

“Freaks” and Raids: A Study of Networked Harassment and Misogyny in Turkey’s Authoritarian Landscape

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This article examines how networked misogyny functions as a mechanism of authoritarian patriarchal control in Turkey's digital landscape. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 33 women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) creators and digital ethnography, I ask: How do feminist and queer creators navigate gendered digital violence under authoritarian rule, and what do their experiences reveal about the relationship among state power, patriarchal ideology, and platform governance? I argue that networked misogyny in Turkey operates as a state-enabled system of gendered punishment extending offline patriarchal control into digital spaces. Building on Manne's framework of misogyny as enforcement and Banet-Weiser's concept of popular misogyny, I show how creators face two overlapping forms of harassment: identity-based attacks (targeting who they are) and genre-based attacks (targeting what they say). These are amplified by algorithmic bias, political repression, and platform inaction, making visibility a site of punishment—yet creators resist through strategic self-presentation and protective visibility. This study contributes to scholarship on digital activism under authoritarianism by showing how patriarchy, weaponized by authoritarian states, transforms platforms into infrastructures of gendered control.

Keywords: networked misogyny, creator culture, digital activism, platform governance, authoritarianism

The *Monument Counter* (2025) serves as both digital memorial and stark indictment of Turkey's ongoing femicide crisis (Figure 1). This online platform updates the number of women killed due to domestic violence, its homepage displaying an ever-growing tally (456 in 2025 alone) alongside a dense archive of victims' names, categorized by year. Each name links to detailed accounts: how the women were killed, by whom, and whether they had sought state protection. While honoring the dead, the *Monument Counter* also exposes systemic failures, transforming raw data into a tool of advocacy that challenges public indifference

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and governmental inaction. The platform's meticulous documentation counters official underreporting, while its visibility on social media helps galvanize public outrage and mobilize digital protest. Although it has not yet resulted in comprehensive legislative reform, it plays a vital role in sustaining political pressure and shaping feminist discourse around state accountability and the right to life.

Femicide (defined as the gender-based killing of women) remains a global crisis, with the United Nations reporting that every 11 minutes, a woman or girl is murdered by a family member. In Turkey, the problem has escalated, fueled by patriarchal norms, state-backed gender oppression, and weak legal protections. Between 2002 and 2009, femicide cases surged fourteenfold (Hürriyet Daily News, 2016). By 2016, 94 women had been murdered in the first three months alone—up from 59 in the same period three years earlier.

This rising offline violence is compounded by an intensification of networked misogyny in Turkey: a systematic, digitally mediated form of harassment targeting women, feminists, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals. As Banet-Weiser (2018) notes, heightened feminist visibility often provokes a misogynistic backlash, and in Turkey, this dynamic is exacerbated by an authoritarian state that weaponizes cultural conservatism to suppress dissent. Bulut and Yoruk (2017), Savcı (2021), and Zengin (2024) have shown that attacks on feminist and queer users online are not just spontaneous cultural reactions, but are entangled with broader political agendas, including nationalism, Islamization, and patriarchal statecraft. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) regime has strategically fostered a conservative gender ideology, using formal censorship and informal digital policing, including troll armies and coordinated reporting campaigns, to undermine feminist discourse and marginalize dissent (Bulut, 2022; Yesil et al., 2017).

Feminist and queer creators in Turkey thus find themselves at the intersection of platform governance and state repression, navigating a complex ecosystem of algorithmic downranking (Duffy & Meisner, 2023), shadowbanning (Are, 2022), and political precarity, an area that remains undertheorized in scholarship on influencer and creator cultures. These conditions have roots in Turkey's long and plural history of feminist organizing from state-led modernization projects to radical, Kurdish, and Islamic feminisms (Arat, 2005; Diner & Toktas, 2010; Gole, 1996), but digital spaces now serve as both vital lifelines and contested battlegrounds. Turkey's digital repression is distinctly hybrid: a confluence of neoliberal platform dynamics, soft censorship, and overt state control, ranging from periodic website bans to digital surveillance that collectively silence without always resorting to outright prohibition (Tufekci, 2017; York, 2021). In this context, the tone and expression of Turkish digital feminism emerges from this double bind, where visibility itself is both a form of resistance and a source of risk.

reproduction, visibility, and public speech becomes central to how the regime legitimizes itself. Taken together, these frameworks reveal that patriarchal power in contemporary Turkey is specifically punitive—it does not merely subordinate women and queer people, but actively punishes those who transgress its norms, making punishment itself a technique of authoritarian governance.

