

Citizens' perceptions of hate speech during the parliamentary elections of 28 September 2025

ANALYSIS

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Data from monitoring carried out by the Promo-LEX Association from 2018 to the present has demonstrated not only that hate speech is a frequent phenomenon in the Republic of Moldova, but also that the process of prevention and combating it has required legislative changes¹, and after 2022 requires the streamlining of the reporting – documentation – sanctioning cycle.

As we highlighted in the latest hate speech monitoring report², this type of speech is increasingly being used in combination with manipulative messages and disinformation generated by both real people and algorithms. In the period between the 2024 presidential elections and the start of the election campaign for the 2025 parliamentary elections (September 2024 – August 2025), a process of normalisation of hate speech took place, and the autumn 2025 election campaign began in a public and online space already steeped in hate, intolerance and misinformation.

Data from monitoring carried out by the Promo-LEX Association since 2018 shows that the authorities' response to hate speech is insufficient compared to the number of cases identified by civil society. Despite the actions taken by the General Police Inspectorate (GPI), the Audiovisual Council (AC) and other institutions, the number of complaints is declining. This is why research into public perceptions of hate speech during last autumn's parliamentary elections provides an important basis for analysing and evaluating the actions taken and those planned to prevent and combat hate speech both during and outside election periods.

This analysis was carried out based on data from the sociological study 'Citizens' perceptions of the quality of elections and the functioning of democratic processes in the Republic of Moldova'³.

¹ Promo-LEX Association, [Analytical study](#) on the documentation and administrative and criminal prosecution under the new provisions on hate speech, p. 9, 2023, last accessed: 15 April 2026.

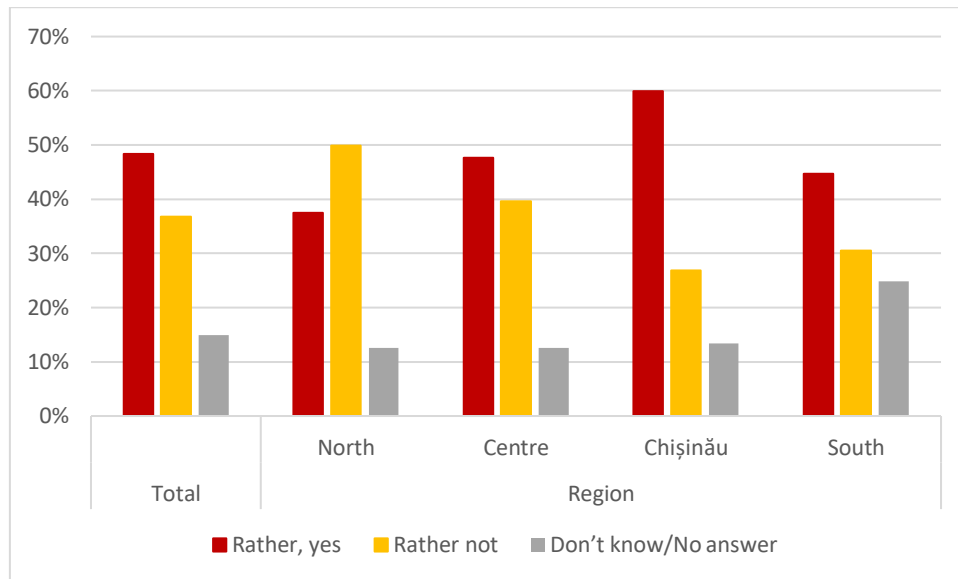
² Promo-LEX Association, [Monitoring report](#) "Hate speech and incitement to discrimination in the public and online sphere in the Republic of Moldova during the election period for the parliamentary elections of 28 September 2025", last accessed: 15 April 2026.

³ [The sociological study](#) "Citizens' perceptions of the quality of elections and the functioning of democratic processes in the Republic of Moldova" was conducted between 22 February and 12 March 2026, on a sample of 1,226 respondents aged 18 and over. The research was commissioned by the Promo-LEX Association and carried out by Ates Research Group in 95 urban and rural localities across the Republic of Moldova (excluding the Transnistrian region and the diaspora) and has a margin of error of $\pm 2.8\%$.

