] , [18] , [22] , [23] , [24] , [25] , [27]
Media and info literacy	8 articles: [4] , [10] , [11] , [12] , [13] , [19] , [25] , [27]
Accuracy prompts / accuracy primes / accuracy nudges	8 articles: [4] , [6] , [15] , [16] , [18] , [19] , [21] , [27]
Counter-speech	5 articles: [1] , [2] , [5] , [20] , [26]
Social norms interventions	2 articles: [4] , [7]

⁷ Disprove [\[3\]](#), [\[8\]](#), [\[9\]](#), [\[11\]](#), [\[12\]](#), [\[14\]](#), [\[15\]](#), [\[16\]](#), [\[17\]](#), [\[18\]](#), [\[19\]](#), [\[21\]](#), [\[22\]](#), [\[23\]](#), [\[24\]](#), [\[25\]](#), [\[27\]](#)

⁸ Disprove [\[3\]](#), [\[6\]](#), [\[11\]](#), [\[14\]](#), [\[17\]](#), [\[18\]](#), [\[19\]](#)

⁹ Disprove [\[11\]](#), [\[13\]](#), [\[18\]](#)

¹⁰ It is important to acknowledge that there is a lack of definitional consistency in the literature, with ongoing debates regarding the terminology used to describe problematic information online (Armitage and Vaccari, 2021). The most widely accepted distinction differentiates *misinformation* – false or misleading content shared unintentionally – from *disinformation*, which refers to deliberately deceptive content, often fabricated for strategic purposes (Jack, 2017).

¹¹ Disprove [\[13\]](#)

¹² Disprove [\[5\]](#)

On the basis of the literature, there is no clear-cut evidence on the effectiveness of the different strategies. Instead, most articles highlight the many factors that influence the effectiveness of the respective interventions, such as the frequency of intervention over period of time¹³, personal factors such as previous beliefs and cognitive biases¹⁴, complexity of the message (the more complex, the less effective)¹⁵ or the specific form that the intervention takes (e.g. fact-checking as a rebuttal of the whole message is more effective than fact-checking only certain aspects of a message)¹⁶.

Gender remains largely unaddressed across the articles under the *Disprove* pillar. If it is addressed, it is mostly mentioned as demographic information in surveys or other forms of research. Additionally, most of the literature focuses on Europe or the US with other regional contexts only rarely being discussed. Lastly, RWPAs are rarely addressed outright. The communicative issues such as misinformation or fake news are mostly addressed in general terms.

4.2.2 Co-opt

The literature of the *Co-opt* pillar aims to capture strategies by mainstream actors that try to emulate and mirror right-wing populist communication tools to respond to regressive claims and better communicate and represent gender-based needs. The findings under this pillar of our literature review suggest that attempts at co-optation when employed by mainstream actors often contribute to what has become known as the “mainstreaming” of RWPAs’ regressive and exclusionary narratives. Concretely, mainstreaming can be defined as a process by which “the public discourse [silently shifts] towards more radical positions without being perceived” (Hohner et al., 2022, p. 308)¹⁷. The actors identified as mainly contributing to this effect within our sample of the literature are mainstream politicians, parties, and the media. In addition, many articles focus on how RWPPs or RWPAs strategically construct the far right in a specific manner for it to become more “acceptable” within the mainstream.

Different from the *Disprove* literature where clusters of literature emerge around the aspects of far-right communication that are addressed through democratic political communication (misinformation, fake news, etc.), the clusters that emerge under the *Co-opt* pillar form around two types of strategies employed by mainstream actors themselves: *platforming* and the *inclusion of far-right topics*. *Platforming*¹⁸ describes how RWPAs or their ideas are being amplified by receiving a platform. This can, for example, happen through interviews with far-right actors by mass media institutions

¹³ *Disprove* [11], [14]

¹⁴ *Disprove* [12], [24], [27]

¹⁵ *Disprove* [24]

¹⁶ *Disprove* [24]

¹⁷ The process of mainstreaming is sometimes also referred to as *normalization* in the literature. Normalization describes a shift in social and political norms, i.e., the process through which radical ideas or previous taboos become normalized. This happens through the constant transgression of existing norms by RWPAs but also through mainstream actors’ co-optation of far-right strategies and ideas.

¹⁸ *Co-opt* [2], [3], [14], [18], [20]

which are trusted by the audience. *Including far-right topics*¹⁹ refers to the agenda-setting power that RWPAAs have or are given. The literature highlights this especially in the context of political debates around immigration (particularly in connection with the so-called “refugee crisis”). It finds that mainstream political parties are moving towards more anti-immigrant stances in line with far-right views which legitimizes them²⁰. The specific communicative strategies that add to this *inclusion* that are elaborated on in the literature represent a broad spectrum, including adopting dog whistles (ingroup far-right terms with a disguised meaning)²¹ or borrowing far-right terms (e.g. association between refugees and natural disasters such as “refugee flood”)²². This ‘co-optation’ might be done with the goal of hindering their electoral success and shifting votes that might go to RWPPs to other mainstream parties. However, different papers argue that such strategies tend to backfire as they do not prove effective in hindering the success of the far right and rather contribute to the normalization of their ideas²³.

The literature not only engages with specific co-opt strategies and their effects. Some of the papers also focus on the term “mainstream” itself and argue that it often remains vague and unspecific, thereby questioning the distinction between actors, strategies, and audience²⁴. To better understand how the counterproductive effect of co-opt strategies can be explained, they point out that the mainstream and the extreme are closer to one another, which is contrary to the most prominent construction of what the mainstream is. Instead of two entities that can easily be distinguished from each other as binary opposites, they suggest that the mainstream and the extreme lie on a spectrum, thereby muddling the ground for effective distinction for communication strategies.

Since most of the literature focuses on analysis or critiques of co-opt strategies and their mainstreaming or normalizing effects, counteractions remain largely absent. Additionally, discussions are predominantly cantered on immigration while gender is largely ignored in this literature. Lastly, as with the *Disprove* pillar, the literature under the *Co-opt* pillar has a very limited regional focus, concentrating particularly on the Global North.

4.2.3 Create

The literature under the *Create* pillar highlights the importance of the digital space and specifically social media for political communication in general or political campaigning in particular. While different digital spheres and different types of content are investigated (including Tweets, Snapchat ads, Telegram and WhatsApp), the focus lies on Facebook posts²⁵ and social media ads across platforms²⁶. The literature mostly

¹⁹ *Co-opt* [1], [2], [5], [6], [12], [14], [15]

²⁰ *Co-opt* [1], [3], [12], [18], [20]

²¹ *Co-opt* [2]

²² *Co-opt* [17]

²³ *Co-opt* [1], [12]

²⁴ *Co-opt* [7]

²⁵ *Create* [1], [7], [8], [9], [10], [15], [16], [18]

²⁶ *Create* [2], [7], [9], [10], [17], [18]

discusses political campaigning and political communication while issue communication is only addressed in one paper²⁷. Articles argue that social media is becoming an increasingly crucial space where elections are being influenced or even decided through digital communication and discussions online. Rather than suggesting new strategies for online communication, most articles analyze political communication online and address its issues and effectiveness. The articles address different communication strategies including but not limited to tailoring strategies such as *personalization* and *political marketing* through, for example, (micro-)targeting, hypermedia campaigns, eliciting user engagement, or the strategic use of emotional wording. One issue that comes up repeatedly in the literature is the question of ethics around digital communication. Particularly data-driven campaigning and (micro-)targeting are suggested as potentially problematic due to ethical concerns such as privacy concerns about using personal data for targeting and potential misuse of data. In addition, microtargeting is discussed as potentially causing an erosion of shared democratic debates in society²⁸. Some authors also point out that people's own ethical concerns might shape their perception and reception of these communication strategies and therefore have an impact on the perceived legitimacy and trustworthiness of e.g. a party's electoral campaign²⁹.