Nonetheless, naming patriarchy's punitive character does not, on its own, explain the specific mechanisms through which it is enforced in digital spaces. For this, I turn to Manne's (2017) theorization of misogyny not as hatred of women per se, but as a system that polices and punishes women who violate patriarchal norms, particularly those who claim visibility, authority, or autonomy. Manne distinguishes between sexism (an ideology that naturalizes gender hierarchy) and misogyny (the enforcement arm that punishes noncompliance). Where sexism justifies the way things are, misogyny punishes those who challenge it. In Turkey's authoritarian context, misogyny operates as the mechanism through which punitive patriarchal governance is enacted: The state's restorative gender project (Kandiyoti, 2016) and its moralized regulation of women's bodies (Sarioglu, 2021) require an enforcement apparatus, and misogyny, expressed through harassment, surveillance, threats, fines, and coordinated attacks, provides it.

Banet-Weiser (2018) extends this framework by identifying popular misogyny as a cultural formation that emerges in response to feminist visibility. As feminist discourse gains traction in digital spaces, misogynistic backlash intensifies, weaponizing shame, surveillance, and violence to discipline women back into subordinate positions. In Turkey, this dynamic is exacerbated by state alignment: The AKP regime strategically amplifies misogynistic discourse to suppress dissent, framing feminist and queer activism as threats to family values and national morality. Popular misogyny thus functions as the cultural complement to institutional enforcement, where the state deploys legal and administrative punishment, popular misogyny mobilizes public hostility to achieve the same disciplinary ends.

Thus, while patriarchy names the overarching system of gendered power relations, in Turkey's current configuration, it takes a specifically punitive form, one in which women's and queer people's visibility, autonomy, and speech are not merely discouraged, but actively punished as threats to national morality and state authority (Kandiyoti, 2016; Sarioglu, 2021). Authoritarianism provides the institutional infrastructure, troll armies, vague legal statutes, and captured judiciaries through which this punitive patriarchy operates at scale. Misogyny, following Manne (2017), identifies the specific enforcement mechanisms, harassment, surveillance, threats, and coordinated attacks that translate patriarchal ideology into lived punishment. And popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser, 2018) supplies the cultural apparatus that normalizes and amplifies this enforcement beyond the state. Together, these concepts illuminate how digital harassment in Turkey functions not as isolated incidents, but as punitive patriarchal governance: a systematized form of gendered punishment in which state power, platform architectures, and cultural backlash converge to discipline those who transgress authoritarian gender norms.

Gendered and Digital Violence in Turkey's Authoritarian Landscape

Digital violence against women and LGBTQI+ individuals has emerged as a global crisis across platformed societies. Scholars have documented how online visibility increases exposure to gendered harassment and reinforces offline inequalities (Are, 2022; Banet-Weiser, 2018; boyd, 2010; Jackson et al.,

2020). Across diverse political contexts, these harms are shaped by local political regimes, cultural norms, and algorithmic infrastructures (Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Grohmann & Corpus Ong, 2024; Kaakinen et al., 2018). However, scholarship on networked harassment and platform governance has been predominantly shaped by Euro-American liberal democratic contexts. By centering Turkey, this study extends these conversations to a setting where gendered digital repression is coproduced by authoritarian governance, nationalist discourse, and platform policy, a configuration that existing frameworks do not fully account for.

As outlined above, patriarchy in Turkey is actively reproduced through discourses of family protection, motherhood, and moral virtue, with LGBTQI+ identities framed as Western imports and women's rights reconfigured as threats to the moral order. These narratives deploy patriarchal values to justify authoritarian governance, underscoring how gender functions as a governing rationality (Kandiyoti, 2016; Özkazanç, 2020).

The rise in digital violence against women and LGBTQI+ individuals in Turkey is deeply tied to the country's deepening authoritarianism. Since the early 2010s, the AKP has weaponized digital platforms to suppress feminist and queer voices. Political trolling, once grassroots, has become a state-backed operation (Bulut & Yoruk, 2017), with the AKP's troll army ("Ak-trolls") attacking activists and shaping public discourse through fear and self-censorship (Akis, 2022; Yilmaz & Kenes, 2023). Far-right and religious groups also use coordinated reporting and disinformation, especially during periods of feminist visibility such as Women's Day or Pride. These efforts echo state narratives framing feminist and LGBTQI+ activism as foreign threats to "traditional values" (Diner & Toktas, 2010).

