



**GENDER AND IDENTITY  
BASED DISINFORMATION  
IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**

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# Introduction

In March 2023, in Banja Luka, a city in northwestern Bosnia-Herzegovina, a mob of 30-40 men violently assaulted a group of LGBTIQ<sup>1</sup> activists affiliated with the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Pride March. The organizers of the march described the attack as a hate crime based on sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>2</sup> This violent act was set against a backdrop of inflammatory remarks from public officials, propagated through media outlets and social networks,<sup>3</sup> reflecting a broader context of eroding democratic values within Republika Srpska, the entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina where Banja Luka is situated.

Preceding the event, around the previous year's Pride march in June 2022, disinformation about LGBTIQ was noted to support and perpetuate homophobia in the society, through instances such as manipulation of the march's slogan to display a menacing message: "We're coming for you."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the acronym LGBTIQ is used to refer to a broad spectrum of identities that include but are not limited to lesbians, gay men, bisexual people, transgender individuals, and intersex persons. "Queer" or "questioning" in this context is taken to encompass other identities not explicitly mentioned in the abbreviation. The acronym LGBTIQ sometimes includes additional letters and symbols to cover other communities, such as A for asexual people (individuals who do not experience sexual attraction) or + as a way to include all identities not specifically mentioned in the basic acronym. The purpose of using this and similar acronyms is to provide visibility and recognition to the diversity within the community, as well as to support inclusivity and acceptance. When referring only to "LGBTIQ", the authors refer to individuals, groups, and events.

<sup>2</sup> Povorka ponosa. "Saopštenje: Ovo je bio organizovani zločin iz mržnje usmjeren prema LGBTIQ osobama". Povorka ponosa. 19.3.2023. <https://povorkaponosa.ba/2023/03/19/saopstenje-ovo-je-bio-organizovani-zlocin-iz-mrznje-usmjeren-prema-lgbtiq-osobama/> (accessed 10.2.2024.)

<sup>3</sup> Radio Slobodna Evropa. "Policija zabranila okupljanje 'Bh. povorci ponosa' u Banjaluci". <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/policija-rs-zabrana-parade-ponosa-banjaluka/32323973.html> (accessed 7.3.2024.)

<sup>4</sup> This manipulation will be discussed in further detail in chapter "Demonizing LGBTIQ Narratives".

The incident in Banja Luka is reminiscent of an attack that occurred in 2008 during the Queer Festival in Sarajevo, marked by a vehement media campaign against LGBTIQ individuals. This campaign culminated in an attack that left eight people injured.<sup>5</sup> These incidents underscore the significant impact that discriminatory media portrayals and disinformation narratives can have in inciting violence based on gender and identity.

When speaking about gender and identity based disinformation (GiD), we are usually referring to “a subset of misogynistic abuse and violence against women that uses false or misleading gender and sex-based narratives, often with some degree of coordination, to deter women from participating in the public sphere.”<sup>6</sup>

However, there are various definitions of this term that focus on different aspects.<sup>7</sup> In a publication by the British think tank Demos, it is stated that “gendered disinformation” refers to “information activities (creation, sharing, disseminating content) that attack or undermine

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<sup>5</sup> Centar za ljudska prava Univerziteta u Sarajevu. *Ljudska prava u Bosni i Hercegovini 2008: Pravo, praksa i međunarodni standardi ljudskih prava sa ispitivanjem javnog mnijenja*. Ur. Miroslav Živanović. Sarajevo: Centar za ljudska prava Univerziteta u Sarajevu, 2009. Pgs. 395-399.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20171118200636/http://hrc.unsa.ba/hrr2008/PDFS/ljudskapravaubih2008.pdf> (accessed 10.2.2024.)

<sup>6</sup> Global Engagement Center. *Gendered Disinformation: Tactics, Themes, and Trends by Malign Actors*. US Department of State. 27.3.2023. <https://www.state.gov/gendered-disinformation-tactics-themes-and-trends-by-foreign-malign-actors/#:~:text=The%20ultimate%20goal%20of%20gendered,and%20people%20with%20intersecting%20identities> (accessed 10.2.2024.)

<sup>7</sup> EU Disinfo Center. *Gender Based Disinformation: Advancing Our Understanding and Response*. Brisel: EU Disinfo Center, 20.10.2021.

<https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/gender-based-disinformation-advancing-our-understanding-and-response/> (accessed 10.2.2024.)

people on the basis of their gender, and weaponize gendered narratives to promote political, social, or economic objectives.”<sup>8</sup>

One of the criticisms of using the term relates to its overly narrow definition, which “implies binary assumption, despite the fact this type of disinformation also replicates other gendered stereotypes like transphobia.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the term “gender and identity-based disinformation” is also used to describe false and misleading narratives directed towards LGBTIQ individuals or groups. In the publication “Gender Disinformation in the Context of LGBTI Communities” from 2023, ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) World states that “Gender disinformation, in the context of LGBTI communities, occurs when false, misleading or inaccurate narratives based on harmful stereotypes of LGBTI communities, particularly of trans women, are created and disseminated to achieve certain political, social or economic goals.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in this paper, the definition of “gender and identity-based disinformation” will be most similar to the one offered by Demos but adjusted so it includes disinformation against LGBTIQ individuals and groups. The term will be used to describe disinformation that is disseminated with the intention of discrediting individuals or groups that identify or are perceived as women and within the LGBTIQ community, and the instrumentalization of hatred towards women and LGBTIQ individuals and groups for the purpose of achieving specific political, social, or economic goals.

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<sup>8</sup> Judson, E., et al. *Engendering Hate: The Contours of State-Aligned Gendered Disinformation Online*. Demos, oktober 2020. Str. 7. <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Engendering-Hate-Report-FINAL.pdf> (accessed 10.2.2024.)

<sup>9</sup> EU Disinfo Center. 20.10.2021.

<sup>10</sup> ILGA World. *Gender disinformation in the context of LGBTI communities*. ILGA World. 7.7.2023. Str. 2. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/cfis/gender-justice/subm-a78288-gendered-disinformation-cso-ilga-world.pdf> (accessed 10.2.2024.)

One key aspect of gender and identity-based disinformation lies in the fact that it is often an integral part of anti-gender discourse. Anti-gender discourse, as a segment of broader anti-gender movements, can be defined as “transnational initiatives that oppose what they perceive as ‘gender ideology’ or ‘gender theory.’”<sup>11</sup> Although these movements are ideologically diverse and sprawling, they are united in their perception of progressive forces advocating for an inclusive understanding of gender equality as a common enemy.<sup>12</sup>

These movements often intertwine with racist and xenophobic narratives, particularly using discourse on gender-based violence, notably sexual violence, to advance these narratives. In 2019, NewsMavens, a platform that published news selected by women at top media brands as significant, featured an article that conducted a comparative analysis of media reporting on sexual violence incidents perpetrated by local men versus non-white foreigners in Italy.<sup>13</sup> The analysis revealed a stark contrast in media treatment: when the accused were local men, the media often approached female victims with skepticism and portrayed the perpetrators sympathetically, casting them in a positive light. Conversely, if the perpetrators were foreigners, the media swiftly adopted a demonizing tone. This pattern of media representation was not unique to Italy; the article highlighted that similar reporting trends were observed across various European countries, including Poland, Switzerland, and Malta.<sup>14</sup>

Anti-gender movements are a transnational phenomenon, present in different cultures and societies, and one specific intersection where they can be analyzed, especially in the context

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<sup>11</sup> Bobičić, Nađa, & Stojčić, Marijana. *Antirodni diskurs u medijima u Srbiji*. CM Komunikacija i mediji, No. 53 (18/2023): 3-31. Pg. 6. <https://scindeks-clanci.ceon.rs/data/pdf/2466-541X/2023/2466-541X2353003B.pdf> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Pase, Irs. “All rapists are awful, but some are more awful than others”. NewsMavens. 12.3.2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190331041640/https://newsmavens.com/special-review/1082/all-rapists-are-awful-but-some-are-more-awful-than-others> (accessed 7.3.2024.)

