

# **SAFE DIGITAL SPACES FOR WOMEN AND ACTIVISTS AND FOR DEMOCRACIES**

The Role of the G7 in 2026,  
under the French Presidency



# SUMMARY

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In its [Declaration](#), the W7 identifies the backlash as a major factor contributing to global imbalance, which must be addressed as such by the French G7 presidency. Masculinism is both a product of and a catalyst for this backlash. It lies at the intersection of several issues that must be addressed jointly: online violence, digital security and sovereignty, disinformation, the rise of the far right and populism, and the destabilization of democracies.

This W7 brief offers a framework for analyzing and understanding the mechanisms of masculinism, its challenges, and its manifestations, both online and offline. It then identifies a series of levers to be activated by the G7 countries that have committed to combating the backlash.

## MASCULINISM AND BACKLASH

Masculinism is an ideology that promotes male domination over women in all spheres of society: political, economic, and sexual. Masculinist discourse glorifies a hegemonic, virile, and heteronormative masculinity. It is hate speech that incites violence against women and LGBTQIA+ people. There is ideological overlap between this discourse and far-right discourse, where misogyny, LGBTphobia, and racism sometimes converge. Masculinism is not new in itself. But this discourse is gaining visibility amid a global backlash against women's rights, and its growing influence is evident in the political agendas of the most conservative parties.

## MASCULINIST DISCOURSE AND SEXIST CYBERVIOLENCE ON THE CONTINUUM OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In its digital form, masculinism is a form of sexist cyberviolence. This online violence is not isolated or ad hoc. It is part of a continuum of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) that occurs both online and offline. Combating this violence therefore requires, above all, addressing the underlying causes of SGBV in our societies: power dynamics between men and women, patriarchal norms, gender inequalities, and male domination. Women are the primary victims of online violence. The risk is higher for women who hold public office, are involved in politics or community organizations, for women of color, and for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Acts of online violence are not a series of isolated incidents, but are designed to keep women and LGBTQIA+ people in a subordinate position by reminding them of the risks associated with engaging in the digital public sphere.

# THE RISE OF HATE SPEECH AND ONLINE VIOLENCE AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BIG TECH

Technology is not neutral. It reflects our societies, in this case, patriarchal societies, and reproduces the biases, inequalities, and violence perpetuated within them, sometimes even amplifying them. They have an “underlying gendered structure”, in which the male standard is held up as the universal norm. Digital tools, performance criteria and algorithms are currently majoritarily designed by and for men, in Western contexts. The algorithms that govern the visibility of online content are designed in environments with little diversity; they reproduce and amplify the sexist and discriminatory biases of our societies. They contribute to silencing the voices of women and LGBTQIA+ people while promoting the virality of hateful content directed at them. At the same time, feminist content and content related to sexual and reproductive rights is subject to excessive moderation and shadow bans. Additionally, automated moderation systems, which rely largely on data in English, still struggle to handle certain dialects or hybrid linguistic practices (i.e. Arabic and French), which can lead to inconsistent moderation across different regions of the world.

Gender bias embedded in algorithmic systems is also evident in the development of generative artificial intelligence tools, some of whose features make it possible to generate or manipulate images of people without their consent. These practices disproportionately affect women and LGBTQIA+ individuals and can expose them to physical, domestic, or community-based violence. Image-based abuse (IBA), whether based on authentic or synthetic content, thus constitutes an emerging form of gender-based violence that is insufficiently addressed by existing legislation and too often tolerated by platforms.

Since Elon Musk’s acquisition of Twitter, the responsibility of Big Tech has become even more glaring. Today, it is no longer a matter of Big Tech’s unwillingness to regulate online content or protect women, but rather a deliberate intent to cause harm, particularly in the case of X, with a self-proclaimed alignment with anti-gender ideology and the European far right.

# A THREAT TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS, AND TO DEMOCRACIES MORE BROADLY

Recent years have seen a surge in sexist rhetoric and cyberviolence, as well as anti-rights discourse online<sup>1</sup>. 84% of cyberviolence victims are women<sup>2</sup>. Girls and teenage girls are also particularly affected by harassment on social media, which peaks when they are between the ages of 14 and 16<sup>3</sup>.