This hostility extends to women journalists, especially those reporting on gender, Kurdish rights, or state violence. They face misogynistic abuse, threats, and coordinated trolling, often with little legal recourse (Uluk, 2021). Although harassment is punishable by law, enforcement is politicized. As Kandiyoti (2016) notes, the AKP uses gender ideology to isolate dissent, a strategy also evident in the banning of feminist and LGBTQI+ protests and rising digital censorship. Still, many women journalists persist, supported by unions and legal advocacy, yet their vulnerability differs from that of influencers or creators, who often lack institutional protection and face more diffuse digital violence: gendered surveillance, content takedowns, and algorithmic invisibility.

Among influencers and creators, the landscape is even more fragmented. Celebrities may face backlash for feminist or queer allyship, but often retain institutional protections and access to mainstream platforms. In contrast, politicized creators, particularly those identifying as queer, trans, or feminist, are more vulnerable to deplatforming, economic marginalization, and coordinated attacks. While feminist and LGBTQI+ movements in Turkey share overlapping goals around bodily autonomy, freedom of expression, and resistance to conservative gender norms, they also confront distinct challenges. Feminist creators, for instance, are often policed for challenging heteronormative family ideals, while queer creators face an additional layer of homophobic and transphobic violence rooted in religious nationalism. Disaggregating these experiences is essential to understanding how networked harassment operates as both a shared and a differentiated threat across movements and identities.

Since the early 2010s, the Turkish government has institutionalized misogyny and queerphobia through intertwined legal, discursive, and administrative mechanisms. The 2021 withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention signaled the state's formal retreat from protecting women against violence. Articles 216 and 301 of the Penal Code (Law No. 5237, 2004), which criminalize "publicly denigrating the religious values adopted by a section of the public" (Art. 216/3) and "publicly denigrating the Turkish Nation" (Art. 301/1), have been repeatedly mobilized to silence feminist and LGBTQI+ expression online. Pride marches have been banned annually since 2015, and progovernment media and the Directorate of Religious Affairs have framed queer visibility as a threat to "family values." These policies form the sociolegal scaffolding that enables digital repression: By legitimizing patriarchal and moralist discourses, they render harassment, content takedowns, and online hate speech not merely social phenomena, but extensions of institutional power.

The current landscape of digital activism builds on a long genealogy of feminist and queer resistance, from Mor Çatı and the Women's Solidarity Foundation in the 1990s to Lambdaİstanbul's legal struggles in the 2000s (Savcı, 2021). The Internet intensifies rather than replaces these earlier feminist and queer publics.

Platformed Resistance

In response to shrinking civil society spaces, feminist, queer, and women's rights actors in Turkey increasingly turn to digital platforms as primary sites of activism, practices that extend the punitive patriarchal governance framework outlined above into the terrain of resistance. While this reflects global trends in platformed protest (Tufekci, 2017), Turkey presents a uniquely high-risk environment where visibility is both necessary and dangerous. As Tufekci (2017) argues, digital platforms have become essential infrastructures for organizing under authoritarianism, enabling visibility and coordination even as they introduce new vulnerabilities. In Turkey, feminist and LGBTQI+ organizations often work collectively yet remain largely invisible because of safety concerns and the risk of state retaliation (Altınay, 2004; Zengin, 2024). Meanwhile, politically engaged content creators, despite their reach and visibility, tend to operate as individuals rather than as part of coordinated movements. This disaggregated activism reflects the networked nature of contemporary digital resistance (Tufekci, 2017).

Building on Jackson et al. (2020), visibility under authoritarianism functions not as a binary of presence or absence, but as a regime—a structured distribution of who is permitted to appear, under which terms, and with which consequences. Within this regime, feminist and LGBTQI+ creators in Turkey experience visibility as conditional exposure: To be seen is simultaneously to risk erasure.

This form of resistance operates through protective visibility (Jackson et al., 2020), where digital presence is calibrated for survival rather than confrontation. Activist-creators balance self-expression and safety, often adopting fragmented, individualized strategies that challenge traditional models of collective action. Visibility, then, is never neutral: It is both a resource and a risk that determines who can speak, who is heard, and at what cost. In Turkey's authoritarian context, misogyny functions as the primary mechanism determining who pays the cost of visibility.