<sup>14</sup> Cvjetičanin, Tijana. “How misinformation, fake news and misogyny affect the rights of women in Europe”. NewsMavens, 24.6.2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20191229135718/https://newsmavens.com/special-review/1203/how-misinformation-fake-news-and-misogyny-affect-the-rights-of-women-in-europe> (accessed 7.3.2024.)

of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is anti-Western propaganda. In BiH, a significant portion of disinformation stems from pro-Russian sources, promoting values close to the Russian regime,<sup>15</sup> especially intensified due to the escalation of conflict in Ukraine.<sup>16</sup>

Among the narratives popularized by pro-Russian propaganda outlets is the portrayal of the “decadent West.” This depiction, as outlined by EUvsDisinfo, a project initiated by the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, serves as a staple in the Kremlin's propaganda arsenal. The narrative characterizes Western society as “a materialistic, immoral, corrupt and perverted society that subverts traditional values.”<sup>17</sup> This framing is strategically employed by the Kremlin to discredit Western institutions and ideologies, positioning Russia as the defender of traditional moral values against Western decadence. In this context, gender and identity based disinformation is often used to depict the “West” as a society in which traditional gender roles are disrupted and in which sexuality and sexual identity are interpreted outside of the rigid nonbinary roles, which to these channels suggests downfall, disorder and chaos.

While there have been various efforts at monitoring media reporting on gender and LGBTIQ in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there have been no notable analyses focused on gender and identity based disinformation. The aim of this research is to create a foundation for future studies by providing an initial diagnosis, and to point out ways in which research could be expanded and the topic more deeply analyzed.

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<sup>15</sup> Cvjetićanin, T., et al. *Dezinformacije u online sferi: Slučaj BiH*. Udruženje građana “Zašto ne,” April 2019. Pgs. 62-63. [https://zastone.ba/app/uploads/2019/05/Dezinformacije\\_u\\_online\\_sferi\\_Slučaj%20BiH\\_BHS.pdf](https://zastone.ba/app/uploads/2019/05/Dezinformacije_u_online_sferi_Slučaj%20BiH_BHS.pdf) (accessed 10.2.2024.)

<sup>16</sup> Cvjetićanin, T., et al. *Dezinformacijski narativi u BiH i regiji*. Udruženje građana “Zašto ne,” 2023. [https://zastone.ba/app/uploads/2023/03/Dezinformacijski\\_narativi\\_u\\_BiH\\_i\\_regiji.pdf](https://zastone.ba/app/uploads/2023/03/Dezinformacijski_narativi_u_BiH_i_regiji.pdf) (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>17</sup> EU vs. Disinfo, “DISINFO: The West is decadent, corrupt, rotten, and has reached its final phase”. EU vs. Disinfo, 23.4.2021. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/the-west-is-decadent-corrupt-rotten-and-has-reached-its-final-phase> (accessed 29.2.2024.)



This research has the potential to be useful for organizations engaged in media literacy and combating hate speech, as well as human rights organizations focused on women and LGBTIQ and those involved in fact-checking. By providing a detailed insight into the presence, scope, and frequency of disinformation, this research could enable these organizations to develop more effective strategies for prebunking<sup>18</sup> and creating materials aimed at combating hate speech online and enhancing media literacy. Consequently, this work could serve as a foundation for creating specific tools and campaigns that would contribute to reducing the spread of disinformation and improving the general understanding of and response to hate speech and disinformation online, thereby strengthening societal resilience to these phenomena.

# Methodology

This study utilized the database of Raskrinkavanje.ba, a fact-checking organization working in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Launched in 2017, Raskrinkavanje<sup>19</sup> is operated by the citizen's association "Zašto ne" (Why Not). Raskrinkavanje is a verified member of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) and the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCN). Verification means that the work of the Raskrinkavanje platform has been evaluated by independent assessors and meets the standards set by their respective codes.

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<sup>18</sup> Prebunking is a strategy used to counter disinformation before it spreads. The basic idea of the strategy is to inform people in advance about possible disinformation and deception methods before they encounter disinformation. This way, individuals' resilience against false information is strengthened through the development of critical thinking and analytical skills, making it easier to recognize and reject false information when they encounter it.

For more information, visit <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10463283.2021.1876983>

<sup>19</sup> Raskrinkavanje. "O Raskrinkavanju." <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/o-raskrinkavanju> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

Raskrinkavanje's primary focus is on identifying and debunking factually inaccurate claims circulated in media outlets or via social media in Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian and Montenegrin languages. In addition to this, Raskrinkavanje sporadically engages in media and narrative analyses, along with prebunking articles that address recurrent disinformation narratives tied to specific dates or events.<sup>20</sup>

According to Raskrinkavanje's methodology,<sup>21</sup> this platform monitors media outlets that have significant readership in Bosnia and Herzegovina and possess some of the following characteristics: they do not have a clearly indicated imprint and editorial team; publish content without stating the name of the author or a clear indication that it is reprinted content; claims in articles are not checked or supported by sources; they have already received some negative ratings on the site raskrinkavanje.ba. This platform also tracks social media profiles "if their posts become, or aim to become, a source of fake news or some form of disinformation that can spread to the public." While this method provides a thorough approach to selecting claims for debunking, it means that the sample used in this study is entirely dependent on the disinformation identified and analyzed by researchers from this platform. Consequently, conclusions regarding the prevalence of disinformation in the overall information landscape cannot be drawn.

Raskrinkavanje employs 15 distinct ratings in their fact-checking articles to categorize the type of manipulation being addressed, with each rating's definition accessible on their website.<sup>22</sup> These ratings encompass a range of manipulative content, including fake news, disinformation, manipulation of facts, clickbait, conspiracy theories, and pseudoscience. The

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<sup>20</sup> Raskrinkavanje. "Analyze." <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analize/analyze> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>21</sup> Raskrinkavanje. "Metodologija." <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/metodologija> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

website features a specialized section titled “Across the margin,”<sup>23</sup> which is devoted to debunking disinformation targeting and concerning marginalized groups, such as women, the LGBTIQ community, and migrants. This section also explores various forms of public discourse surrounding these groups. The first article within this category was published in 2018, signifying Raskrinkavanje’s longstanding commitment to refuting false claims about marginalized groups, including GiD. It is important to note that examples of certain narratives identified in the GiD Database can be seen in fact-checks that were published by Raskrinkavanje in the earlier years and weren't included in the sample.

As mentioned, Raskrinkavanje’s website served as the foundational resource in creating the GiD database. The selected claims for the database were identified from fact-checking articles published over a three-year period, from January 15, 2021, to January 15, 2024. This timeframe was chosen to ensure the relevance and timeliness of the analyzed GiD content. During these three years, Raskrinkavanje published a total of 1,922 fact-checking articles, with specific instances of debunked GiD found in 71 of these articles.

The database provides comprehensive details for each entry, including a link to the fact-check, the publication date, the rating assigned to the incorrect claim, the subject of the debunked GiD, as well as a link to the rated piece of GiD and its publication date. Additionally, the database documents whether a particular group is the target of disinformation or if the disinformation about a certain group serves as an instrument for another purpose. It also includes information on whether the GiD was initially published in media outlets or on social media within the Western Balkans region and whether it was translated from another language or originated locally.

The debunked GiD in these fact-checking articles was then categorized according to the broader narratives they appear to support. This categorization process involved examining

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<sup>23</sup> Raskrinkavanje. “Preko margine.” <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analize/preko-margine> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

factors such as the target/instrument, subject of GiD, and the wording and vocabulary used in the claims. The identified categories include: “Anti-western Propaganda through GiD,” “Gender-specific Health Disinformation,” “Objectification for Financial Gain,” “Case-specific Disinformation with Impact on Equality,” “Demonizing LGBTIQ Narratives,” “Political propaganda through GiD,” and “The Conspiracy Angle of GiD”. The GiD from the sample that did not align with any of these categories was classified as “Other.” Some instances of GiD fit into multiple categories, indicating their presence in several broader narratives. The entire database is accessible via the link [here](#).