Generally, similar to the other pillars, the articles highlight issues of online communication strategies instead of suggesting possible strategies that might be helpful to resolve these. They mostly address general topics around social media and political communication or focus on the effectiveness of particular strategies (often finding only limited effectiveness). Additionally, there is a strong focus on elections in the literature, which are connected to a very specific form of communication. Therefore, the findings on elections cannot easily be applied to political communication in general. In line with the previous two pillars, the regional focus is largely limited to the US and Europe, and gender is often overlooked in the literature under the *Create* pillar. If gender is included, it is about how politicians' gender influences how they are perceived. Gender messaging and gendered issues are not elaborated on in the literature.

²⁷ Create [10]

²⁸ Create [5], [7], [10], [12], [14], [18]

²⁹ Create [12], [18]

The literature review presents an overview of the diverse forms in which the digital sphere plays a crucial role in political communication by disproving or co-opting far-right strategies or creating own democratic political communication campaigns. In all three pillars of the literature, there are ***no clear-cut results regarding the effectiveness of individual and selected online communication strategies***. Regarding *Disprove* pillar, the articles find differing effectiveness for specific strategies, often ***depending crucially on*** both online and offline ***contexts***. As such, the literature suggests that the strategies are not as effective as often anticipated. With regards to strategies examined in the *Co-opt* pillar, this is even more pronounced whereby most of the literature finds ***counter-productive effects of normalizing and mainstreaming far-right narratives***. Regarding the *Create* pillar, there is also limited insights for concrete suggestions for new communication tools promising potential for democratic issue communication. The literature here emphasizes that ***contextual factors and communication goals are key*** and focuses on ethical considerations and implications.

To summarize, importantly for WP10, the literature review also exposes ***gaps especially regarding gender issues and gender messaging as well as transformative and helpful communication strategies*** (apart from some disproving strategies). As a result of these findings, both the participant sampling and discussion structure for the expert workshop (see [Section 5](#)) were set up specifically with the goal to mitigate the gender gap and to focus on finding solutions to create communication strategies that are effective in countering the far right without inadvertently platforming or reproducing their ideas.

5. Expert Workshop

This section reports on the expert workshop conducted in October 2025. The workshop was designed to gather insights from scholars and practitioners working at the intersection of online political communication, research on RWPAs and the broader far right, and gender perspectives. The workshop³⁰ brought together six experts to collaboratively explore how gender-based needs and policies addressing them can be effectively communicated while countering reactionary and anti-gender narratives. Additionally, a testimony from a seventh expert who could not participate on the workshop date was collected, ensuring further triangulation of perspectives. The objective was not only to understand how exclusionary narratives can be countered, but also to identify proactive and transformative communicative strategies capable of competing with and surpassing far-right discourse by promoting progressive, systemic, and engaging approaches to gender-related issues. Due to the relative lack of gender perspectives discovered in the literature review, questions and expertise on gender issues were particularly prioritized in the workshop set-up. The following sections outline the methodological design and participant recruitment process (5.1), summarize the proceedings of the workshop (5.2), and present preliminary findings emerging from the discussions (5.3).

5.1. Workshop Conceptualization and Participants

For the selection of participants, the goal of WP10 was to gather a heterogeneous group of experts in the field, who would represent a wide variety of fields and focal points as well as provide insight into both theoretical and practical considerations of political communication. In order to create a group of experts with different specific foci within the general topic of (anti-)gender communication online. Based on this desired mix of disciplinary expertise as well as research foci and perspectives, we formulated ideal participant profiles as follows in [Table 3](#) below.

Table 3: List of ideal participant profiles

Research Expertise	Specific expert focus
Gender and Communication	Countering far-right messaging
Gender and Communication	Communicate gender messaging
Countering far-right online	Author of meta-review or speaker
Countering far-right online	Advisor to politicians, policy-oriented outputs or events
Online messaging in theory	Author of meta-review or speaker
Social media communication	Advisor to politicians, policy-oriented outputs or events
Role of media / social media & mainstream parties as complicit to the far right	RPRN Network

³⁰ Participants did not receive any remuneration for participating in the workshop.

On the basis of this ideal-type selection scheme, we created a first list of potential participants through internet searches. The initial list was sent to project partners within UNTWIST with the goal of building on the networks that were already available through the expertise within the consortium. After compiling the sampling list with at least two potential participants per ideal-type category, we sent invites via email to participate in our workshop. Due to a high number of cancellations, this process was amended and iterated several times before arriving at a final number of confirmed attendees. The final group of participants consisted of a) unaffiliated academics from the field of political communication or far right research, b) researchers involved in one of UNTWIST's sister projects with a clear focus on gender, and c) practitioners from NGOs. Participants also represent a broad variety of geographical backgrounds including experts from and based in different (European) countries ([Table 4](#)).

Table 4: List of participants to the workshop (including testimony collected later)

Expert	Country	Discipline	Research focus	Affiliation
Rebekka Kesberg	UK / Netherlands	PhD in Social Psychology	Anti-gender narratives online and counteraction	University of Sussex; Push*back*lash (EU Horizon Project)
Elżbieta Korolczuk	Poland / Sweden	PhD in Sociology	Anti-gender campaigns / politics	Warsaw University and Södertörn University; CCINDLE (EU Horizon Project)
Vincent Lambert	France	PhD in Information and Communication Studies	Far-right communication on digital and social media	Université Côte d'Azur
Susi Meret	Denmark	PhD in Political Science	Far-right youth, anti-gender and anti-feminism, gender equality online	University of Aalborg; FIERCE (EU Horizon Project)
Maria Giovanna Sessa	Belgium / Italy	PhD in Political Science	Gender and disinformation	EU DisinfoLab
Florian Stoeckel	UK	PhD in Political Science and Social Psychology	Counterstrategies to anti-gender narratives	University of Exeter; Push*back*lash (EU Horizon Project)
Aurora Perego	Italy	PhD in Sociology and Social Research	Social movements, LGBTQIA* activism, anti-gender campaigns, intersectionality, feminism	University of Trento; CCINDLE (EU Horizon Project)

5.2. Workshop Proceedings

The overall goals of the workshop were to gather expert knowledge on (1) how far-right actors frame and communicate gender-related issues and how such narratives can dominate and shape public debate, (2) effective strategies for democratic actors to counter these practices online and offline, and (3) strategies to enable mainstream actors to better communicate and represent gender-based issues and policies addressing them in democratic ways. These goals correspond to the Specific Objective of WP10 (i.e., SO3) to derive policy recommendations about effective strategies based on expertise on political communication. The specific focus on the communication of gender-based needs also aimed to address the gaps uncovered in the literature review about gender-related communication insights.