Approximately 50% of respondents believe that hate speech was used in the 2025 parliamentary elections, but over 45% were unable to define what it is.

According to the sociological study “Citizens’ perceptions regarding the quality of elections and the functioning of democratic processes in the Republic of Moldova”, 48% of respondents believe that hate speech and/or incitement to discrimination were used in the parliamentary elections of September 2025. Most of them live in Chişinău municipality (59.9%) and the Centre region (47.7%). Approximately 37% do not believe that hate speech was used: 50% of them live in the North region (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Has public hate speech or speech inciting discrimination been used?



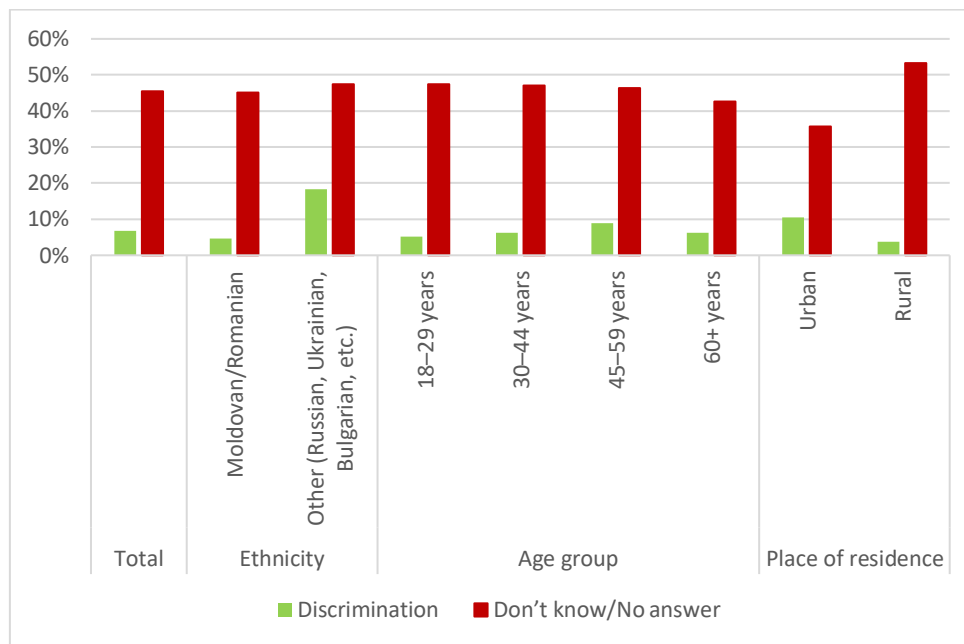
However, 45.5% did not answer or did not know how to answer the question ‘What do you think constitutes hate speech?’. At the same time, only 6.7% of those who answered this question stated that hate speech means “discrimination”, an answer that is closer to the definition of what constitutes hate speech in national legislation⁴ and that provided by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe⁵ (see Figure 2). Of these, approximately 9% are aged between 45 and 59, 10.5% live in urban areas, and over 18% are of an ethnicity other than Romanian.

A further 15.3% of respondents defined hate speech using terms or concepts that are more likely to be causes and/or consequences of hate speech: negative attitude, aggression, social division and hatred towards someone. Over 5% of respondents associated hate speech with disinformation, manipulation, pressure on voters and foreign interference.

⁴ The [Audiovisual Media Services Code](#) of the Republic of Moldova, Article 1: Definitions, defines ‘hate speech’ as ‘all forms of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify hatred, violence or discrimination against a person or a group of persons, or that humiliate them or infringe upon their honour and dignity on the basis of their personal characteristics or status, whether real or attributed, such as “race”, colour, ethnic, national or social origin, nationality, sex, gender, language, religion or religious beliefs, political opinions, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, health status, age, marital status, migrant or asylum seeker status”, last accessed: 15 April 2026.

⁵ Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)16](#) on combating hate speech, point 2, p. 7, last accessed: 15 April 2026.

Figure 2. What do you think constitutes hate speech?