The articles featured on Raskrinkavanje that were not included in the database encompass analyses of media reporting on gendered issues that did not provide a rating of factual correctness and fact-checks aimed at debunking disinformation targeting female politicians, where the disinformation was not based on gender. Additionally, the excluded content covered gender-specific manipulative product advertisements and fact-checks that addressed disinformation without being able to conclusively show that it was based on gender. Essentially, the omitted articles dealt with a range of topics that, although pertinent to discussions of gender or involved female figures, did not strictly meet the criteria for gender-based disinformation as defined by this study’s categorization standards.

In the subsequent sections of this paper, we will analyze the data from the database and explore each category in detail.

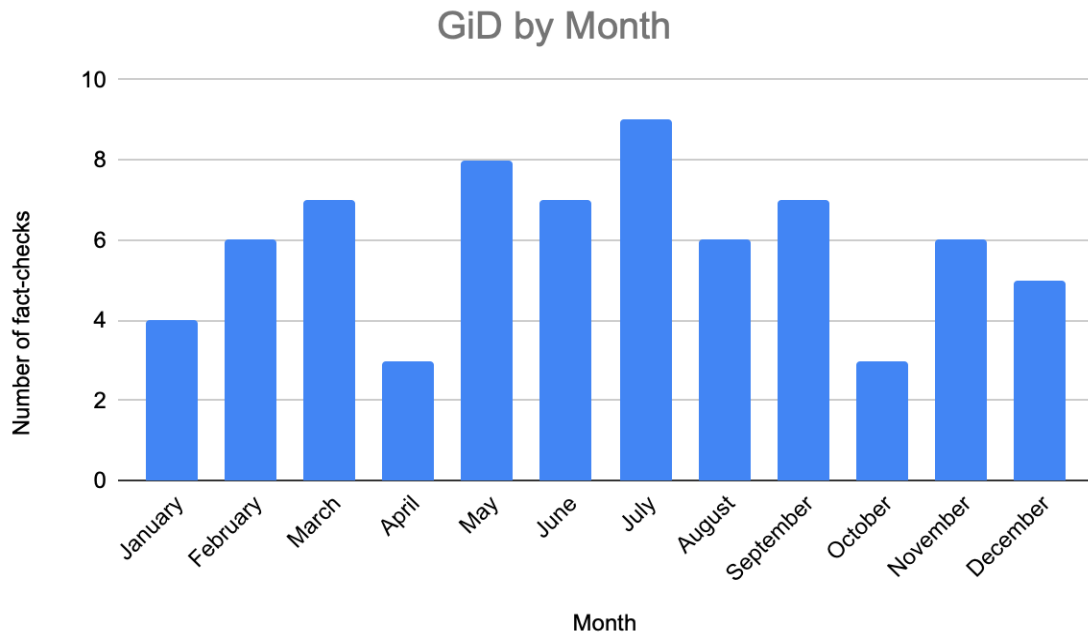
# Analysis

The sample analyzed comprised 71 fact-checking articles from a total of 1,922 fact-checks published by Raskrinkavanje from January 2021 to January 2024, constituting 3.70% of all published fact-checks. Among these, 39 analyses focused on GiD concerning women, representing 55% of the GiD-related sample and 2% of the overall sample, while 32 analyses addressed GiD related to LGBTIQ, accounting for 45% of the GiD-related sample and 1.7% of the total sample.

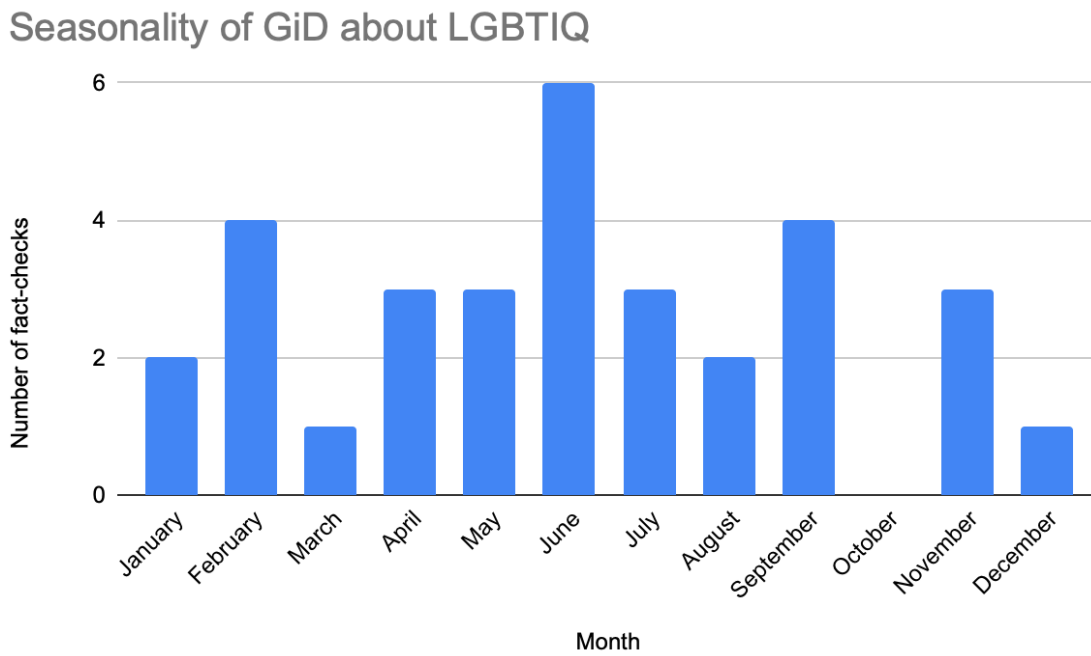
In 38 instances (53.5%), women and LGBTIQ individuals were the targets of disinformation, whereas in 33 instances (46.5%), GiD was utilized as a tool to achieve a certain objective. Breaking it down, LGBTIQ individuals were the target in 12 cases and were instrumentalized in 18 instances. Conversely, women were targeted in 26 cases and used as a tool in 15 instances.

GiD was spread through social media and media outlets at comparable rates, with social media slightly prevailing (36 cases or 50.7%) over traditional online media outlets (35 cases or 49.3%). In 46 instances (65%), the analyzed media were identified as the source of disinformation, whereas in 25 cases (35%), the disinformation was translated from foreign language sources.

We also analyzed GiD by month in all three years that were subject to analysis, with July being the month with the most GiD (9), followed by May (8), and March, June, and September (7 each).



While this distribution may indicate some seasonality, to gain a better understanding, it's important to disaggregate the data and separately analyze GiD against women and LGBTIQ.



Further analysis, as discussed below, shows that disinformation against LGBTIQ increases during the summer months, aligning with the timing of Pride marches. Additionally, the size of the sample warrants further monitoring in the coming years to be able to draw any definitive conclusions.

Notably, according to Raskrinkavanje's methodology, this platform analyzes all iterations of disinformation, including the original fake news as well as subsequent transmissions. However, for consistency, only the first iterations of the fake news were analyzed in the GiD sample. The methodology also involves verifying the accuracy of current disinformation and identifying the first instance of inaccurate claims, regardless of the publication date. Consequently, the sample includes an example of disinformation that resurfaced in 2023, originating from an article published in 2013.

## **ANTI-WESTERN PROPAGANDA THROUGH GiD**

A total of 20 fact-checking articles from the sample addressed claims categorized as “Anti-western Propaganda through GiD,” accounting for 28.2% of the GiD database. In all of the cases, the disinformation targeted the West, specific Western countries, leaders, or institutions. Media outlets were identified as the source of disinformation in nine instances, whereas social media accounts were responsible in 11 cases. Nine of the claims were translated from other languages, and 11 originated locally. Many of these claims either rely on or aim to reinforce the narrative of the “decadent West.”