The workshop took place online on 2 October 2025 from 10:00 – 12:00 (CET) and was structured as a roundtable format with an **introductory round** followed by an **open discussion**. There were two moderators from the UBERN team present: a main moderator and a moderator that remained mostly in the background managing the chat and writing the protocol. In the first part, moderators introduced the project as well as the structure and goals of the workshop before opening the floor for a first round of insights. Later in the roundtable discussion, the role shifted to facilitating the discussion by, e.g., asking questions to clarify or redirecting the discussion.

After a quick introductory round, where participants explained their disciplinary and expert background, to start the discussion, participants were asked to all answer the following **introductory question**.

Based on your research experience, what communication strategies have you found most effective in competing with far-right narratives while promoting systemic, progressive ideas in engaging ways? This may involve formats (language, medium, platform) or specific practices – for example, solidarity-building, storytelling, cross-movement alliances. Could you also share one concrete example or case study that illustrates these approaches in action?

This question was informed by the findings and the gaps in the literature review. Firstly, the effectiveness of different strategies remains ambiguous in the literature. Therefore, the question aimed at receiving first-hand accounts of implementing different strategies. Since concrete strategy suggestions remained scarce or even absent across the articles covered in the literature review, the question also aimed at direct examples for creative and innovative communication strategies that participants had experienced as useful. Additionally, the literature review shows that different situated aspects influence communication strategies and their effectiveness (context, individual settings, platforms, etc.). The question aimed at capturing concrete circumstances and experiences about intervening situated aspects and the ways they could hamper or enhance the effectiveness of political communication.

After the introductory round during which all participants shared their views, insights, and experiences on the question, the main moderator asked several follow-up questions covering different aspects of participants' inputs (and the literature review's findings) to guide the **open discussion**. Overall, the discussion was very respectful with relatively equal shares of speaking time given to all participants. Additionally, there seemed to be a shared sentiment among the participants about the importance of such exchanges. On the one hand, participants mentioned that they were interested in what other persons working in the same field are doing, and, on the other hand, participants noticed throughout the discussion that there were shared difficulties as well as experiences and appreciated the space to discuss these. As such, the workshop was closed with the potential outlook to further develop the exchange into a longer-lasting format to continue thinking about and collaborating around these important topics in this type of interdisciplinary and cross-sector groups.

The testimony of the expert who was unable to attend the online workshop on the scheduled date was collected during the second week of October in a one-to-one online interview with the workshop moderator. The expert was asked the same introductory question posed to workshop participants and then invited to share insights from their research in response. The conversation lasted approximately 45 minutes.

5.3 Main Findings (Experiences and Future Outlook)

The discussion highlighted different **communication strategies** and their effectiveness, but participants also pointed to different **mediating factors**, such as regional context, ethical questions, and platform structures, which influence these strategies. Below we outline the core findings of the workshop separated by central themes (communicative strategies, regional context, transnational activism, platform and social media affordances, science communication) that were highlighted by experts throughout the discussion.

The concrete communication strategies ranged from **utilizing the existing digital infrastructure** of social media – such as a copyright infringement claim for content to be taken down or working with actors who already have a big reach (e.g., influencers) – to strategies which aim to **uncover coded language** and thus, **create awareness** for harmful messaging. Experts also discussed **content-related strategies** aimed at **reframing** gender-based issues by highlighting their relevance across multiple policy fields (e.g., healthcare, labor market, family policies – see also here results from WP1). Moreover, participants emphasized the need to understand how anti-gender actors themselves strategically produce and circulate knowledge – including pseudo-scientific reports, selective data, and emotionally charged narratives – in order to design effective counter-responses. For more details on the concrete strategies and resulting recommendations see [6.1](#).

In addition to insights on particular strategies, participants emphasized the **regional and political context** as highly influential in their research on communication

strategies (recommendations see [6.2](#)). One participant detailed how they had conducted research using the same communication strategies to counter the anti-gender backlash in three different countries. The same strategy hereby proved only effective in one of the three countries, which led the researchers to conclude that context seemed more important than the content or the strategy itself. Participants discussed that this might be due to the fact that there are varying general perceptions and biases around gender-based issues in different countries which can determine how strategies or interventions resonate with people.

Despite the importance of geographically and culturally specific factors, however, participants also largely shared the view that **transnational activism and solidarity-building** was an important strategy to counter the far right. An expert, indeed, noted how transfeminist and queer activists have already developed robust transnational knowledge-sharing practices – such as mapping services for marginalized groups and documenting their own narrative repertoires that challenge normative views on their existence – which could offer valuable models for strengthening solidarity and countering coordinated anti-gender knowledge production. Although there are movements and debates on the national level, the far right also works on a transnational level by, e.g., building transnational alliances. Moreover, social media facilitates the flow of arguments, memes, and signifiers that are important in political communication across national boundaries. Since this is actively exploited by the far right, actors aiming to provide counterarguments or challenge RWPAs' political communication should also act transnationally. At the same time, participants acknowledged the difficulty of transnational dissemination – even in the context of Horizon Europe projects – which many of them are a part of (recommendations see [6.4](#)). They particularly pointed out safety and security concerns given the current online predominance by RWPA that necessitates specific safety measures that are not always in place for researchers. They also pointed to the difficulty that research projects include a lot of dissemination activities, but researchers are vastly under-resourced and not equipped to conduct the expected transfer adequately, thereby hampering the chance for effective communication and the consolidation of lasting solidarity networks that are needed to counter the online influence of RWPAs.

Another central theme that emerged in the discussion was the influence of the **digital environment (platforms and social media)** on the effectiveness of political communication strategies (for recommendations see [6.3](#)). Social media is a highly important communication channel especially (but not exclusively) for reaching younger audiences. Therefore, participants emphasized the need to understand platform affordances including algorithms, social media practices, and the demographics of users in order to communicate effectively. In particular, different platforms offer different affordances for political messaging that influence the directions and strategies undertaken by both RWPAs and democratic actors. As such, decisions about specific interventions must take both restricting platform regulations as well as specific potentials provided by platform affordances into account. Moreover, experts underline how platform literacy is a key defensive tool: for example, avoiding direct engagement

with discriminatory content to prevent boosting its visibility, critiquing it via screenshots, and sharing guidance on how to maintain safe and effective digital identities while advancing progressive narratives.

Another aspect of this part of the discussion revolved specifically around **social media as a communication space**. One participant pointed out that while skills to communicate effectively on social media should be improved by mainstream actors to reach broad audiences, there remained an ethical question of whether social media should be used because it is one of the main communication weapons of the far right. During the discussion, participants repeatedly pointed out that it is important to not think of the online world as separate from the offline world, noting that both anti-gender and feminist actors' knowledge production unfolds simultaneously online and offline. As online discussions and offline narratives mirror each other and are highly interdependent, strategies and interventions should not only be moved into the digital realm but instead be complemented offline as well. Most participants highlighted different formats or areas which might be helpful for offline interventions such as cartoons, performances, or the arts in general. At the same time, social media might be helpful in finding new counterstrategies and serve as a testing ground for strategies that, if found to be effective, could be implemented in other settings (recommendations see [6.1](#)).