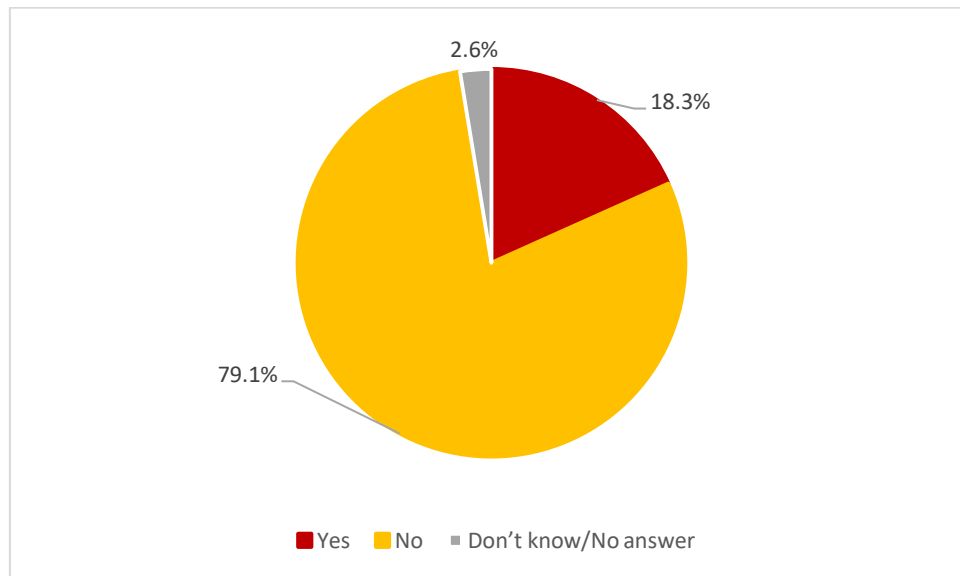


These data show that approximately 5 in 10 people in the Centre region believe that hate speech was used in the 2025 parliamentary elections, which is the highest figure among the three regions where the study's data were collected. Furthermore, the data reveals that, at national level, although the majority of citizens perceive that hate speech was used in the 2025 parliamentary elections, only 67 out of 1,000 people were able to define the phenomenon using a term that comes closer to its basic definition. In other words, there is a limited understanding of what constitutes hate speech, and this is predominantly found among people living in urban areas. This can also be explained by the fact that, from 2018 to the present, public authorities have not organised information and awareness-raising campaigns on the consequences of hate speech, nor to promote existing national mechanisms for reporting and sanctioning hate speech.

Over 18% of the population was directly affected by hate speech during the 2025 parliamentary elections.