Disinformation regarding LGBTIQ individuals, women's rights, and policies concerning these groups is often utilized to advance this narrative, as evidenced by examples in

Raskrinkavanje's GiD database. A significant instance is a fact-check<sup>24</sup> from April 2023, which addressed social media posts featuring photographs of two sculptures. One sculpture shows a pregnant woman surrounded by small children, while the other portrays a figure with both male and female sexual characteristics. The posts on social media claimed these sculptures were "monuments for mothers" in Russia and the Netherlands, questioning users about which "world" they prefer. While the image of a pregnant woman with children indeed represents a monument to mothers in the Russian town of Tyumen, the sculpture from the Netherlands signifies something completely different. Titled "And Life is Over There" by artist Femmy Otten, it is displayed in The Hague. According to the artist, this piece aims to depict the "ideal form of human being," inspired by the Greek mythological figure Hermaphroditus, who merged with his lover. It is not a "monument to mothers."

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<sup>24</sup> Salkanović, Maida, & Zulejhić, Emir. "Spomenik majci' kao alat antizapadne propagande".Raskrinkavanje. 28.4.2023. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/spomenik-majci-kao-alat-antizapadne-propagande> (accessed 11.2.2024.)





Several fact-checks in the database addressed disinformation targeting Western female political figures, erroneously labeling them as transgender, mostly accompanied by highly negative and even openly hostile and insulting descriptions of the transgender population.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lukić, Nikolina & Šehović, Nerma. "Osoba koja se rukuje s Bidenom na viralnom snimku nije 'muškarac u ženskom kostimu'". Raskrinkavanje.30.5.2022.

Notable individuals subjected to such disinformation include Michelle Obama, Brigitte Macron, and Toni Preckwinkle. Furthermore, female Western politicians were also falsely depicted as overtly sexual, with allegations or implications suggesting their immorality. For instance, a manipulated photo of the Italian politician Maria Elena Boschi was shared on social media, altering her appearance to seem inappropriately dressed for a formal event.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, German Minister of External Affairs Annalena Baerbock was baselessly accused of having participated in a pornographic film.<sup>27</sup> These claims aim not only to undermine these women through sexist and transphobic allegations but also to portray Western countries as “immoral.”

Within the database, another prevalent theme is disinformation related to children and the approaches Western countries and institutions adopt toward sexual education.

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<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/osoba-koja-se-rukuje-s-bidenom-na-viralnom-snimku-nije-muskarac-u-zenskom-kostimu> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

Manojlović, Marija, “Michelle Obama nije bila registrovana kao muškarac za glasanje na izborima”. Raskrinkavanje. 10.3.2023.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/michelle-obama-nije-bila-registrovana-kao-muskarac-za-glasanje-na-izborima> (accessed 11.2.2024)

Šehović, Nerma. “Apsurdne glasine predstavljene kao činjenice: Brigitte Macron nije ‘rođena kao muškarac’”. Raskrinkavanje. 23.2.2022.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/apsurdne-glasine-predstavljene-kao-cinjenice-brigitte-macron-nije-rodena-kao-muskarac> (accessed 11.2.2024)

Čeliković, Amina. “Ne, na ovoj fotografiji nisu prikazani premijer Luksemburga i ‘njegova supruga’”. Raskrinkavanje. 26.1.2021.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/ne-na-ovoj-fotografiji-nisu-prikazani-premijer-luksemburga-i-njegova-supruga> (accessed 11.2.2024)

<sup>26</sup> Murić, Elma. “Lažna fotografija italijanske političarke dijeli se godinama”. Raskrinkavanje. 29.07.2021.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/lazna-fotografija-italijanske-politicarke-dijeli-se-godinama> (accessed 11.2.2024)

<sup>27</sup> Salkanović, Maida. “Nestorović ‘objasnio geopolitiku’ nizom neistina i dezinformacija”. Raskrinkavanje 20.10.2023. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/nestorovic-objasnio-geopolitiku-nizom-neistina-i-dezinformacija> (accessed 11.2.2024)

Raskrinkavanje has debunked claims suggesting that UNICEF declared children have a right to pornography and that it is beneficial for them, supposedly based on EU research.<sup>28</sup> It also debunked claims about Australian schools permitting students to identify as cats, Swedish schools mandating Pride parades, and a kindergarten in Germany exclusively opened for gay children.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, unfounded claims about parents in Germany losing custody of their children for “not conforming to Germany's attitudes about LGBT people” and a Serbian woman being fined in Germany for not allowing her son to dress as a girl for school were fact-checked.<sup>30</sup> These claims often aim to incite moral panic, alleging the corruption and sexualization of children, thereby demonizing LGBTIQ individuals and Western countries in the process.

Within the sample, there are instances where GiD was leveraged to exacerbate existing local hostilities toward the West. For instance, in 2021, Raskrinkavanje debunked multiple

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<sup>28</sup> Lakić, Mladen. “UNICEF-ov rad ne tvrdi da pornografija nije štetna za djecu”. Raskrinkavanje

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/unicef-ov-rad-ne-tvrdi-da-pornografija-nije-stetna-za-djecu> (accessed 11.2.2024)

<sup>29</sup> Manojlović, Marija & Zulejhić, Emir. “Izmišljene priče o učenicama koje se ‘identifikuju kao mačke’ kao pokriće za transfobiju”. Raskrinkavanje. 9.11.2022.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/izmišljene-price-o-ucenicama-koje-se-identifikuju-kao-macke-kao-pokrice-za-transfobiju> (accessed 15.2.2024)

Šehović, Nerma. “Švedske škole nisu organizovale ‘parade ponosa’”. Raskrinkavanje.22.6.2021.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/svedske-skole-nisu-organizovale-parade-ponosa> (accessed 1.3.2024.)

Salkanović, Maida. “Vrtić otvoren u Berlinu nije samo za ‘homoseksualce i lezbijke’”. Raskrinkavanje. 26.07.2023. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/vrtic-otvoren-u-berlinu-nije-samo-za-homoseksualce-i-lezbijke> (accessed 1.3.2024.)

<sup>30</sup> Šehović, Nerma. “Izmišljena priča ‘sestre Milke’ kao opravdanje za protivljenje EuroPrideu”. Raskrinkavanje. 29.8.2022. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/izmišljena-prica-sestre-milke-kao-opravdanje-za-protivljenje-europrideu> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

Manojlović, Marija. “Je li njemačka policija oduzela djecu roditeljima zbog njihovih stavova o homoseksualnosti?”. Raskrinkavanje. 8.5.2023.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/je-li-njemacka-policija-oduzela-djecu-roditeljima-zbog-njihovih-stavova-o-homoseksualnosti> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

conspiracy theories concerning US-based Serbian actress Danijela Štajnfeld, who had accused Serbian actor and politician Branimir Lečić of rape. Her allegations were dismissed in the media through various conspiracy theories suggesting that American intelligence services orchestrated her accusations to tarnish Serbia's reputation.<sup>31</sup>

## GENDER-SPECIFIC HEALTH DISINFORMATION

In the GiD database, 17 of the fact-checks addressed gender-specific health disinformation, accounting for 23.9% of the GiD database. Social media was identified as the source in 10 instances, while media outlets were the source in seven cases. The incorrect claims were translated from foreign languages in 10 cases and originated locally in seven instances. These claims were categorized exclusively in this category in seven cases, whereas in 10 instances, they overlapped with other categories.

Claims within this exclusive category predominantly target women, disseminating disinformation about specific medical procedures or treatments. Disinformation about potentially life-saving medical interventions, such as HPV vaccines and mammograms, was falsely presented as highly dangerous.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ćosić, Marija. "Teorije zavjere kao 'objašnjenje' slučaja seksualnog nasilja". Raskrinkavanje. 10.5.2021.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/teorije-zavjere-kao-objasnjenje-slucaja-seksualnog-nasilja> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>32</sup> Šehović, Nerma. "Najavljene vakcine protiv HPV-a: Nova meta domaćih antivaksera". Raskrinkavanje. 4.2.2022.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/najavljene-vakcine-protiv-hpv-a-nova-meta-domacih-antivaksera> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

Šehović, Nerma. "Mamografija ne povećava smrtnost od raka niti je to potvrdila studija". Raskrinkavanje. 15.12.2023.