A third theme emerging from the discussion concerned the role of **science communication and knowledge production** as a strategic tool. Participants stressed that anti-gender actors frequently rely on pseudo-scientific reports, selective or misleading data, and anecdotal evidence to present themselves as authoritative and "scientific," while framing their critics as anti-science. In response, queer and (trans)feminist communities have developed their own counter-knowledge infrastructures, including systematic monitoring of attacks and collaborations between civil society and academia. These practices aim not only to document harmful narratives but to proactively generate alternative knowledge that strengthens democratic and inclusive discourses. Moreover, some participants noted that while anti-gender movements operate transnationally and maintain powerful national branches capable of infiltrating public institutions, (trans)feminist organizations face significant structural barriers in doing the same – as their transformative agendas often receive limited support from the very institutions they seek to reform. For this reason, one expert stressed the importance of urging institutional actors to critically reflect on the relationship between democracy and its institutions: if anti-democratic forces can enter and reshape democratic structures from within, then safeguarding democracy may require rethinking and renewing those institutions rather than preserving them unchanged.

Overall, participants highlighted that gender is a central topic for RWPAs and stressed the need to counter the anti-gender backlash. On the one hand, there are gender-related issues – such as trans healthcare or same-sex couples' adoption rights – that RWPAs frequently target and gear hate towards. On the other hand, the notion of gender is also appropriated by RWPAs in various ways to serve different political

purposes. Gender is, for example, instrumentalized as a platform for anti-immigration narratives – as in the case of *femonationalism*, where feminist themes are exploited and co-opted in anti-Islam and xenophobic campaigns coordinated through collaborations between right-wing nationalist political parties, neoliberals, and certain feminist theorists and policymakers (Farris, 2017). Gender also functions and is exploited as a point of convergence for multiple discourses, becoming a “symbolic glue” that links, for example, gender conservatism with critiques of neoliberalism and globalization (Peto et al., 2017). Additionally, the general focus of RWPAs on gender is exemplified by RWPPs, e.g., in Germany, where the AfD brings up gender-related topics more frequently than any other party in parliament. Participants stressed that creating awareness – beyond gender studies, extending into areas that are usually not observed through the “gender lens”, such as agriculture – is a very important step, but not sufficient. It is crucial that pro-gender attitudes and narratives are cultivated within society through communication strategies aimed not only at challenging the far-right, anti-gender movement but also at countering the more widespread sentiment that gender equality “has gone too far”. Participants also stressed that countering anti-gender narratives requires acknowledging their “intersectional” nature and developing communication responses that address the broader constellation of xenophobic, nationalist, and essentialist claims intertwined within them.

The insights that emerged from the expert workshop showed that communication strategies vary widely in form and effectiveness, with **context** often determining whether an intervention succeeds. Strategies ranged from leveraging platform mechanisms and collaborating with high-reach actors to decoding harmful language, reframing gender-related debates, and fostering transnational solidarity. Participants also emphasized the importance of understanding how anti-gender actors strategically produce and circulate **pseudo-scientific knowledge**, which necessitates building **stronger evidence-based counter-knowledge infrastructures** within academic, activist, and community contexts.

The digital environment was highlighted as a critical factor shaping political communication. Understanding **platform affordances**, algorithms, and user practices was seen as essential for effective outreach while avoiding the amplification of discriminatory content. Although social media offers valuable opportunities – especially for engaging younger audiences – participants noted that online strategies must be **complemented by offline interventions**, as digital and physical spheres are deeply intertwined.

Finally, the workshop reinforced that gender remains a central focus of RWPA communication, both as a target and as a symbolic resource used to link gender conservatism with xenophobic and nationalist narratives. Participants stressed the **need to cultivate pro-gender attitudes beyond gender-specialized spaces** and to develop **intersectional communication strategies** that address the broader constellation of claims embedded in anti-gender rhetoric. Together, these insights underscore the need for context-sensitive, ethically grounded, and structurally supported communication approaches capable of strengthening democratic and inclusive discourses.

6. Findings and Recommendations for Action

Given the central goal of WP10 to provide recommendations for political stakeholders' communication and policy activities based on insights into political communication research and expert experiences in the field, this section summarizes the findings across four key areas of action and derives specific recommendations for each. The four areas of action – *communication and language*, *platforms and actors*, *political context*, and *scientific and political communication* – are based on the thematic clusters that emerged across both components of the WP10 research design as they were highlighted, to varying degrees, in both the literature review and the expert workshop. As such, these four areas can be understood as the result from our triangulated findings and represent key fields of intervention for democratic actors seeking to communicate their content effectively online. Each of the following sections (6.1 to 6.4) outlines the central insights for its respective area of action and concludes with a set of concrete recommendations derived from these findings. The final [Section 7](#) presents the overall conclusion and situates the findings within the broader UNTWIST project.

6.1. Communication and Language

The main goal of WP10 is to generate insights and recommendations on communication strategies that can help democratic actors communicate responsive policies that address gender-based needs and, in doing so, improve political representation.

The insights generated by the literature review show that different approaches to political communication – such as attempts to disprove or co-opt RWPAs messaging, or to create specific democratic messaging – vary considerably in their impact on the effectiveness of online communication. The three-partite structure of *Disprove*, *Co-opt*, and *Create* proves useful for differentiating between individual types of communication strategies and should be taken into account by democratic actors communicating online. At the same time, the reviewed literature offers only limited insights on more specific strategies that consistently work across contexts and conditions.

For concrete strategies within the *Disprove* pillar, such as debunking or fact checking, both the articles in the literature review and the expert testimonies conclude that the results are not clear-cut and their impact is mitigated by contextual factors. Accordingly, policy makers need to carefully assess the political and cultural context before implementing disprove strategies in order to maximize effectiveness. One cross-contextual insight highlighted by experts is the importance of employing positive, affective language – emphasizing fairness, empathy, and humor – to differentiate democratic messaging from antidemocratic one, not only in the language used but also in overall communication style.

For co-opt strategies, the evidence is more clear-cut as the articles in the literature review mostly point to counterproductive effects, such as mainstreaming and normalization of far-right communication and politics. This means that democratic actors should be discouraged from adopting RWPAs' communication styles (e.g., dog-whistles and negative affective messaging through fear) or language (e.g., adopting far-right terminology). However, experts highlighted the use of scientific language and knowledge creation as a potential avenue for innovative co-optation of communicative styles. Indeed, while this is by no means a new type of political communication for democratic actors, research has shown that RWPAs have increasingly started to appropriate scientific-sounding language and formats to legitimate their stances (Rothermel, 2023; Edis, 2020). Democratic actors, it is suggested, can counter and reappropriate this by continuing to communicate scientific results in accessible ways, differentiating their messaging from that of the far right through accurate use of data and literature, and by collaborating with scholars, who are already producing and curating such scientific resources as well as practitioners and activists who are already curating and disseminating them.

In terms of creating political communication that does not explicitly seek to counter or subvert RWPAs' online messaging, findings from the literature review highlight again the need for careful contextual and ethical considerations as a necessary precursor to engaging in online political communication. In particular, linguistic choices are crucial: citizens are more likely to perceive political messages as legitimate when the communicative style aligns with their moral and ethical expectations. Experts also suggested that the strategic use of humor – e.g., through cartoons and memes – can be an effective tool for positively framing gender-related topics. By generating positive emotions and engagement, such messaging can make discussions around gendered issues more accessible and appealing, helping to associate these topics with constructive, inclusive attitudes rather than negative or confrontational emotions. However, they simultaneously cautioned that such approaches require a careful assessment to ensure that the conveyed message remains accessible while not being rendered overly simplistic or superficial.