By creating a climate of intimidation and violence (sometimes including the glorification of rape and murder<sup>4</sup>), these acts have serious psychological and even physical consequences for survivors. According to Plan International's 2020 "Free to Be Online" report, out of 14,000 girls and young women surveyed across 31 countries, 58% reported having been harassed online<sup>5</sup>. The consequences of this online violence are manifold:

- Silencing these individuals: 1 in 5 girls thus stops interacting on social media<sup>6</sup>.
- Victims of online harassment and online sexual violence are more likely to face mental health issues, lose self-confidence, and see their activism stifled by systematic acts of intimidation.
- The continuum of online and in-person violence: the normalization of online harassment and violence then leads to these same harassers taking their actions offline (street harassment, gender-based violence, assault, which can escalate to rape and femicide).

Online SGBV is exacerbated for people who face multiple forms of discrimination, hence the importance of an intersectional approach. In addition to discrimination based on gender and age, there is discrimination related to nationality, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. According to the same Plan International 2020 report, 37% of girls who identify as belonging to an ethnic minority, 14% of girls with disabilities, and 42% of girls identifying as LGBTQIA+ who have experienced harassment report having been harassed for these reasons<sup>7</sup>.

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1. According to a 2020 study by Plan International, of the 14,000 girls and young women surveyed in 31 countries, more than half had experienced online harassment and abuse, with one in four feeling physically threatened. Report: The State of the World's Girls 2020: Free to Be Online, Plan International, 2020.
2. 2026 Report on the State of Sexism in France: The Masculinist Threat, High Council for Equality between Women and Men, 2026.
3. Report: The State of the World's Girls 2020: Free to Be Online, Plan International, 2020.
4. 2026 Report on the State of Sexism in France: The Masculinist Threat, HCE, 2026; [Study "Toxic Twitter – A Toxic Place for Women,"](#) Amnesty International, 2018.
5. Report: Free to Be Online, Plan International, 2020.
6. Report: Between Truth and Falsehood, Plan International, 2021.
7. Report: Free to Be Online, Plan International, 2020.

85% of LGBTQIA+ individuals and 71% of people of color report having experienced cyberviolence, compared to 41% of the general French population<sup>8</sup>, and 56% of victims of sexual and gender-based cyberviolence are minors<sup>9</sup>. Thus, 42% of girls who identify as LGBTQIA+ and who have been harassed reported having already been harassed for this reason<sup>10</sup>.

Furthermore, disinformation and misinformation, facilitated by AI, limit access to reliable information for girls and adolescents of all backgrounds. Yet the digital space is a major source of information for them, particularly regarding sexual and reproductive rights, especially in contexts where these topics are taboo and where they do not have the opportunity to discuss them freely at home or at school. False information can thus have profound consequences for their health and future, as well as for their ability to participate in civic and political life and their overall well-being<sup>11</sup>.

In addition to these consequences for the rights and health of women and girls, the deregulation of digital spaces poses a threat to democracies. According to the HCE, masculinism constitutes a national and international security issue<sup>12</sup>. It is the responsibility of states and platforms to ensure safe online spaces, free from gender-based stereotypes and violence. The rise of masculinist discourse also goes hand in hand with the rise of disinformation, conspiracy theories, and concepts of “alternative truths” that make democratic debate impossible. Additionally, some conservative States amplify masculinist movements’ narratives, exploit them and incorporate them into mechanisms of political control. They use digital platforms as a tool for monitoring and repressing citizens, particularly within legal frameworks that criminalise abortion or homosexual relationships. This leads to activists self-censoring online and ultimately contributes to restricting civic space and weakening feminist counter-powers. The complicity of Big Tech contributes to the silencing of women and LGBTQIA+ people, while giving increased visibility to the far right and masculinist discourse.

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8. Feminists Against Cyberbullying - IPSOS, “Cyberviolence and Cyberbullying: An Overview of a Widespread Phenomenon,” November 2021, a survey conducted by IPSOS among 1,008 French adults aged 18 and older.