In a particular fact-check, Raskrinkavanje debunked disinformation regarding abortion, specifically debunking erroneous claims about the health consequences of abortion, such as assertions that abortions lead to breast cancer and fertility issues.<sup>33</sup> The Facebook pages spreading this disinformation are managed by a local pro-life organization named “Sara - Mjesto za tebe,” affiliated with the US-based anti-abortion group “Heartbeat International.” This organization, which operates call and “crisis” centers, has been investigated by journalists in the US for employing disinformation and manipulative tactics aimed at deterring women from accessing abortion services.

Gender-based health disinformation was frequently paired with conspiratorial narratives and/or anti-Western propaganda. For instance, a viral video circulated in December 2023 claimed that children, particularly girls, experience accelerated puberty due to sex hormones present in fast food. Several Western chain restaurants were accused of serving such food, allegedly causing girls to mature at an unnatural pace. Raskrinkavanje addressed and debunked these claims in January 2024.<sup>34</sup>

In another case, a well-known conspiracy theorist on Facebook, reacting to a video by a conservative Croatian “theologian” who criticized “modern women” for immorality and

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<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/mamografija-ne-povecava-smrtnost-od-raka-niti-je-to-potvrdila-studija> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>33</sup> Šehović, Nerma. “Dezinformacije o abortusu pod krinkom ‘savjetovanja i podrške’”. Raskrinkavanje. 15.3.2022.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/dezinformacije-o-abortusu-pod-krinkom-savjetovanja-i-podrske> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>34</sup> Šehović, Nerma. “Nema dokaza da djeca sazrijevaju ranije zbog hormona u brzjoj hrani”. Raskrinkavanje. 10.1.2024. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/nema-dokaza-da-djeca-sazrijevaju-ranije-zbog-hormona-u-brzjoj-hrani> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

advocated for traditional gender roles, falsely asserted that it is perilously risky to have children with women in their thirties because they are very likely to give birth to children with congenital disorders. He attributed the behavior of modern women to “satanism,” blending disinformation about female reproductive health, conservative anti-Western propaganda, and conspiracy theory in his post.<sup>35</sup>

Gender-based health disinformation was also combined with homophobic and/or transphobic narratives in a few cases. For instance, during the monkeypox outbreak in spring 2022, media outlets and social media users in the region of Western Balkans falsely linked the disease with the LGBTIQ community, labeling it a “gay disease” and falsely alleging it could only be transmitted through sexual interactions between men.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, hormonal therapy for individuals undergoing gender transition was misrepresented by certain regional media, which claimed it had severe adverse effects and accused it of being a means to “force children to change their gender.”<sup>37</sup>

Some of these homophobic health claims also carried a conspiratorial undertone. For example, Raskrinkavanje debunked several claims suggesting that a herbicide called atrazine

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<sup>35</sup> Šehović, Nerma. “Mitovi i činjenice o trudnoći poslije tridesete”. Raskrinkavanje. 24.11.2023.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/mitovi-i-cinjenice-o-trudnoci-poslije-tridesete> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>36</sup> Beširević, Alena. “Stigmatizacija: Majmunske boginje nisu ‘gay bolest’”. Raskrinkavanje. 8.6.2022.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/stigmatizacija-majmunske-boginje-nisu-gay-bolest> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>37</sup> Manojlović, Marija. “Lažna panika zbog hormonske terapije: Transfobija i dezinformacije na portalu Logično”. Raskrinkavanje. 1.9.2021.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/lazna-panika-zbog-hormonske-terapije-transfobija-i-dezinformacije-na-portal-logicno> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

could “turn men into women” and alleging that this substance was covertly added to certain foods under the instructions of Bill Gates.<sup>38</sup>

## OBJECTIFICATION FOR FINANCIAL GAIN

GiD that involved objectification for financial gain was identified in five fact-checks conducted by Raskrinkavanje between January 2021 and January 2024. This category constitutes 7% of the GiD database. All the claims originated from media outlets and were locally produced.

The claims in this category predominantly serve as clickbait, designed to lure users into clicking on a website, where they are then exposed to advertising links. These claims mostly focus on women's appearance, sexuality, or deviation from traditionally defined gender roles. Women are depicted as either overly sexually active or with a pronounced sex appeal, and criticized for dressing inappropriately, especially if older. Some of the articles also promoted various methods for weight loss or altering one's appearance.

One analysis in this category debunked claims about female celebrities' supposed involvement in pornographic materials.<sup>39</sup> Other articles manipulatively presented stories of

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<sup>38</sup> Manojlović, Marija. “FAIRTRADE oznaka na hrani nije zamjena za ‘zelenu žabu’ niti označava opasne proizvode”. Raskrinkavanje. 12.10.2023.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/fairtrade-oznaka-na-hrani-nije-zamjena-za-zelenu-zabu-niti-oznacava-opasne-proizvode> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

Manojlović,, Marija. “Oznaka zelene žabe ne znači da u proizvodima ima atrazina”. Raskrinkavanje. 25.10.2023.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/oznaka-zelene-zabe-ne-znaci-da-u-proizvodima-ima-atrazina> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

Šehović, Nerma. “Atrazin jeste štetan za zdravlje, ali nije tačno da može ‘muškarca pretvoriti u ženu’”. Raskrinkavanje. 23.2.2023. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/atrazin-jeste-stetan-za-zdravlje-ali-nije-tacno-da-moze-muskarca-pretvoriti-u-zenu> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>39</sup> Ćosić, Marija. “Lažni porno-snimci i eksplicitne fotografije kao ‘izvor klikova’”. Raskrinkavanje. 11.6.2021.

mothers who abandoned their children, thereby deviating from their traditionally assigned societal roles.<sup>40</sup> In these instances, disinformers are instrumentalizing women's bodies and socially sanctioned behaviors for profit. Interestingly, this type of instrumentalization was absent in the GiD related to the LGBTIQ, where the focus was primarily on advancing specific political or ideological agendas.

## CASE-SPECIFIC DISINFORMATION WITH IMPACT ON EQUALITY

Disinformation about specific cases (primarily involving alleged or confirmed abuse) with broader implications for equality was addressed in five fact-checks by Raskrinkavanje between January 2021 and January 2024. This category makes up 7% of the GiD database. The source for all the claims were media outlets and all the claims originated locally.

The majority (four out of five) of fact-checks in this category pertain to a significant incident from 2021 involving Danijela Štajnfeld, a Serbian actress now based in the US, who accused her colleague, actor and politician Branislav Lečić, of rape. Following her formal complaint with the police and public disclosure in spring 2021, the case received extensive media coverage. A considerable number of Serbian media outlets disseminated various disinformation about the case and Štajnfeld herself, apparently aiming to discredit her. This included fabricating her statements or misquoting her to suggest inconsistencies, falsely alleging her participation in pornographic films in the US to question the credibility of her allegations, and spreading conspiracy theories. Some of these theories, which were

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<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/lazni-porno-snimci-i-eksplicitne-fotografije-kao-izvor-klikova> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>40</sup> Šehović, Nerma. "Top Vijesti Balkan: Eksploatacija teških životnih priča i mizoginija za klikove". Raskrinkavanje. 10.11.2021.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/top-vijesti-balkan-eksploatacija-teskih-zivotnih-prica-i-mizoginija-za-klikove> (accessed 11.2.2024.)



highlighted in the segment “Anti-Western propaganda through GiD,” insinuated she was compensated or instructed by a specific government to make these false accusations.<sup>41</sup> A few months later, another wave of disinformation emerged when media reported that she had previously accused another man of rape during her teenage years in her hometown, leading to the man's suicide and speculation that she fabricated the rape story to obtain asylum in the US. These claims were either entirely debunked or shown to lack any substantial evidence.<sup>42</sup> The case was also widely sensationalized, with numerous media outlets across the region seemingly exploiting public interest to generate clicks and views through manipulative, clickbait headlines.<sup>43</sup>

While the debunked false claims in these fact-checks centered on this particular case, the broader media campaign to discredit a woman who accused someone of sexual violence, along with her vilification in mainstream media, demonstrated and perpetuated existing prejudices against women who come forward. This kind of reporting, especially if consistent and predominant, can deter victims of sexual violence from reporting their experiences.