Regarding the specific focus of WP10 on the communication of gender-based needs and related policy recommendations, the experts in the workshop emphasized the importance of recognizing the existing politicization of gender across different contexts. To avoid reinforcing RWPAs' affective and moralizing language styles – gender-based needs (and the policies addressing them) should be reframed as parts of different policy fields. This builds on and aligns with a long-standing tradition of *gender mainstreaming*, whereby gender-based needs are understood as an important dimension across all areas of life and policymaking. Such reframing also helps to bring the conversation back to the actual, concrete needs that structure citizens' everyday lives and experiences in domains such as health care, housing, family and care work, labor market, etc.– needs that previous UNTWIST work packages identified as key

drivers of citizens' concerns – especially WP1 (Typology)³¹, WP2 (focus groups)³² and WP9 (citizen workshops)³³.

Overall, thus, there is limited evidence as to which strategies reliably and consistently support effective political communication by democratic actors across different contexts and issues. Nevertheless, the insights generated from WP10 provide for a set of communication guidelines democratic actors in politics and media should consider when utilizing different types of language and communication styles. These are detailed in the box below.

Recommendations and Guidelines (Area of Action 1)

- **Avoid mirroring or reproducing far-right messaging.**
Refrain from adopting the talking points, tone, or language used by right-wing populist actors (RWPAs), as this often reinforces rather than counters their narratives and politics.
- **Use positive affect strategically.**
Employ communication tools such as humor and empathy to engage audiences, while ensuring messages remain substantive, ethical, and not purely sensationally emotional.
- **Ground messaging in scientific evidence on gender-based needs.**
Integrate research-based insights – such as those generated by UNTWIST – to strengthen credibility, reclaim evidence-based communication, and address citizens' gendered concerns more effectively
- **Communicate in a way that is both accessible and aligned with democratic values.**
Frame messages around fairness, inclusion, and empathy rather than fear, moral judgment, or polarization.
- **Reframe gender debates through concrete political issues.**
Focus on policy-relevant gender-based needs – such as labor market conditions, welfare, care work, and safety – instead of abstract discussions about identity, ideology, or morality.

³¹ See the [interactive website on WP1](#) for more information on the research and data.

³² See the [deliverable 2.3 of the UNTWIST project](#) (Ortiz and Ruiz Jiménez, 2024) and the [observable \(interactive data platform\) for WP2](#) for more information on the research and data.

³³ See the deliverable 9.2 of the UNTWIST project (in review).

6.2. Platforms and Actors

While the initial focus of WP10, as previously discussed, was strictly on communication strategies in terms of styles and techniques (6.1), both the literature review and insights from the expert workshop highlight that understanding and mastering online political communication also requires attention to broader, intertwined factors. If these structural factors are overlooked, the effectiveness of the strategy- and language-related recommendations discussed earlier is significantly reduced. Among these, the first two aspects that emerged as particularly salient throughout WP10 were the platforms where communication occurs and the actors who disseminate messages. These factors are not peripheral; indeed although platform-specific dynamics were initially outside the scope of the WP10 research design, both the expert workshop and the literature review (*Disprove* and *Co-opt*) highlight how platforms and actors' choices to engage with them directly shape the effectiveness, reach, and reception of messaging strategies, making them integral to any analysis of online political communication. Experts in the workshop also consistently stressed that platforms' choices are not neutral nor should they be considered as such. Design features, norms, and incentive structures strongly shape how RWPA as well as democratic actors are able to disseminate their narratives. The following sub-sections therefore describe the current challenges that affordances pose to democratic political communication before pointing to the findings of how actors can reform and navigate them effectively.

Our literature review highlights that one extensively researched aspect is the role of **platform design and affordances** in facilitating the spread of political misinformation³⁴. The concept of *affordances* describes the relationship between a platform's infrastructure and specific features and human agency enacted by users that allow for certain communicative practices and social interactions to emerge and become salient (Bucher and Helmond, 2017). One key factor influencing political communication online is, for instance, the *incentive systems* embedded in platforms: features such as "likes" not only boost content visibility but are often interpreted by users as indicators of credibility although the reliability of the content has no actual influence on the visibility³⁵. Moreover, although most platforms have implemented some sort of regulatory mechanisms in the last years – such as blocking, reporting, and filtering – to influence content visibility and curb hate speech³⁶, these measures have not always been applied consistently, robustly, and timely³⁷. Indeed, some platforms, which initially introduced interventions in this regard (e.g., Twitter's moderation/fact-checking tools³⁸), have since removed them again gradually diluting

³⁴ *Disprove* [27]

³⁵ *Disprove* [18]

³⁶ *Disprove* [5]

³⁷ Research shows that these interventions are far more effective in the Global North, as in many regions of the Global South, political communication takes place primarily through encrypted messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram, where platform-level moderation is not feasible in the same way (*Disprove* [2]).

³⁸ *Disprove* [26]

platforms guidelines. Experts in the workshop confirmed this trend, noting a steady weakening of moderation guidelines and a decline in effective tools to report or respond to hate speech. They also stressed that such platform decisions directly shape the communicative possibilities of democratic actors. Finally, the third challenge that emerged on platform affordances builds on a long-standing debate on the role of online echo chambers in facilitating the spread of misinformation that benefits RWPAs³⁹. Echo chambers refer to online spaces in which users are exposed primarily to like-minded views, limiting contact with alternative perspectives – and which are created and shaped through an intricate interplay of platform algorithms and user preferences. Research has shown how these types of spaces can contribute to an increased spread of misinformation about gender-related issues, which are affectively loaded using polarizing imageries (Fulton et al., 2025; Shuster et al., 2025)

In line with concerns about platform affordances (e.g., likes), experts suggested that platforms should revise and **adapt their algorithms** to promote a more diverse range of evidence-based content and sources (see also [6.1](#)) while simultaneously down-ranking false or misleading information. Such adjustments would help curb the spread of misinformation and strengthen the visibility of democratic, evidence-based political communication⁴⁰. Experts noted that – under current conditions where platform architectures intrinsically favor RWPAs’ affectively loaded and polarizing political communication approaches instead of evidence-based communication – democratic actors run the risk of being pushed into “fighting fire with fire”, echoing concerns raised in the *Co-opt* pillar of the literature review. In particular with regards to gender topics, this can lead to a mainstreaming of anti-gender views instead of a refocusing of the debate on gender-based needs and their representation (Volk, 2025). This challenge extends not only to the content of the messages that are being disseminated but also to how democratic actors use the platforms. For example, campaign strategies such as microtargeting may unintentionally reinforce structures that enable undemocratic data practices and undermine privacy protections⁴¹. Experts therefore emphasized the importance of **adjusting existing tools and platform mechanisms** in order to create a more level playing field that supports ethical and democratic forms of information dissemination. In addition, **institutional interventions** – such as redesigning platform features, deactivating specific sub-platforms, or deplatforming harmful groups (as occurred on Reddit in 2020) – are discussed as promising approaches. Although these interventions are less frequently studied, authors express significant optimism about their potential effectiveness⁴².