9. Feminists Against Cyberbullying - Point de Contact - #StopFisha, “The Major Survey on Sexist and Sexual Cyberviolence,” 2025, a survey of 2,136 respondents.

10. Report: The State of the World’s Girls 2020: Free to Be Online, Plan International, 2020.

11. Report: Toward Inclusive Digital Education for Girls and Young Women, Plan International and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, October 2021.

12. 2026 Report on the State of Sexism in France: The Masculinist Threat, High Council for Equality between Women and Men, 2026.

# THERE ARE MEASURES THE G7 MUST TAKE

There are regulatory frameworks, offering varying degrees of protection, on this issue at the UN level (Agreed Conclusions of CSW 69), the European level (Istanbul Convention, Digital Services Act, Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, etc.), and in various national implementations. We must commit the necessary political will and financial resources to these frameworks and, where appropriate, supplement them. Ten years ago, women launched #MeToo. They seized upon a digital tool: Twitter, in an environment that was already hostile to them at the time, and turned it into a global sounding board to denounce sexual and gender-based violence.

As stated in the W7 Declaration, the French G7 presidency must be a moment of clarification. This applies equally; and with particular urgency, to digital issues. With the support of several states, including within the G7, Big Tech leaders are currently waging an offensive against the regulation of digital spaces. By misusing the right to “freedom of expression,” they are hindering political efforts to protect women’s rights online. These rights are thus caught up in a broader power struggle that intertwines digital sovereignty and security, economic interests, and ideological battles.





In this context, the G7 must not, at the very least, give an advantage to those who advocate for the deregulation of digital spaces and the proliferation of sexist discourse and cyberviolence. States that have committed; whether openly or not, to combating the backlash must take action to implement the following measures:

## 01

### Strengthening the legal framework and support systems









Strengthen the legal, policy, and budgetary arsenal for combating sexual and gender-based and violence online and offline, to address its structural causes, by adopting an intersectional approach, enacting laws against violence against women and girls that hold social media platforms and other third-party online platforms accountable, and ensuring the effective implementation of these laws and policies by all relevant authorities (police, the judiciary, and the public prosecutor’s office).

-  For States that have ratified it, implement the Istanbul Convention, and ensure that legislative frameworks for combating SGBV refer to and apply to all forms of violence committed online, in accordance with GREVIO's recommendation.
-  Strengthen the training and expertise of national justice system personnel (courts, police departments, etc.) to receive complaints, handle offenses, support victims, and ensure the protection of everyone in the digital sphere. These professionals must specialize in cyberviolence, gender-based and sexual violence, and discrimination on digital platforms. National courts must be able to address issues of cyberviolence against women and LGBTQIA+ individuals as they would any other violation of fundamental rights.
-  Allocate 0.1% of the national GDP to combating gender-based and sexual violence and increase overall funding for public policies on gender equality and for feminist organizations and movements.
-  Coordinate multi-stakeholder responses to combat violence and the rise of online masculinism, by linking the fight against gender-based and sexual violence, the protection of digital rights, the fight against terrorism, and prevention and protection measures for civil society actors.

## 02

### Education on equality and combating misinformation






-  Ensure access to reliable and secure information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, particularly abortion, by establishing a criminal offense for digital obstruction and promoting tools for accessing information (e.g., the Planning national toll-free number, 3919...).
-  Place comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) at the heart of public policies to promote equality and respect, to recognize and respect consent, and to combat sexual and gender-based violence, discrimination, school bullying, and inequalities, which exist both in real life and online. Integrate CSE with comprehensive media literacy programs, particularly digital media literacy, to foster the development of critical thinking, address the specific needs of girls and young women, and promote gender equality.

-  Create spaces for interdisciplinary reflection and dialogue to strengthen the integration between public policies to combat gender-based and sexual violence and public digital policies, paying particular attention to the rise of masculinist discourse online and its specific characteristics. These spaces should bring together experts from the research community (particularly the social sciences), feminist activists and female developers, representatives from government ministries, and digital companies.
-  Document the rise of masculinist discourse, which is an extension of misogyny and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment and an integral part of the continuum of SGBV, as well as the multi-stakeholder anti-rights movements organizing offline, and fund research into its definition and analysis, its causes, and its consequences. This data and these studies would make it possible to clearly identify masculinist content and actors, and to expand the body of literature on cyberviolence against women and LGBTQIA+ individuals.
-  Invest in public awareness campaigns on the rights and recognition of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals and gender equality, as well as against cyberviolence and persistent stereotypes, targeting the general public.
-  Strengthen training for media professionals on how to address SGBV and sexist cyberviolence, for example through European funding and support from community-based media organizations.