One fact-check in this category concerned the murders that occurred in Gradačac, a town in northeastern Bosnia, in August 2023. Nermin Sulejmanović brutally murdered his partner, Nizama Hećimović, in front of their 9-month-old daughter and broadcasted it live on Instagram. Sulejmanović subsequently killed two more individuals, a father and son, Džengiz

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<sup>41</sup> Cvjetičanin, Tijana & Šehović, Nerma. “Suđenje žrtvi: Medijski linč Danijele Štajnfeld”. Raskrinkavanje. 7.5.2021.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/sudenje-zrtvi-medijski-linc-danijele-stajnfeld> (accessed 11.2.2024.)  
Ćosić, Marija. “Teorije zavjere”. 10.5.2021.

<sup>42</sup> Šehović, Nerma. “Kompleksna mreža medijskih manipulacija o slučaju ‘Štajnfeld-Lečić’”. Raskrinkavanje. 29.6.2021.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/kompleksna-mreza-medijskih-manipulacija-o-slucaju-stajnfeld-lecic>  
(accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>43</sup> Ćosić, Marija. “Seksualno nasilje kao povod za klikbejt naslove”. Raskrinkavanje. 13.5.2021.  
<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/seksualno-nasilje-kao-povod-za-klikbejt-naslove> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

and Denis Oder, before committing suicide. This shocking case was extensively covered by the media.

Media reports on the case contained a significant amount of misinformation and disinformation, some of which may have originated from errors and hurried reporting. However, others appeared to arise from an intention to exploit the case for clicks, evident through the publication of numerous clickbait headlines. These reports treated the subject as a sensation rather than addressing it as a brutal act of femicide following severe domestic abuse.<sup>44</sup> This kind of reporting can very negatively impact the public's understanding of gender-based violence and femicide, through supporting already existing views of it as isolated incidents and private matters, instead of deeply-rooted societal issues.

## THE CONSPIRACY ANGLE OF GiD

Claims categorized as GiD from a conspiracy angle were addressed in 11 articles on Raskrinkavanje, constituting 15.4% of the GiD database. Social media platforms were the source in 10 instances, whereas media outlets accounted for only one case. The claims originated from a foreign language in five cases and were locally sourced in six instances. Notably, in all examples from the database, conspiracy theories overlapped with another category, especially the “Demonizing LGBTIQ Narratives” and “Gender-based Specific Health Disinformation.”

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<sup>44</sup> Salkanović, Maida. “Preuranjene i neprovjerene informacije medija o ubistvima u Gradačcu”. Raskrinkavanje. 18.8.2023.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/preuranjene-i-neprovjerene-informacije-medija-o-ubistvima-u-gradaccu> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

One notable claim debunked within this category was the assertion that the Rockefeller family invented feminism as a scheme to dismantle the family structure and enslave the population.<sup>45</sup> The Rockefellers are a prominent actor in many conspiracy theories. This claim serves as an illustrative example of how gender equality can be maligned within various conspiracy theories about the “elites” who purportedly control the world as part of their agenda for domination and enslavement. It portrays the advocacy for equality and women's rights as inherently villainous, thus confirming the anti-gender narratives. This is even more pronounced in activism for rights of LGBTIQ people, often framed in the conspiratorial narrative as part of a plot to dismantle the family structure and impose “immorality” on society.

Raskrinkavanje fact-checked several claims aligned with this narrative, including social media “analyses” of the 2021 Eurovision Song Contest, accused of promoting “the gay lobby,” “depraved culture,” and the erosion of “traditional values,” as well as satanism and demonic symbols.<sup>46</sup> A video by infamous internet personality Andrew Tate, discussing among other topics how “they” promote “the gay stuff” to control the population, gained popularity on social media in 2022, once again depicting LGBTIQ individuals and activists as either pawns or collaborators in a supposed conspiracy against humanity.<sup>47</sup> An image of a man in lingerie, falsely claimed to depict Klaus Schwab, president of the World Economic Forum and a

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<sup>45</sup> Čeliković, Amina. “Ne, Rockefelleri nisu ‘izumili’ feminizam”. Raskrinkavanje. 24.5.2022.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/ne-rockefelleri-nisu-izumili-feminizam> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>46</sup> Ćosić, Marija. “Nesuvisla ‘zavjerska’ opažanja o Evroviziji: ‘Simbolika pakla i demonskih bića’ nije ‘javno pokazana’ na sceni”. Raskrinkavanje. 28.5.2021.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/nesuvisla-zavjeroska-opazanja-o-evroviziji-simbolika-pakla-i-demonskih-bica-nije-javno-pokazana-na-sceni> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>47</sup> Šehović, Nerma. “Najpoznatiji internetski ženomrzac kao izvor teorija zavjere o klimatskim promjenama”. Raskrinkavanje. 2.9.2022.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/najpoznatiji-internetski-zenomrzac-kao-izvor-teorija-zavjere-o-klimatskim-promjenama> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

common target of conspiracy theorists, also circulated on social media. This misrepresentation is a straightforward yet effective and common method of associating the LGBTIQ community with alleged conspiracies of the so-called ruling elite.<sup>48</sup>

Gender-based health disinformation sometimes also overlapped with conspiracy theories, particularly those concerning the so-called Big Pharma and “the medical establishment”. An example includes a widely circulated post from October 2023, which labeled mammography as organized crime against women<sup>49</sup>. It alleged that the “medical mafia” is aware that mammograms cause cancer but continues to recommend them to increase the number of patients and profits. Raskrinkavanje thoroughly debunked these claims in an article<sup>50</sup> published on October 31, 2023. HPV vaccines have also been targeted by conspiracy theorists recently, with claims circulating that these vaccines contain graphene oxide, a substance purportedly very dangerous and also alleged to be in Covid-19 vaccines. Investigations found these claims to be unfounded.

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<sup>48</sup> Karađuz, Amar. “Na viralnoj fotografiji nije Klaus Schwab”. Raskrinkavanje. 6.6.2022. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/na-viralnoj-fotografiji-nije-klaus-schwab> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>49</sup> Šehović, Nerma. “Mamografija nije ‘zločin’, već provjeren način da se spase životi žena”. Raskrinkavanje. 31. 10. 2023. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/mamografija-nije-zlocin-vec-provjeren-nacin-da-se-spase-zivoti-zena> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>50</sup> Beširević, Alena. “Vakcine protiv HPV-a ne sadrže grafenov oksid”. Raskrinkavanje. 16.3.2023. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/vakcine-protiv-hpv-a-ne-sadrze-grafenov-oksid> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

## DEMONIZING LGBTIQ NARRATIVES

Disinformation about LGBTIQ was debunked in 32 fact-checking analyses on Raskrinkavanje between January 2021 and January 2024. This category makes up 45% of the GiD database. The source for claims were social networks (18 cases) slightly more than informative web portals (14 cases).

Most of the disinformation (24 out of 32) was related to the global context, while eight were focused on the local context. Of these locally focused disinformation, seven were related to pride marches, including two cases about Europride in Belgrade and five about Bosnia and Herzegovina Pride March. The analysis shows that in 12 cases, LGBTIQ individuals and topics were the direct target of disinformation, while in 20 cases, they were used as a tool for promoting political goals and agendas.



An example of disinformation where LGBTIQ is directly targeted is an article<sup>51</sup> published on the portal Dnevno.hr, which labels homosexuality as a disease, citing the story of a former homosexual who claimed to have successfully cured himself. This type of disinformation aims at demonizing the LGBTIQ community, promoting harmful and outdated views on homosexuality.