While there is a clear need for increased political pressure **to regulate and reform platform governance**, experts in the workshop also discussed how **democratic actors** can act and navigate the platform environment prior to a successful regulatory

³⁹ Disprove [\[12\]](#)

⁴⁰ Disprove [\[18\]](#), [\[25\]](#)

⁴¹ Create [\[5\]](#), [\[7\]](#), [\[10\]](#), [\[12\]](#), [\[14\]](#), [\[18\]](#)

⁴² Disprove [\[4\]](#)

reform. As long as platform decisions directly shape the communicative possibilities of democratic actors, both experts in the workshop and articles in the literature review propose alternative means to manage harmful content – all of which revolve around being aware of the mechanisms through which content spreads across platforms. One strategy mentioned by experts, for example, involves leveraging **copyright regulations**, which are more clearly codified in most legal systems and therefore more likely to result in the removal of targeted content. This was also echoed by experts who suggest that democratic actors may need to “play the system”: since platform-based mechanisms for flagging hate speech are increasingly ineffective, copyright infringement claims can serve as a more reliable pathway to content removal. Similarly, commenting on or quoting harmful messages from RWPAs can inadvertently boost their visibility by increasing traffic and engagement around their posts. A more effective approach is to **avoid interacting** with the original content altogether. Instead, democratic actors can take screenshots of the harmful messages and repost them separately, using these images to expose the attacks received and hold RWPAs accountable without amplifying their reach. Messages about gender-based needs spread alongside these screenshots should adhere to the guidelines set out in [6.1](#).

In addition, democratic actors should adopt innovative strategies that **integrate online and offline tools**, such as participatory labs and collective action – such as organized protests, roundtables, or exhibitions. For these strategies and actions to be successful, experts also expressed that democratic actors’ interventions around gender representation should extend beyond the “usual suspects” of marginalized communities (e.g., racialized groups, people with migration backgrounds, or gender minorities) to also include actors who are often perceived as (but are actually not) distant from debates around gender-based needs, such as those working in agriculture or service industries. Using the strengths of social media to connect distant groups, actors should focus on strengthening **transnational solidarity networks** – both on- and offline across social movements and among academic disciplines, including, for instance, collaborations between far-right and anti-gender researchers. To this end, experts also highlighted the value of collaborating with established online communicators (such as [Philosophy Tube on YouTube](#)), which was seen as crucial to support underrepresented groups, who are often silenced through dominant affordances on social media. Building these connections could also help actors, who possess theoretical expertise in communication but lack practical training in producing engaging content for broad audiences (e.g., researchers), in translating their instances into more impactful online communication. This is particularly important given that democratic and progressive actors tend to be proficient in traditional offline outreach but continue to lack both the necessary skills and resources for strategic social media engagement, despite digital platforms being central arenas for opinion formation and electoral influence. However, it is important to recall that scholars continue to warn that online marketing and promotional mechanisms remain insufficiently transparent⁴³,

⁴³ Create [\[9\]](#)

raising ethical concerns and underscoring the need for more equitable and accountable digital communication infrastructures.

Recommendations and Guidelines (Area of action 2)

- **Reform platform design and governance to support democratic communication.**
 - *Encourage platforms to revise engagement-driven incentive systems, strengthen content-moderation tools, and increase transparency in algorithmic curation to limit the amplification of misinformation and hate speech.*
 - *Support institutional efforts to introduce clearer accountability standards, ensure consistent enforcement of platform rules, and intervene structurally when necessary (e.g., redesigning features or removing harmful sub-platforms).*
- **Strengthen democratic actors' understanding of platform mechanisms.**
 - *Increase awareness of how platform logics – such as engagement metrics, trending systems, and algorithmic amplification – shape visibility online, enabling actors to make better-informed strategic and ethical communication choices.*
 - *Use platform features strategically to limit the spread of harmful content. Avoid direct interaction with RWPA posts that may boost their visibility; instead, rely on screenshots or separate posts when exposing attacks. Make use of copyright regulation where applicable to request content removal.*
 - *Improve preparedness for online harassment and smear campaigns, by developing skills and protocols to anticipate, navigate, and de-escalate coordinated online attacks (e.g., “shitstorms”), drawing on insights about RWPA tactics and patterns of mobilization.*
- **Integrate online and offline strategies for democratic mobilization.**
 - *Combine social-media communication with offline engagement, ensuring consistent messaging, stronger community ties, and more resilient support networks.*
 - *Strengthen collaboration and solidarity across actors and contexts. Foster transnational networks and cross-sector alliances to share resources, knowledge, and digital communication practices, including partnerships with experienced online communicators who can help translate complex messages into accessible formats.*
 - *Engage communities beyond the “usual targets” of gender debates. Include groups often perceived as distant from gender-equality discussions – such as workers in agriculture, logistics, or service industries – to anchor communication in everyday concerns and broaden democratic coalitions.*
- **Uphold ethical standards in digital political communication.**
 - *Ensure that any use of online advertising, targeting, or analytics respects democratic principles, safeguards privacy, and avoids contributing to opaque or exploitative data ecosystems.*

6.3. Political Context

Adding another societal layer outside of concrete direct communication strategies, a third factor that emerged consistently throughout WP10 – both in the literature reviewed and, even more prominently, in the expert workshop – is the decisive role played by political, cultural, and media contexts in shaping how political communication is produced, understood, and received. As discussed in the following paragraphs, context conditions not only the effectiveness of specific **communication** strategies but also the meanings attributed to **gender-related messages**, the **resonance of RWPA's narratives**, and the **ability of democratic actors** to anticipate, counter, and reframe such narratives.

First, research shows that public perceptions of **gender issues and gender-equality policies** vary substantially across countries and social environments – and that these contexts are not static. Indeed, cultural and geographical landscapes can shift over time, influencing how gendered political messages are interpreted. For instance, as workshop experts noted, recent studies indicate that the belief that “gender equality has gone too far” is increasingly common among young men in countries such as Finland and Denmark – context that are not traditionally associated with backlash politics. This illustrates how changing gender norms, evolving societal debates, and emerging local grievances continuously redefine the communicative environment in which democratic actors operate. Similarly, in the expert workshop, it was discussed how empirical evidence demonstrates that findings on political **communication** cannot be straightforwardly generalized across contexts. Indeed, many studies focus on one or a small number of national settings, and their conclusions often reflect context-specific political cultures rather than universal dynamics. For example, scholars have shown that perceptions of authenticity among female politicians differ considerably across countries: while research in the United States highlights barriers to being perceived as authentic, studies in Norway find that female candidates are often perceived as more authentic than their male counterparts⁴⁴. These discrepancies underscore the need for context-sensitive approaches rather than one-size-fits-all recommendations.

Context also plays a central role in shaping how **RWPAs** use **implicit communication**, including dog whistles. Understanding such coded messages requires cultural and social knowledge that is specific to each environment. Experts highlighted that the ability to identify and interpret these cues – crucial for countering RWPA narratives – depends on shared historical references, local political tensions, and dominant media framings. Without attention to the contextual meaning of dog whistles, democratic actors risk misinterpreting or overlooking harmful communication strategies. Additionally, political context can influence which messages gain traction and become viral, both online and offline. Platform dynamics (see [6.2](#)) interact with

⁴⁴ Create [\[13\]](#)

cultural norms and political agendas, meaning that content that resonates in one country may not attract any attention in another⁴⁵. This interaction is further shaped by the structure and ideological orientation of the **media ecosystem**: media environments that are more accommodating or tolerant of right-wing narratives create a communicative climate in which RWPA messages spread more easily and face less scrutiny⁴⁶.