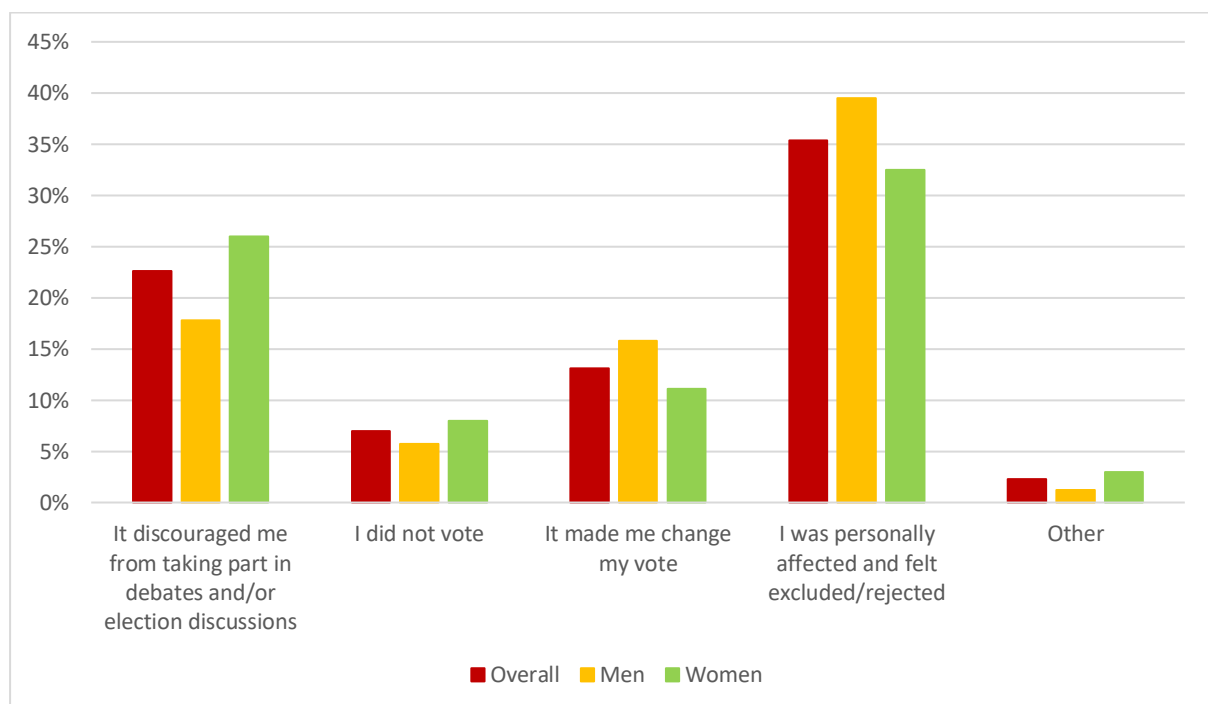
18.3% of respondents stated that they had been affected by hate speech generated and disseminated during the parliamentary elections in September 2025 (see Figure 3). Of these, 35.4% stated that hate speech had affected them personally and made them feel rejected/excluded. This response option was selected by a higher percentage of people of an ethnic background other than Romanian (52.9%) and those living in the South region (48.4%), (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. During the September 2025 election campaign, did hate speech influence or affect you personally?



A further 22.6% of respondents stated that hate speech during the parliamentary elections in autumn 2025 discouraged them from participating in electoral debates and/or discussions, and of these, 26% were women. At the same time, 13% of respondents changed their voting preference, and 7% stated that they did not vote because of the hate speech (see Figure 4). Of those who changed their voting preference and/or felt excluded, the majority were men – 15.8% and 39.5% respectively.

Figure 4. How did hate speech influence/affect you?



The study data show that, during the 2025 parliamentary elections, approximately 2 in 10 people were directly affected by hate speech. Most women were discouraged from participating in

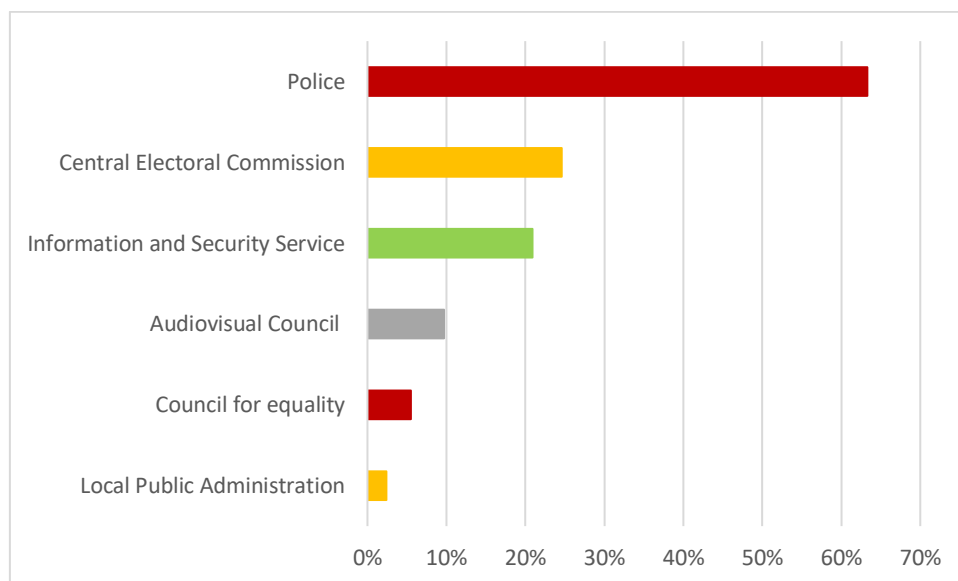
electoral debates and discussions and/or did not take part in the elections because of hate speech. Most men changed their voting choice and/or felt excluded/rejected because of hate speech.