Since Turkey's authoritarian turn in the 2010s, the Internet has become a double-edged sword: While providing activists and creators with platforms for visibility and community building, it also exposes them to surveillance, harassment, and digital violence. Turkey's authoritarianism has cultivated a distinct blend of misogyny and transphobia, reinforced through state institutions, progovernment media, and legal instruments. The Directorate of Communications and the Cyber Crimes Unit monitor dissident social media content, while troll networks affiliated with ruling-party youth branches amplify harassment campaigns against feminists and queer creators (Freedom House, 2023). As Yesil (2016) notes, the AKP's authoritarian neoliberalism systematically mobilizes gender and sexuality to police dissent, frame LGBTQI+ rights as Western impositions, and consolidate power through moral panic. Balta (2025) adds that the erosion of democratic institutions has produced a sociopolitical environment in which repression is internalized, narrowing the public's ability to imagine alternatives to state violence. This intersectional context underscores the need for analytical frameworks that account for how antqueer and antiwomen rhetoric can operate through shared ideological and institutional channels under authoritarian governance.

Moreover, Turkey consistently ranks among the highest for femicide rates in the Council of Europe (We Will Stop Femicide Platform, 2025), with both cis and trans women frequently targeted, a convergence less commonly seen in other regional contexts. Examining Turkey's digital activism thus provides critical insight into how gendered and queer oppression interact under authoritarianism, enriching global understandings of digital resistance. While state repression relies on legal mechanisms, censorship, and physical force, activist-creators counter it through visual critique, public mobilization, and online advocacy.

Rather than viewing digital harassment merely as a symptom of patriarchal culture, it should be read as a technopolitical apparatus of punitive patriarchal governance (Özkazanç, 2020; Sarioglu, 2021), one that enforces patriarchal order through digital infrastructures, contributing to broader feminist analyses of how digital media sustains authoritarian rule.

Turkey's Unique Political Landscape

Queer Visibility as Threat: Repression, Platforms, and the Politics of Family

The repression of gender and sexual minorities in Turkey operates at the intersection of rising fascism, antqueer policies, and misogyny. A recent example is the arrest of trans activist İris Mozalar, a member of the Turkey Workers' Party (TİP). In 2024, Mozalar was arrested following a home raid and detained on charges of "inciting hatred and hostility," under Article 216(1) of the Turkish Penal Code (Law No. 5237, 2004). These accusations were based on social media posts condemning xenophobic attacks on Syrian refugees in Kayseri (*Bianet*, 2024).

After two days in prison, Mozalar was released following public outcry and advocacy efforts from TİP and LGBTQI+ organizations. Her arrest quickly became a focal point on Turkish social media, particularly on Twitter/X and Instagram, where activists and creators circulated hashtags and statements demanding her release. Many framed her detention as part of a broader crackdown on queer political dissent. Importantly, Mozalar was arrested for her social media posts condemning xenophobic violence, underscoring the growing risks of digital expression in Turkey. Her case exemplifies a larger pattern of

state repression, where trans and queer activists are disproportionately targeted. It reveals how gender identity intersects with authoritarianism and political suppression, making digital platforms a site of both expression and exposure.

Mozalar's arrest exemplifies identity-based misogyny as enforcement: She is punished for both her trans identity and her political speech challenging state-sanctioned xenophobia. As Manne (2017) argues, misogyny punishes those who transgress gendered norms by claiming public authority, in this case, a trans woman claiming moral authority to critique state violence. Her case reveals how the Turkish state weaponizes vague legal language ("inciting hatred") to silence queer political voices, transforming digital expression into criminal activity. This is not random persecution, but systematic enforcement designed to make queer political visibility untenable.

Turkey's ruling government portrays LGBTQI+ identities as a threat to "Turkish family values," framing queer activism as a Western-imported ideology that undermines national morality. This state-led moral panic has spilled over into social media, where queer visibility is routinely suppressed through a combination of state influence, platform policy, and cultural backlash. In terms of content, creators report having posts removed or shadowbanned when using keywords like "trans," "nonbinary," or "sexuality," even when the material is educational or nonexplicit. In terms of practice, many adapt by using "algo speak" (coded language) or embedding queer themes in humor and aesthetics to reduce detection. Policywise, platform moderation systems, often developed in Western contexts, struggle to account for the specific cultural sensitivities and legal pressures in Turkey, leading to inconsistent enforcement and limited protections for queer users. Mozalar's arrest underscores how the repression of queer identity is not confined to laws but plays out through cultural codes and digital architectures designed to marginalize, erase, or punish those who challenge dominant norms.