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<sup>51</sup> Lakić, Mladen. "Recikliranje homofobije: Homoseksualnost nije bolest i ne može se 'liječiti'". Raskrinkavanje, 17.2.2023.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/recikliranje-homofobije-homoseksualnost-nije-bolest-i-ne-moze-se-lijeciti> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

On the other hand, an example of disinformation where LGBTIQ is used as an instrument of political attack is a post on the Facebook page BHInfo.<sup>52</sup> A photo of the leader of the People and Justice party (Narod i pravda), Dino Konaković, was photoshopped to show him wearing a tie in the colors of the rainbow, with a description that implies his support for the Pride March. This type of disinformation is used for political discrediting, suggesting that political figures who support LGBTIQ rights may be targets of attacks or boycotts by those who oppose these rights.

The analysis of specific targets within disinformation about LGBTIQ topics reveals that trans\*<sup>53</sup> individuals (14 times), general LGBTIQ concepts (12 times), and pride marches (8 times) were the most frequently repeated targets.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, political and economic leaders from countries typically classified as part of the “global North” or “collective West” were also common specific targets, including the Prime Minister of Luxembourg Xavier Bettel, French President Emmanuel Macron, his wife Brigitte Macron, the President and founder of the World Economic Forum Klaus Schwab, and the wife of the former U.S. President Michelle Obama. These targets illustrate how disinformation often uses LGBTIQ themes to criticize or attack public figures who are considered symbols of certain ideological or political values. This is discussed in more detail in the section “Anti-Western Propaganda.”

The analysis of language choices in disinformation texts about LGBTIQ individuals, events, phenomena, and groups reveals the use of harsh and negatively connoted adjectives and

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<sup>52</sup> Ćosić, Marija. “Homofobija kao sredstvo politički motivisanog obračuna”. Raskrinkavanje. 22.6.2022. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/homofobija-kao-sredstvo-politicki-motivisanog-obracuna> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>53</sup> In this paper, trans\* represents a spectrum of identities (including transgender, transvestite, transsexual, etc.) that are not limited solely to trans women and trans men.

<sup>54</sup> Noting that methodology allowed for multiple targets per analysis.

nouns such as “faggot ball,” “perverted culture,” “spiritual disorder,” “terrible mire of sin,” “depravity,” “twisted pervers,” “disgust,” “devils,” “mentally disturbed vermin,” “tranny,” “trannies,” “transgender agenda,” and similar. Additionally, verbs and deverbal nouns such as “conditioning,” “imposing,” “promoting,” “destroying,” “reinforcing,” “imposes,” are used, suggesting coercion, negative action, or undesirable changes.

The words used to describe LGBTIQ in the analyzed texts can be grouped into three interconnected categories: derogatory or offensive descriptions, anti-Western narrative, and the narrative of imposition. Derogatory descriptions, present in eight texts, explicitly aimed at dehumanizing and stigmatizing LGBTIQ individuals. The anti-Western narrative, explicitly present in four texts, used LGBTIQ themes to criticize Western values and policies, implying that they negatively affect traditional societal norms. The narrative of imposition, which was present in nine texts, suggests that LGBTIQ rights and identities represent a form of cultural or political *invasion*, often intertwined with anti-Western sentiments, but sometimes presented without an explicit connection to the West.

Derogatory descriptions such as “faggot ball,” “tranny,” and “trannies,” clearly indicate the contempt and non-acceptance that the authors of these texts express towards LGBTIQ individuals. Such pejorative terms dehumanize the LGBTIQ community, promoting stigmatization and discrimination.

The anti-Western narrative, which describes European culture as “in its decline” and “beyond salvation,”<sup>55</sup> possessing “new twisted social values” that are being “imposed as normal”,<sup>56</sup> implies that changes in social norms related to gender and sexual orientation are part of a

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<sup>55</sup> Ćosić, Marija. “Nesuvisla ‘zavjeroška’ opažanja o Evroviziji”. 28.5.2021.

<sup>56</sup> Čeliković, Amina. “Ne, na ovoj fotografiji nisu prikazani premijer Luksemburga i ‘njegova supruga’”. Raskrinkavanje. 26.1.2021. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/ne-na-ovoj-fotografiji-nisu-prikazani-premijer-luksemburga-i-njegova-supruga> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

broader, negative influence of Western culture and politics, or the “evil policies that the globalist elite is pushing onto the unfated citizens of Western countries”.<sup>57</sup>

The narrative of imposition illustrates the perception of coercion in accepting homosexuality, gender fluidity or transgender rights, often presented through fictional stories that emphasize the negative consequences of such “imposition.” An example of the imposition narrative is visible in a fabricated story about a mother whose son was allegedly forced to wear a dress in school in Germany, and when he did not comply, the mother was fined.<sup>58</sup> This particular case was described as follows: “The conditioning she had in the EU will not pass in Serbia. Male will remain male, and female, female.” This case was used to promote an agenda to ban EuroPride in Serbia.

In one of the articles containing disinformation, there is also a false claim that the mayor of Banja Luka Draško Stanivuković, with the support of his party colleague Jelena Trivić, who are both political opponents of the ruling SNSD (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats) party from the entity of Republika Srpska is advocating for the organization of EuroPride in Banja Luka.<sup>59</sup> In this example, the LGBTIQ community is not only exploited as a means for political conflict, but also used by politicians to rally a specific group of voters. These voters are targeted with fabricated claims about politicians’ intentions to support LGBTIQ rights and host

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<sup>57</sup> Lakić, Mladen. “Svjetski ekonomski forum ne ‘naređuje vladama da legalizuju brak sa djecom” Raskrinkavanje. 30.11.2023. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/svjetski-ekonomski-forum-ne-nareduje-vladama-da-legalizuju-brak-sa-djecom> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>58</sup> Šehović, Nerma. “Izmišljena priča”. 29.8.2022.

<sup>59</sup> Beširević, Alena & Zulejhić, Emir. “Niti se u Banjoj Luci sprema EuroPride, niti je to (trenutno) uopšte moguće”. Raskrinkavanje. 30.9.2022.

<https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/niti-se-u-banjoj-luci-sprema-europride-niti-je-to-trenutno-uopste-moguće> (accessed 11.2.2024.)



Europride in Banja Luka, which are presented as endorsing morally objectionable perspectives.

In addition to verbal disinformation, the use of visual manipulations, including photoshopped images, has been noted as a powerful tool for spreading false narratives. An example of such manipulation is the visual alteration of the poster for the BiH Pride March, where the original slogan “Ima izać” (It's time to come out) was replaced with a menacing message “We’re coming for you.”<sup>60</sup>



*Photoshopped photograph with an undefined threatening message*

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<sup>60</sup> Salkanović, Maida. “Fotošopirana homofobija: Učesnici/e Bh. povorke ponosa nisu poručili/e da ‘dolaze po vas’”. Raskrinkavanje. 27.6.2022. [https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/fotosopirana-homofobija-ucесnici-e-bh-povorke-ponosa-nisu-porucili-e-da-dolaze-po-vas](https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/fotosopirana-homofobija-ucესnici-e-bh-povorke-ponosa-nisu-porucili-e-da-dolaze-po-vas) (accessed 11.2.2024.)



*Original photograph*

The distribution of disinformation about LGBTIQ topics throughout the year shows variations in their frequency by months. The largest amount of disinformation was published in June (6), followed by February and September (4 each), and then April, May, July, and November (3 each).

This may suggest that there is a certain seasonality in the spread of disinformation, possibly conditioned by specific events or holidays celebrated during those periods, such as Pride marches which are often held during the summer. However, the size of the sample is not big enough to draw definitive conclusions.

## **POLITICAL PROPAGANDA THROUGH GiD**

Claims that were categorized as political propaganda through GiD were debunked in nine fact-checks on Raskrinkavanje, making it 12.6% of the GiD database. In three cases, claims originated from media outlets and in six they originated from social media. Five claims originated locally and four were translated from other languages. Disinformation about certain groups or individuals was described as an instrument in all nine examples.