Given that context shapes all core dimensions of political communication – including the production of gender-related messaging, their circulation across media systems, and their interpretation by diverse audiences – it is evident that this dynamic not only conditions the success of RWPAs' gender-related messaging but also affects the perceived credibility and effectiveness of democratic counterarguments. Workshop experts emphasized that rebuttal strategies must be grounded in **local references**, shared cultural understandings, and the specific gendered configuration of political conflicts. Messages that are effective in one political environment may fall flat – or even backfire – in others, reinforcing the importance of **tailoring** counter-narratives to local conditions. This is particularly important with regards to gender, as public debates on gender equality, family norms, and LGBTQ+ rights differ markedly across EU member states in terms of salience, polarization, and historical trajectories, which can strongly shape both the content and style of effective online messages. Moreover, beyond the message content, the legal, institutional, and cultural environment also shapes how political actors *can* communicate using data-driven tools, such as microtargeting. As highlighted by scholars, access to data, permissible targeting practices, and the privacy expectations of citizens vary significantly across countries, influencing the strategic options available to both RWPA and democratic actors⁴⁷. Regulations on data use and digital campaigning therefore form part of the broader political context that structures communication opportunities.

Taken together, these findings indicate that political communication strategies must be developed with close attention to context, as the cultural, institutional, and media environment profoundly shapes not only the meaning and reception of messages but also the tools, constraints, and opportunities available to political actors. Effective communication requires tailoring, contextual knowledge, and sensitivity to local dynamics rather than relying on generic or universally assumed practices.

⁴⁵ Create [1]

⁴⁶ Co-opt [16]

⁴⁷ Create [5]

Recommendations and Guidelines (Area of Action 3)

- **Tailor messages to local political, cultural, and media contexts**
 - *Conduct context-specific analyses to understand local gender norms, political debates, and prevalent narratives.*
 - *Map local media and social media ecosystems to identify channels where evidence-based communication is most visible.*
 - *Collaborate with local experts, community organizations, or culturally informed communicators to ensure resonance.*
- **Monitor and strategically respond to context-specific narratives**
 - *Track harmful or polarizing discourses, including dog whistles and coded messaging, to anticipate potential risks.*
 - *Design counter-narratives aligned with shared cultural, historical, and social references to maximize effectiveness.*
- **Align digital strategies with legal and institutional frameworks**
 - *Ensure compliance with local data protection, advertising, and microtargeting regulations.*
 - *Adapt digital campaigning approaches to the constraints and affordances of the national and regional context.*
- **Build internal capacity for context-aware communication**
 - *Provide training for teams on interpreting local political climates and societal debates relevant to gender and inclusion.*
 - *Foster partnerships across disciplines and sectors to integrate contextual insights into campaign planning and execution.*

6.4. Scientific/Political Communication

Finally, one critical factor emerged from the WP10 expert workshop concerning the role of academia, expertise, and resource allocation in shaping effective political communication. While this was not initially considered in the research design, throughout the implementation and analysis of WP10, it has become clear that the interplay of political and scientific communication profoundly affects how communication strategies are investigated, developed, implemented, and maintained sustainably. In particular, experts in the workshop raised this as a common thread that should be emphasized to democratic actors seeking to increase political communication outputs. Researchers and academics are often tasked with producing knowledge and strategies to support communication around crucial democratic, sustainability, and inclusivity goals. Yet, as expert experiences demonstrate several structural and institutional conditions influence how research is conducted and how effectively it can inform practical communication initiatives. Reflecting on these challenges is essential to ensure that the resources and expertise invested in such projects translate into meaningful impact.

A first challenge identified by experts concerns **project continuity**. Many initiatives, such as experimental online platforms or pilot communication campaigns, are designed and funded for a specific project period. Once the project concludes, it is often unclear who is responsible for maintaining the platform or continuing the communication work, which limits the sustainability and long-term impact of successful interventions. Additionally, communication and reach-out activities within research projects often rely heavily on scholars' personal time and effort rather than dedicated funding. This can divert resources from core research activities and might affect both the quality and reach of communication outputs. Instead of this approach, which puts communication activities on researchers who are only funded for the project duration, facilitating collaborations with external actors, such as influencers of civil society groups, who have a longer trajectory of online visibility and more experience and expertise in online communication is a more sustainable approach. Moreover, these collaborations should not have to be initiated by research teams who lack the resources and time to engage with these actors but rather be centralized within donor institutions and made independent from the project timeline and funding (e.g. usefully these actors become only involved after the initial analysis of the findings).

Another key challenge identified is that, while academics possess strong theoretical knowledge in their fields, they often have limited **expertise** in practical communication, policy engagement, or public outreach – particularly in *directly* design and execute social media campaigns as a trained communication professional would. This can result in outputs – such as public-facing materials – that are more vulnerable to misinterpretation or even manipulation, particularly by actors like RWPAs, who frequently target academic work that challenges their positions. Therefore, collaborations with trained and experienced communicators and policy practitioners

can help bridge these gaps. This issue also intersects with and is particularly relevant for **research safety**, as researching anti-gender or far-right movements can expose scholars to harassment or threats. Experts stressed that insufficient institutional support in these cases can discourage researchers from sharing findings with a wider audience, thereby reducing the practical impact of their work. As such, implementing protective measures and clear protocols is crucial for enabling researchers to communicate safely and effectively.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach, combining institutional support, adequate funding, protective measures, and cross-sector collaborations to ensure that scholarly insights into democratic and inclusive political communication can be effectively translated into practice and sustained over time.

Recommendations and Guidelines (Area of Action 4)

- **Ensure project continuity and sustainability**
 - *Establish institutional mechanisms or partnerships to maintain platforms, campaigns, or communication initiatives beyond the funded project period.*
 - *Allocate dedicated resources – particularly, in terms of personnel collaborating with researchers – for communication and outreach work within research projects, reducing reliance on personal effort and ensuring consistent, high-quality outputs.*
- **Enhance researcher safety and institutional support**
 - *Implement protective measures, clear protocols, and institutional support for scholars engaging with high-risk topics (e.g., anti-gender or far-right movements) to guard research safety and protect researchers from RWPAs attacks and smear campaigns*
 - *Provide institutional guidance and support for risk management in public communication, including digital security and harassment mitigation strategies.*

7. Conclusions for Use in UNTWIST and Beyond

This *Summary of Findings* set out to explore how online media tools can be harnessed to effectively communicate gender-based needs and related policy recommendations, while empowering democratic actors to counter violent and reactionary messages. In the previous sections we have first outlined the chosen theoretical ([Section 2](#)) and methodological ([Section 3](#)) approach of WP10. We then provided insight into the proceedings and findings of both the literature review of relevant literature on three political communications approaches ([Section 4](#)) and one expert workshop with insights of a heterogeneous group of seven researchers working on the intersection between gender-based and far-right online political communication ([Section 5](#)). The previous section ([Section 6](#)), finally, contained the final results of the analysis along four thematic clusters and has provided sets of communication guidelines and policy recommendations for each area of intervention that was identified throughout WP10 (*Communication and Language; Platforms and Actors; Political Context; Scientific/Political Communication*).

In this final section, we now turn back to the UNTWIST project and embed our findings within the project itself to further inform the Policy Toolkit and Handbook design. As emphasized throughout the report, our design built on previous work packages in several ways. First, we built on the identification of gender-based demands and needs communicated by scholars (WP1), voters (WP2, WP3, WP8 and WP9) and political parties (WP4) to assess how (and regarding which approaches) gender-based needs were represented in the communication literature. Moreover, these insights also informed the design of the expert workshop, whereby experts were asked to explain and embed their findings on gender-based needs in RWPA and democratic political communication.