This moral panic has also sparked creative forms of digital dissent. Drawing on platform-specific affordances, queer creators in Turkey often engage in affective, memetic, and performative modes of resistance—forms of "playful activism" (Cervi & Divon, 2023) that challenge dominant narratives and recode state-led moral panics. One such example is the Trojan Horse illustration (Figure 2), created by a queer feminist activist affiliated with the Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Association (KAOS GL), which critiques state-backed oppression masked as family protection. By using symbolic imagery, the social media post disrupts state narratives and exposes the political agenda behind anti-LGBTQI+ campaigns. It exemplifies how visual activism serves as a form of counterpower in digitally mediated spaces. The illustration visually encapsulates how nationalist and religious extremism justify policies that systematically suppress women and LGBTQI+ people.



Figure 2. A screenshot of Ceren's (2023) post. Ceren's caption frames the Big Family March as a Trojan Horse, arguing that "family protection" rhetoric masks state-enabled violence against women, children, and LGBTQI+ people.

While state repression functions at an institutional level, women and LGBTQI+ activists-creators face a more insidious and pervasive form of suppression through everyday digital violence, including surveillance, coordinated attacks, and content takedowns, yet within this hostile environment, platforms also become tools for visibility, protest amplification, and movement building (Tufekci, 2017). The protest signs from recent feminist demonstrations—one declaring "Rightful and Furious" (Figure 3) and another urging "Support Your Sisters, Not Just Your Cis-thers" (Figure 3; personal communication, March 9, 2023)—circulated via Instagram Stories, exemplify this duality. Though captured during offline protests, Instagram Stories' ephemeral affordance reflects the hybrid nature of contemporary activism: Protest messages are not only performed in the streets but also curated, shared, and politicized online. In a climate where mainstream media coverage is limited and feminist speech is increasingly stigmatized, digital circulation becomes a critical means of reclaiming narrative space and countering both state and platform-based erasure. These visuals function as digital resistance that is "safer," as they are momentarily visible.



Figure 3. "Rightful and Furious" and "Support Your Sisters, Not Just Your Cis-ters": Instagram Stories from a creator documenting the Women's March in Istanbul (personal communication, March 9, 2023).

Femicide and Digital Misogyny in Turkey: The Interplay of Online and Offline Violence

Turkey's escalating femicide rates underscore a broader culture of gendered oppression, exacerbated by Erdogan's nationalist, religious-conservative policies. According to the Platform to Stop the Murders of Women, over 1,134 women have been murdered in Turkey over the past five years, often by husbands, boyfriends, or male relatives. This violence functions as a mechanism of patriarchal control aiming to instill fear and deter resistance.

The 2024 Annual Report by the We Will Stop Femicide Platform reveals a record-breaking year for femicides in Turkey, with 394 femicides and 258 suspicious deaths of women—the highest since the organization began tracking data in 2010. The only year femicides declined was 2011, following Turkey's signing of the Istanbul Convention, but since discussions to withdraw from it began, femicides have surged. The report identifies several key factors behind this rise, including the failure to enforce Protection Law No. 6284, the persistence of judicial impunity, and misogynistic rhetoric from political figures. Cases such as the release of perpetrators in high-profile femicide cases further expose the state's failure to protect women. The government's response has been to promote family-centered policies rather than protections for women, despite evidence that 280 of the murdered women were killed by their husband, father, son, or a relative. Notably, femicide is now extending to children, with 19 girls killed by their fathers in 2024, nine of whom were murdered alongside their mothers.

These findings underscore how state policies actively contribute to gendered violence rather than curbing it. By failing to enforce legal protections, promoting conservative family-centric narratives, and tolerating judicial impunity, the government enables femicide and fosters a culture of misogyny and gender-based oppression. This culture extends beyond physical violence into the digital realm, where online harassment replicates and reinforces these structural inequalities. Digital harassment in Turkey intensifies and extends these patterns, serving as a strategic mechanism of patriarchal control that amplifies offline repression through speed, scale, and visibility.

As Manne (2017) argues, misogyny functions to enforce patriarchal norms through punishment. Femicide represents the most extreme form of this enforcement; digital harassment functions as a more diffuse, but equally systematic form, punishing women for claiming visibility without resorting to physical violence, yet both serve the same function: to discipline women back into subordination and signal the costs of resistance. The state's complicity in failing to both protect women offline and moderate harassment online reveals how misogyny operates as a technopolitical apparatus of authoritarian governance.