Personal perceptions of hate speech indicate that people from different social groups feel affected by intolerant messages, but are unable to identify these messages as hate speech. This explains why, of the more than 48% of respondents who stated that hate speech was used in the 2025 parliamentary elections, fewer than 10% were able to associate hate speech with discrimination. These data also confirm the finding made by the Promo-LEX Association following its monitoring of hate speech between 21 July and 19 October 2025. According to the Association, in the absence of complaints regarding violations of Article 52, para. (3) of the Contravention Code (CC), the slight increase in complaints regarding violations of Article 69, para. (3) of the CC could indicate that either victims of hate speech are more likely to recognise an insult than hate speech itself, or that, in the absence of sanctions for the use of hate speech during the election period, they preferred a lesser penalty that would actually be enforced.

Only 9.7% of respondents are aware that hate speech can be reported to the Audiovisual Council.

At national level, the GPI and the AC are the institutions responsible for preventing and combating hate speech. According to the survey data, 73% of respondents know, in theory, where cases of hate speech can be reported (the Police and the Audiovisual Council). Of these, only 9.7% stated that hate speech can be reported to the AC (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Where can a case of hate speech be reported?

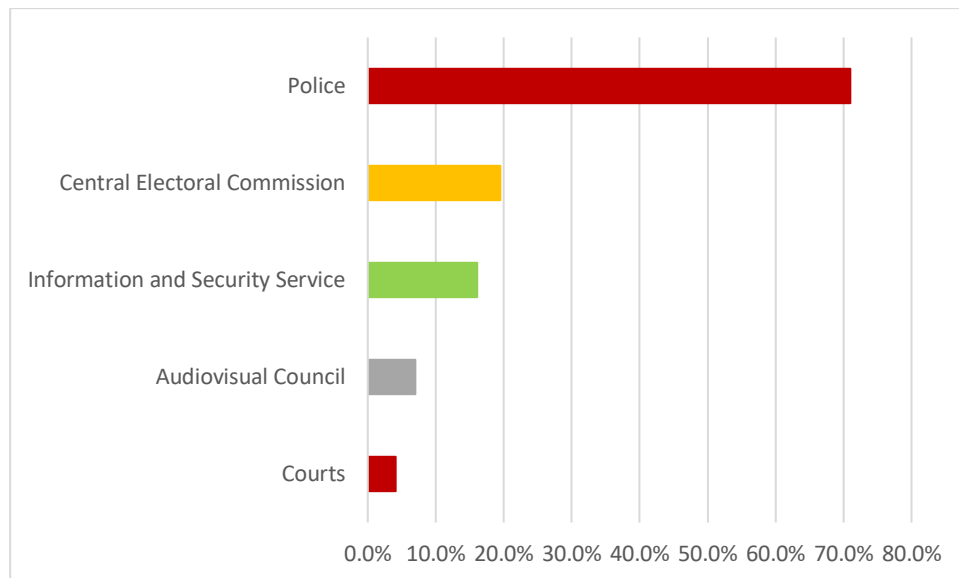


Among those who indicated the Police as the institution to which hate speech can be reported, the data show that there are no significant differences between respondents in terms of region and place of residence, level of education, age or sex/gender. At the same time, most people who indicated the AC as the institution to which hate speech can be reported are aged between 45 and 59 (12.2%) and live in urban areas (12.6%).

According to the study's data, 78% of respondents stated that the police, the AC and the courts can sanction hate speech. At the same time, however, 45.5% of respondents believe that hate speech can also be reported to the Information and Security Service (ISS) and the Central

Electoral Commission (CEC), whilst 35.6% believe that these two institutions have the power to sanction this type of speech (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Who can sanction the use of hate speech?