As such, our findings are tailored to the project to enable consortium members, advisory board members, and other stakeholders to integrate insights on political communication and gender-based needs with concrete research findings from Work Packages 1 to 8. Additionally, these findings can support the re-assessment and adaptation of policy recommendations formulated by citizens in the participatory workshops conducted under WP9, ensuring that these recommendations do not inadvertently enable counterproductive communication but instead advance UNTWIST's goal of representing citizens' gender-based needs in line with democratic values. In this way, the final recommendations serve as a foundation for both ongoing dissemination efforts within the UNTWIST project (WP11), particularly for online communication, and for the development of the Policy Toolkit and Handbook. Below ([Figure 2](#)), we present the final policy recommendations once more, this time organized by the actors responsible for implementing them, both within the context of the project and beyond. This report therefore provides a practical toolkit for researchers, policymakers, media and civil society groups seeking to communicate evidence-based representations of gender-based needs to citizens effectively.

EU Institutions

- Reform **platform governance** and regulation
- Align digital strategies with **legal and institutional frameworks**
- Support **ethical standards** in online political communication
- Ensure **project continuity** and **sustainability**
- Enhance **researcher safety** and institutional support

Political Parties and Media

- **Avoid mirroring** far-right messaging
- Use **positive affect** (humour, irony, empathy) strategically
- Ground messaging in **scientific evidence**
- Communicate accessibly and democratically, **avoiding fear and polarization**
- Reframe gender debates through **concrete policy issues** rather than culture war
- Tailor messages to **local contexts**
- **Engage diverse communities**, including groups often perceived as distant from gender debates

Civil Society

- Strengthen understanding of **platform mechanisms** to avoid amplifying harmful content and respond to coordinated attacks
- **Integrate online** and **offline** strategies
- Foster collaboration and **transnational solidarity**

Figure 2: Policy recommendation by actor level

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9. Annex

9.1 Operationalization of Pillars (*Disprove, Co-opt, Create*)

Operationalization of Disprove

The disprove pillar was operationalized by identifying studies that discuss online communication strategies aimed at countering polarization, misinformation, and hate speech, particularly through the design and implementation of effective counternarratives to far-right messages on social media. These contributions focus on how communicative interventions can correct or pre-empt false, exclusionary, or violent messages.

Operationalization of Co-opt

The co-opt pillar encompassed research exploring how democratic or progressive actors can strategically engage with far-right narratives, for example through mirroring, reframing, or partially incorporating rhetorical or affective elements of their discourse. Because such practices are seldom explicitly labelled as deliberate communication strategies, assessing their relevance required careful consideration of each study's potential to illuminate tactical appropriation or redirection of exclusionary narratives for democratic ends.

Operationalization of Create

The create pillar was operationalized as encompassing studies that examine proactive communication strategies used by mainstream political actors, democratic organizations, and social movements to shape inclusive and participatory discourses online. Given the vastness of the literature on political communication, the review focused exclusively on online communication, particularly within social media environments, and excluded studies centered solely on far-right actors. The selected contributions explore issue framing, agenda-setting, and narrative construction that extend beyond electoral campaigning, emphasizing communicative practices aimed at fostering engagement, inclusivity, and democratic participation. While campaign-related studies were considered, inclusion required that they offer substantive communicative content beyond mere vote solicitation – such as the articulation of policy positions, public engagement strategies, or the promotion of inclusive narratives addressing specific social or political issues.

9.2 List of Keywords for Article Selection for each Pillar

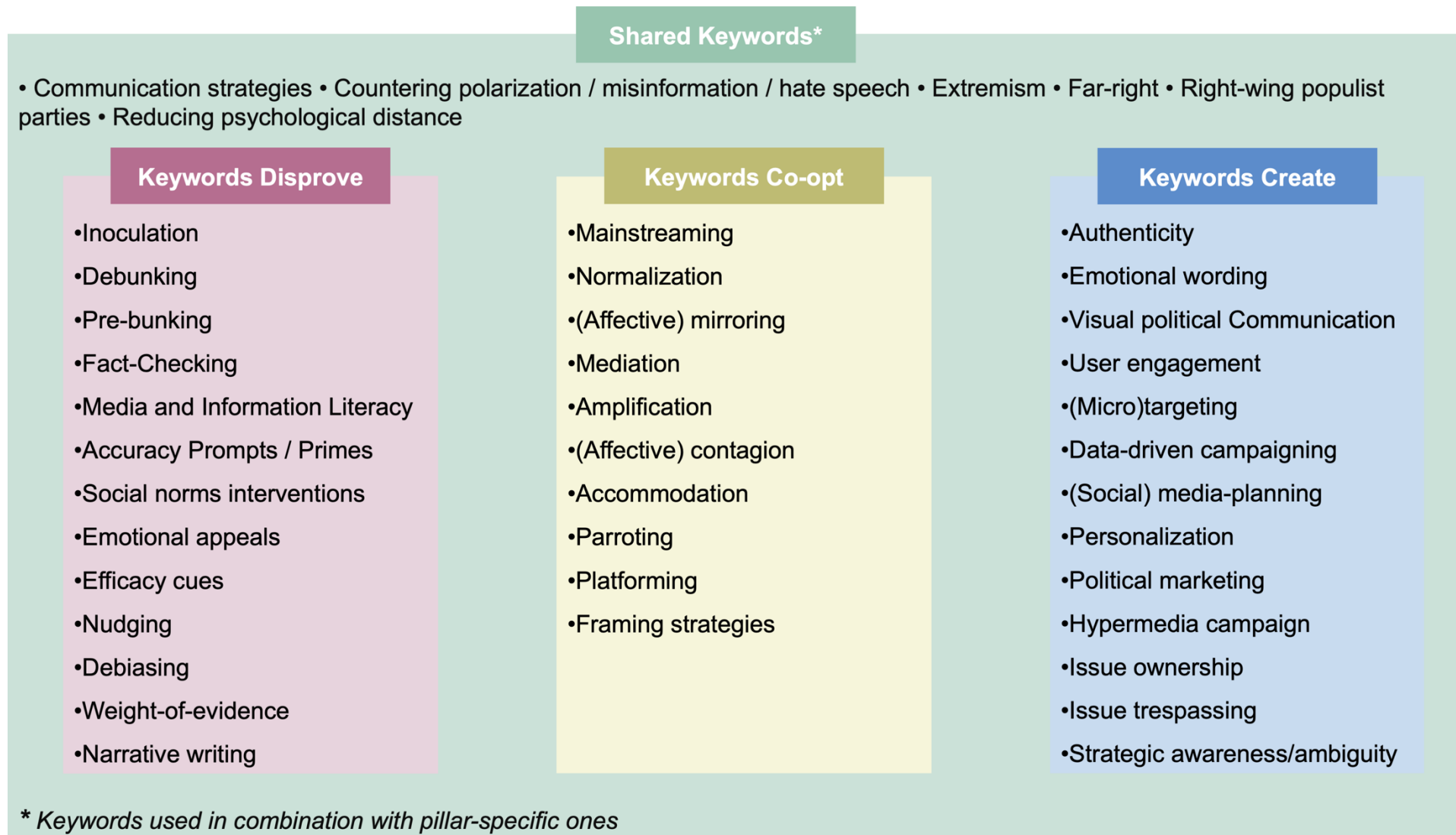


Figure 3A: List of keywords used for the literature review data collection

9.3 List of Academic Articles Included in Literature Review

9.3.1 Disprove

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