

Resolution 2646 (2026)¹

Violence and hate speech against politicians: a threat to democracy

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Violence against politicians is alarmingly on the rise in many Council of Europe member and observer States. The Parliamentary Assembly unequivocally condemns all forms of violence against politicians and reaffirms that violence has no place in democracy.
2. Representative democracy can only be achieved if political candidates are allowed to campaign safely and peacefully and if elected officials are free to carry out their duties with integrity, based on public conduct that is in the interest of the community they represent, and if they are all protected from any kind of harm. Any violent attack on politicians, regardless of their political affiliation, should be considered as an attack on democracy itself.
3. Politicians at all levels of government, and from all political backgrounds, can be victims of violence: political candidates, party members, elected officials or policy makers with an institutional role. Their relatives and associates are often affected also.
4. Urgent action must be taken to prevent and counter violence against politicians, as it fosters an atmosphere of fear that has a chilling effect on democratic participation in political life.
5. Politicians who experience violence may feel compelled to alter their behaviour, limit their participation in public events or reduce their engagement with constituents. They may also decide to self-censor, avoiding discussion of certain controversial issues or even changing their stance on certain policies. They may eventually decide to step back from their role or choose not to stand for re-election. Similarly, individuals who are considering entering politics may be deterred by violence; this reduces pluralism and representativeness and affects the quality of democratic processes.
6. Intimidation, threats and other forms of verbal or physical attacks can also have a considerable impact on the mental well-being of politicians, reducing their ability to work and serve the public.
7. Certain categories, including women politicians and representatives of minority groups, as well as young politicians and public officials, are disproportionately targeted, including through gender-based violence, sexual threats and misogynist, LGBTI-phobic or racist attacks. Particular attention should therefore be paid to these categories to ensure that they are not discouraged from participating in politics and to safeguard the diversity and representativeness of elected officials.
8. Citizens' disenchantment with democratic processes and institutions has been exacerbated by populist movements. At the same time, fearmongering, hate speech and dehumanising rhetoric have become normalised in public discourse. This is fuelling the political polarisation of democracies, characterised by heightened tension and animosity among groups with opposing political views. The deterioration of the political sphere creates fertile ground for violence against politicians, which could spiral out of control.

1. *Assembly debate* on 21 April 2026 (12th and 13th sittings) (see [Doc. 16363](#), report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Ms Elisabetta Gardini; and [Doc. 16382](#), opinion of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Yevheniia Kravchuk). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 21 April 2026 (13th sitting). See also [Recommendation 2305 \(2026\)](#).



9. The Assembly notes that violence against politicians can take various forms, both online and offline; it can be economic, psychological, sexual or physical in nature and can range from verbal abuse and harassment to intimidation, physical threats and attacks, and even lethal violence.

10. Online abuse against politicians includes: sustained harassment and co-ordinated attacks, such as the co-ordinated misuse of reporting mechanisms in order to silence or unjustifiably suspend politicians' accounts; threats (including anonymous threats); doxxing and other forms of unlawful disclosure of personal data; cyberstalking; impersonation; and the dissemination of manipulated or deceptive content intended to intimidate, silence or discredit politicians, including through attacks targeting their relatives or associates.

11. The Assembly is also concerned about the increasing use of deepfakes against politicians: these are audio or video recordings and images, generated or manipulated by artificial intelligence, that realistically depict people saying or doing something they did not, including the fabrication or alteration of public statements and the impersonation of politicians.

12. Acts of violence against politicians are often committed with the ultimate goal of intimidating and silencing them, forcing them to change their views, actions or policies; however, in many cases, such violence is driven simply by disrespect and hatred, without any clear objective.

13. The Assembly reiterates that robust political debate, which includes sharp criticism and satire, forms part of democratic pluralism and is protected under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5). However, threats, incitement to violence, targeted harassment and dehumanising hate speech, whether online or offline, are incompatible with a democratic society and cannot be justified under the right to freedom of expression.

14. Choosing violence over dialogue goes against all democratic principles. In a vicious circle, the increased number of episodes of violence against politicians is therefore a clear symptom of the backsliding of democracy in Europe, and at the same time one of the causes of this backsliding, since violence undermines political participation, representation and institutions, and ultimately democratic resilience.

15. The Assembly highlights that, in addition to internal societal dynamics, violence and hate speech against politicians may be the result of external interference and hybrid warfare strategies.

16. The Assembly recalls that the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe adopted in 2023 the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy, through which they committed to ensuring "full, equal and meaningful participation in political and public life for all, in particular for women and girls, free from violence, fear, harassment, hate speech and hate crime, as well as discrimination based on any ground" (Principle 10).

17. Furthermore, the Assembly reiterates the conclusions of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament held in Strasbourg on 20 and 21 March 2025, which state that violence against politicians undermines democratic processes and erodes trust in institutions. The conclusions also underline the need to make combating violence against politicians a priority in order to preserve democracy.

18. In this context, the Assembly welcomes [Recommendation 544 \(2026\)](#) and [Resolution 522 \(2026\)](#) "Preserving grassroots democracy – Tackling violence against local and regional elected representatives", adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in April 2026.