Although under national legislation, hate speech can be reported to the Police, the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the AC, the survey data show that over 60% of citizens recognise the Police as the institution to which a case of hate speech can be reported. This percentage is likely due to the public perception of the Police as one of the key institutions in maintaining public order. According to data⁶ from the monitoring carried out by the Promo-LEX Association, following the amendment of the legal framework on the sanctioning of hate speech in 2022, the number of complaints regarding the use of hate speech during election periods submitted to the General Police Inspectorate fell from 16 during the 2023 general local election period to zero complaints during the autumn 2025 election period.

Although 9.7% of respondents stated that hate speech can be reported to the AC, only 7% believe that this institution has the legal powers to sanction hate speech. At the same time, according to monitoring data from 21 July to 19 October 2025, compared to the 2024 election campaign, when the AC identified no cases of discrimination or hate speech following two inspections, during the 2025 election campaign, the AC recorded 24 cases of the broadcast of discriminatory content.

The Prosecutor’s Office, which has powers to investigate cases of hate speech inciting violent acts on prejudice-motivation under the Criminal Code, was not mentioned as one of the institutions to which complaints can be made. The CEC and the ISS are among the top three institutions which, according to public perception, can be notified and can sanction hate speech. These findings can be explained by the fact that during the election period, the activities of these two institutions were much more visible, with the CEC being the institution responsible for organising the elections and the SIS being the institution that issued public statements regarding external interference in the elections.

⁶ Promo-LEX Association, [Monitoring report](#) “Hate speech and incitement to discrimination in the public sphere and online in the Republic of Moldova during the election period for the parliamentary elections of 28 September 2025”, p. 116, last accessed: 15 April 2026.

In conclusion, the study's data reveal the following:

1. One in two people believe that hate speech was used in the parliamentary elections of 28 September 2025. Most of these people are from the Centre region.
2. The limited understanding of what constitutes hate speech is partly due to the lack of national information and awareness-raising campaigns on hate speech and other forms of intolerance.
3. The higher number of people in the Centre region who believe there is an understanding of what constitutes hate speech may be due to the greater number of activities/events and/or information in the public sphere and online regarding the phenomenon of hate speech compared to the North and South regions.
4. Hate speech is perceived by just over 18% of the population as the cause of the marginalisation and civic and political disengagement of the people targeted, regardless of sex/gender. A larger number of women stated that hate speech during the parliamentary elections in the autumn of 2025 discouraged them from participating in electoral debates and/or discussions. At the same time, more men stated that they had changed their voting choice or felt excluded because of hate speech.
5. The public perception of the Police as the main institution to which hate speech can be reported and which can sanction such cases is due to its public image as the institution responsible for public order, and not necessarily because of its actual work in preventing and combating hate speech. During the 2025 election period, the number of complaints regarding hate speech during election periods addressed to the Police fell to zero. From 2022 to the present, the General Inspectorate of Police has not organised any information campaigns regarding the consequences of hate speech and the existing reporting mechanism.
6. The Audiovisual Council is known as the institution responsible for preventing and combating hate speech in linear and non-linear audiovisual media by a small number of people, particularly in urban areas and the Central region, despite the increase in sanctions imposed by it during the 2025 election campaign for allowing forms of discrimination.

Recommendations:

The Government of the Republic of Moldova

To develop and regularly implement awareness-raising and information campaigns on hate speech and its consequences at national level, both online and offline, involving all relevant institutional actors (the General Police Inspectorate, the General Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the Ministry of Education and Research, etc.), human rights authorities (the Council for quality and the Ombudsman's Office), civil society organisations and the media.

The General Police Inspectorate

To promote the existing mechanism for reporting cases of hate speech and/or incitement to discrimination to the GPI, in accordance with the provisions of the Contravention Law, amongst the general public, throughout the year and particularly before and during election periods.

The Audiovisual Council

To promote the existing mechanism for reporting cases of hate speech to the Audiovisual Council, in accordance with the provisions of the Audiovisual Media Service Code, amongst the general public, particularly in rural areas of the North and South regions.