## 03







### Regulation of Big Tech

-  Continue efforts to regulate Big Tech by ensuring transparency regarding the use of personal data and the algorithms used for content moderation and by analysing the discriminatory gender norms generated by these algorithms, as well as initiatives to strengthen fundamental digital freedoms (encryption, online privacy, etc.).
-  Make moderation tools public, disclose content visibility criteria and how algorithms work, so that users know what constitutes objectionable content and how moderators act to protect fundamental rights.
-  Require Big Tech companies to make public their reporting mechanisms and data usage practices, as well as the levels of violence against women and LGBTQIA+ individuals on their digital platforms.

-  Tax Big Tech companies based on the “polluter pays” principle to fund efforts to combat sexist speech and cyberviolence.
-  Promote interoperability among platforms and reporting mechanisms, which is the ability for these different systems to communicate with one another. Harassment can occur across multiple services simultaneously, yet there is currently no simple way to report the same content on multiple platforms at the same time. Victims’ efforts must be coordinated so that platforms do not pass the buck, and so that evidence is preserved and processed simultaneously.
-  Require protective default settings, such as preemptive removal of content flagged as non consensual intimate imagery, systematic display of a consent warning message when a person uploads media content featuring another person, limits on mass mentions, detection of clusters of attacks, a coordinated anti-harassment filter, “friction” mechanisms... Platforms can and must slow down virality to protect people.
-  Require digital platforms to establish robust mechanisms for collaborating with victims of image-based abuse (IBA): procedures for the rapid removal and removal of content published without consent, whether authentic or generated by artificial intelligence, including copies and derivative content; dedicated and accessible points of contact; and the preservation of evidence for legal purposes. Impose deterrent financial penalties on platforms that fail to comply with these obligations within the specified timeframes.
-  Strictly regulate synthetic content generation tools to prevent the creation of non-consented content, that disproportionately targets women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, whether they produce sexual content (for example: Grok, which allows users to “nudify” photos of women) or not, since the mere dissemination of a manipulated image can expose a person to physical, domestic, or community violence. Regarding tools for generating non-consensual synthetic sexual content: ban the future development and marketing of such tools and require AI providers to incorporate technical safeguards preventing these uses from the outset (safety by design), as recommended, for example, by the European Parliament.

# 04

## Promoting feminist expertise and supporting feminist organizations and movements

-  Supporting the development of alternative platforms and applications that are independent of Big Tech, and involving experts, associations, and activists in the design and development of these alternatives.
-  Strengthen support for feminist digital platforms and those supporting victims of gender-based and sexual violence (for example: initiatives led by collectives of feminist developers or aimed at increasing the visibility of women and LGBTQIA+ people online).
-  Increase or, at a minimum, maintain international solidarity budgets to support the collective action of activist networks and feminist organizations, as well as projects led by feminist civil society aimed, for example, at training women and girls in digital professions.
-  Establish protective mechanisms to defend freedom of association, which is under widespread attack through shadow bans, the suppression of feminist or LGBTQIA+ content, and other means...
-  Support feminist and LGBTQIA+ organizations and activists, including those led by young people, so they can participate in decisions and initiatives to combat online gender-based violence, alongside legal professionals, researchers, digital workers, and policymakers.
-  Promote the inclusion of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals in key positions in the digital and technology sectors. This support must aim for a fundamental transformation of digital governance frameworks, recognising gender as a structural factor in understanding technologies and how they operate.
-  Strengthen offline and online protection for feminist activists and human rights defenders, drawing inspiration from the work of feminist networks and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders: documenting online violence against them, building their capacity for digital self-defense, ensuring end-to-end encryption of communications, and strengthening their overall security (physical, digital, financial, freedom of expression, etc.).