19. Considering the Council of Europe's ongoing efforts towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe, the Assembly believes that Council of Europe member and observer States should renew their social contracts with citizens through whole-of-society initiatives involving all relevant stakeholders: national governments and parliaments, local authorities and councils, the judiciary, law-enforcement agencies, civil society organisations, academic institutions, media and businesses.

20. The objective should be to restore appreciation for those who decide to dedicate their time and effort to public life, to uphold the bonds that keep democracies together and to strengthen the boundaries of dialogue, respect, tolerance and mutual understanding in order to prevent violence, thus reinforcing democratic security.

21. In line with these considerations, the Assembly calls on member and observer States of the Council of Europe to:

21.1. adopt robust legislation that recognises the different forms of violence against politicians as specific criminal offences or aggravating circumstances, and imposes tougher penalties where appropriate, in accordance with the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality, in order to demonstrate zero tolerance of this phenomenon;

- 21.2. introduce or strengthen legislation to prohibit or limit the disclosure by law-enforcement authorities of information concerning the early stages of ongoing investigations involving politicians without prior judicial authorisation;
- 21.3. identify appropriate regulatory tools to prevent social and traditional media from disseminating material that incites violence, hate speech, dehumanising discourse or other inflammatory content, while safeguarding freedom of expression and ensuring transparency, due process and effective remedies, without delegating to private actors, in an opaque manner, the power to define lawful political opinion; regulatory tools should also be identified for observing whether and how social media companies deal with shadow banning and organised blocking campaigns that hinder the free speech of politicians;
- 21.4. promote safeguards against manipulated content (including deepfakes) used to threaten, impersonate or incite violence against politicians, focusing on authenticity and transparency measures such as the clear labelling of synthetic content, provenance/traceability tools and effective and timely remedies (including notification and right of reply), under transparent procedures and independent oversight, without delegating to private actors the power to restrict lawful political opinion;
- 21.5. make human and financial resources available to law-enforcement authorities and the judiciary, to ensure that all forms of violence against politicians are investigated and prosecuted swiftly, properly and effectively, possibly through specialised units that can ensure appropriate levels of co-ordination among the relevant authorities;
- 21.6. ensure that public institutions protect all political voices equally when implementing anti-violence policies, avoiding any ideological bias, respecting freedom of speech and freedom of the press, while fully ensuring that the fight against hate speech, particularly racist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic speech, is implemented in compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights;
- 21.7. protect the physical and psychological well-being of politicians at all levels, with a particular focus on women politicians and representatives of minority groups, without creating hierarchies of protection; equal safeguards should be afforded to all political voices, ensuring their preparedness and safety by providing protection measures such as regular risk assessments, emergency buttons, alarm systems and enhanced democratic surveillance;
- 21.8. ensure that security frameworks move beyond static, rank-based measures towards dynamic, threat-informed protection protocols; specifically, for politicians targeted by aggressor States, protection must be maintained as long as the threat persists, regardless of their current official status, with particular emphasis on preventing and countering intelligence-led cross-border operations;
- 21.9. combat the targeting of politicians' private lives and families, including through doxxing and other unlawful disclosures of personal data, by strengthening rapid-response reporting channels, effective removal procedures for unlawfully disclosed personal data and law-enforcement follow-up, coupled with risk assessment measures to prevent escalation into offline violence;
- 21.10. provide politicians at all levels with capacity building on safety measures, guidelines on cybersecurity, legal and psychological support and other resources where needed;
- 21.11. strengthen debate spaces and opportunities for citizens to participate through participatory and deliberative democracy processes that include civil society organisations;
- 21.12. conduct public campaigns and implement learning programmes for civic education and media literacy in order to renew citizens' civic responsibility and trust in institutions, with a special focus on younger generations;
- 21.13. promote cross-party dialogue and a political culture based on transparency, respect and responsibility, and the rejection of violence and hate speech, across the entire political spectrum;
- 21.14. improve the collection of data at all levels in order to properly analyse the phenomenon, identify the underlying causes, categorise the different methods and means of violence, and how they target different groups, through an intersectional approach, assess how citizens respond to episodes of violence against politicians and monitor developments in order to tailor relevant legislation and policies;
- 21.15. consider establishing a mechanism to identify, track and raise awareness of specific threats or episodes of violence against politicians at local, regional and national levels.

22. The Assembly notes that politicians have a primary responsibility to set an example of civic, tolerant and democratic conduct. It therefore calls on politicians at all levels to refrain from using inflammatory, dehumanising rhetoric and from inciting violence. The Assembly also invites politicians to condemn all acts of violence, in all their forms, especially when they are perpetrated against their peers from different parties.

23. The Assembly reiterates its support for the work of the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance, as a forum for discussion specialising in measures to address hate speech.

24. Furthermore, the Assembly invites national parliaments and local councils, as well as political parties, to:

24.1. subscribe to the Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-racist and Inclusive Society, as endorsed by [Resolution 2443 \(2022\)](#) “The role of political parties in fostering diversity and inclusion: a new charter for a non-racist society”, and fully implement its provisions;

24.2. adopt dedicated codes of conduct to prevent politicians subjecting their peers from different parties to abusive behaviour;

24.3. adopt security protocols and monitoring and alert mechanisms to provide adequate psychological and physical support to their members when they are the victims of verbal or physical attacks.