This category can be further divided into two subcategories: local/regional political propaganda and international political propaganda. Local political propaganda is present in claims addressed in four fact-checks. Two of these target the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) through GiD. In a fact-check<sup>61</sup> from January 2021, Raskrinkavanje scrutinized a clickbait headline concerning a video from the birthday party of SDA party member Emina Tufekčić. In the video, Tufekčić can be seen slightly moving to the rhythm next to a birthday cake. Despite this, the headline misleadingly described the footage as showing “dirty dancing” by the SDA politician at her birthday, presumably aiming to entice readers through unfounded insinuations of sexual misconduct. The article, lacking any public interest information, was laden with sexist insults aimed at Tufekčić.

Before the elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina in September 2022, a photo of an alleged election billboard featuring a reality TV star Senada Nurkić, circulated on social media with the claim that she was a candidate of the SDA political party.<sup>62</sup> Nurkić was not a candidate in the elections, not for SDA nor for any other political party. The billboard, which was photoshopped, initially appeared as satire in some media outlets in 2016 and reemerged six years later as fake news. This misuse of misogynistic stereotypes regarding women in politics served as a tactic to discredit the political party in question. A couple of other local examples of using alleged support for LGBTIQ for political goals were previously discussed in the “Demonizing LGBTIQ Narratives.”

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<sup>61</sup> Lakić, Mladen. “Ako si žena, ne smiješ plesati: ‘Prjavo izvještavanje’ o političarkama”. Raskrinkavanje. 18.1.2021. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/ako-si-zena-ne-smijes-plesati-prjavo-izvjestavanje-o-politicarkama> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>62</sup> Šehović, Nerma. “Recikliranje ‘satire’: Maca Diskrecija nije se kandidovala ni na izborima ove godine”. Raskrinkavanje. 6.9.2022. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/recikliranje-satire-maca-diskrecija-nije-se-kandidovala-ni-na-izborima-ove-godine> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

International political propaganda through GiD in the database predominantly pertains to Russia and/or its invasion of Ukraine. In February 2021, Raskrinkavanje debunked a fabricated claim that Russian President Vladimir Putin had sanctioned a law permitting Russian women, who were victims of attempted rape, to kill their attackers without any legal repercussions.<sup>63</sup> This entirely fictitious claim has been circulated by numerous news outlets in our region since 2016 and has resurfaced on multiple occasions, despite being debunked by several fact-checking organizations. It falsely glorifies Putin as a leader who supports such extreme measures for protecting women. This is not the first time Raskrinkavanje has debunked disinformation about Russian men valiantly protecting women from sexual violence. In an article from 2018 that isn't included in the sample, Raskrinkavanje debunked a story published by several media outlets from the region, about Russian men attacking a group of Middle Eastern migrants that were harassing a group of girls in a nightclub in the city of Murmansk.<sup>64</sup> This entirely made-up story was published in the media along with comparisons between the Russian men and men from Western Europe, who are depicted as weak and emasculated for “not defending their women.” This is an example that shows that these anti-gender narratives about *machismo* have been present for years in our region, just like in other places across the world.

Another instance from the GiD Database exploiting the theme of sexual violence against Russian women occurred in October 2022. A disturbing screenshot from a pornographic film depicting the sexual assault of a woman by a group of soldiers was shared on social media. The screenshot was altered to include the Ukrainian army symbol on the actors' “soldier” uniforms and was disseminated with the claim that it depicted Ukrainian soldiers raping a Russian woman, claiming the image was found on a phone belonging to a deceased Ukrainian

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<sup>63</sup> Džebo, Semir. “Putin nije odobrio zakon na osnovu kojeg bi žrtve silovanja imale pravo ubiti počinitelja”. Raskrinkavanje.1.2.2021. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/putin-nije-odobrio-zakon-na-osnovu-kojeg-bi-zrtve-silovanja-imale-pravo-ubiti-pocinitelja> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

<sup>64</sup> Cvjetičanin, Tijana. “Od lažne prijave do ‘tumačenja genetskog koda’: Obračun sa migrantima koji se nikada nije desio”. Raskrinkavanje. 22.2.2018. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/od-lazne-prijave-do-tumacenja-genetskog-koda-obracun-sa-migrantima-koji-se-nikada-nije-desio> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

soldier.<sup>65</sup> This represents a deeply troubling attempt to use the issue of sexual violence against women as a tool for war propaganda.

It is notable that in these examples of international political propaganda through GiD in our region, sexual violence, its perpetrators, and the women who experience it, are depicted in a significantly different light than in local cases. When we compare these aforementioned examples of sexual violence related discourse and the public discourse and media reporting on accusations that Danijela Štajnfeld brought against Branislav Lečić, we can see that in the context of sexual violence being exploited for propaganda purposes women are depicted as helpless victims, perpetrators as nameless “others” and local men as valiant saviors. Sexual violence itself is used as an instrument to convey a specific political or ideological message. When discussing accusations of sexual violence in a local context, without broader ideological or political implications, and when alleged perpetrator and victim are both familiar faces, public discourse focuses on dissecting the victim’s statements, actions and behaviours, perpetuating misogynistic stereotypes about women, and emphasizing the alleged perpetrator’s accomplishments, likeability, and success. Sexual violence itself is minimized, denied or misrepresented. It is a somewhat similar pattern to the one that was seen in Italian media reporting on sexual violence, as described in the NewsMavens article.

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<sup>65</sup> Karađuz, Amar. “Slika ukrajinskih vojnika koji siluju ženu ‘ukradena’ iz pornografskog filma”. Raskrinkavanje. 12.10.2022. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/slika-ukrajinskih-vojnika-koji-siluju-zenu-ukradena-iz-pornografskog-filma> (accessed 11.2.2024.)

# Conclusion

This study uncovered the presence of GiD in the online information landscape of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the wider region, including both disinformation concerning women and LGBTIQ individuals and groups. GiD comprised almost 4% of all the fact-checks conducted by Raskrinkavanje in this time period. As mentioned in the Methodology section, this sample was identified based on the Raskrinkavanje methodology which focuses exclusively on disinformation content. For future research, it would be useful to develop a media monitoring methodology that would more precisely determine what portion of the total media texts about LGBTIQ and women constitutes disinformation.

The study also confirmed that the identified GiD follows globally recognized patterns of anti-gender discourse. A total of 57.7% of GiD pertained to women, while the remaining 42.3% was related to LGBTIQ. GiD served dual purposes: it was employed to undermine individuals from specific marginalized communities by using the underlying conservative societal presumptions about gender roles and sexual norms, and it also utilized gendered narratives to further political, social, or economic agendas.

Women and LGBTIQ individuals or groups were the targets of disinformation in just over half of the scrutinized fact-checks, and in slightly less than half, GiD was used as a mechanism against them. LGBTIQ were instrumentalized more frequently than women; inversely, women were more often the direct targets of disinformation compared to LGBTIQ. Common overlapping of categories illustrates how GiD can be used for multiple purposes and with multiple goals in mind at once.

The study indicates that social media and traditional online media outlets are almost equally responsible for disseminating GiD, with social media being a marginally more frequent source of incorrect claims in the analyzed sample. Additionally, it was observed that the majority of GiD instances originated locally. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution, given that they were not made in a controlled environment but rely on a sample of analyses conducted by Raskrinkavanje, whose data collection methodology can influence the observed trends.

The study indicates a possible seasonality in the spread of disinformation, with periods surrounding specific events, such as Pride marches, showing a higher propensity for generating disinformation. However, further monitoring is required to conclusively determine the patterns of this seasonality and how the spread of disinformation (GiD) evolves over time.

Given the significant portion of disinformation aimed at serving political objectives, it is reasonable to predict that electoral periods will see an increased volume of GiD. With 2024 being an election year in Bosnia-Herzegovina—and notably a year with a high number of elections globally—the insights from this study could empower human rights groups to better predict disinformation trends and address them more effectively.

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