Method

To explore the dynamics of digital harassment under authoritarianism, I conducted in-depth interviews with 33 women and LGBTQI+ content creators in Turkey, supplemented by online participant observation of their platforms.² While I foreground three illustrative cases, Luna, İpek, and Nehir, these examples represent distinct positions within a broader spectrum of political precarity observed across the 33 creators interviewed. Each case exemplifies a recurring pattern in the data set, reflecting how gender, sexuality, and ideological expression shape varying degrees of risk, visibility, and repression under Turkish authoritarianism.

All participants had experienced targeted harassment online. My approach was guided by feminist digital ethnography and grounded theory. Interviews were transcribed, translated (when in Turkish), and coded using NVivo software. I followed an inductive coding process, identifying emergent themes related to how creators experience and respond to different forms of harassment.

The study employed purposive and snowball sampling to reach politically engaged and marginalized creators, including micro- and nano-influencers on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. I identified participants through public posts and hashtags related to feminist or LGBTQI+ activism, with further recruitment through referrals and private creator Discord channels.

Interviews were conducted between June 2022 and December 2023, via Zoom or asynchronous messaging (to accommodate safety and privacy). Most lasted 60–90 minutes. I supplemented interviews

² These 33 participants were largely urban, middle-class, and university-educated—comprising 21 cisgender women, five trans women, four nonbinary individuals, two queer men, and one gay man—between 20 and 35, and based primarily in the metropolitan centers of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir.

with ethnographic fieldnotes and screenshots of public posts and comment sections, which offered further insight into creators' risk management and audience interactions.

Following open coding in NVivo, I developed a typology of harassment that emerged inductively from the data set and was informed by prior work on "networked misogyny" and "strategic harassment" (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Drawing on Manne's (2017) framework of misogyny as enforcement, I identified two overlapping, but distinct, forms: identity-based harassment, which punishes creators for violating gender and sexual norms simply by existing visibly (targeting who they are), and genre-based harassment, which punishes creators for producing content that challenges patriarchal authority (targeting what they say). This typology reveals how misogyny enforces both normative identity (who may appear) and normative discourse (what may be said), with queer and feminist creators facing compounded punishment when both their identities and content transgress authoritarian norms. These categories helped clarify how harassment operates as both a personal and structural force in Turkey's authoritarian digital ecosystem.

My identity as a white-passing, middle-class, cisgender Armenian woman from Turkey conducting research from a U.S. institution shaped the project. I remained attentive to differences in lived experience and political context, maintained a reflexive journal, and prioritized participant anonymity and safety.

Findings

Manifestations of Networked Misogyny: From Harassment to Raids

Identity-Based Harassment

In Turkey, LGBTQI+ creators face relentless online persecution and heightened self-censorship, where hate speech, systemic discrimination, and digital suppression intersect. For trans creators like Luna, the risk is not abstract; it is constant and deeply personal. I first encountered Luna's videos during my early digital ethnography in 2022. Her content stood out not just for its courage, but for the comment sections crowded with both support and transphobic vitriol. As a nano-influencer with over 10K followers each on TikTok and Instagram and a small, but loyal, YouTube subscriber base, Luna has cultivated a niche digital persona grounded in advocacy and emotional candor. Despite financial barriers and algorithmic suppression, she experiments with trend-savvy content formats like reaction videos and dual-screen storytelling to increase reach while maintaining authenticity. I reached out for an interview after following her for several months, and she agreed, saying she was eager to "put things on the record," despite the risks of visibility.

When we finally spoke in July 2023, Luna told me, "The biggest threat is having one of the easiest identities to target." Her voice was calm, but deliberate. She described how a fellow trans creator was fined 350,000 liras by Turkish authorities for sharing a postsurgery testimonial on TikTok, accused of "advertising" his gender-affirming procedure:

On TikTok, a trans man shares his gender-affirming surgery experience and says, "I'm very happy with this. You can also have this surgery with this surgeon." And then they

fine him around 350,000 liras, claiming he's "advertising it." But there's no such law. There's nothing that says you "cant advertise this." They just pull regulations from elsewhere. (Luna interview, July 2023)

Luna's experience exemplifies identity-based misogyny as enforcement (Manne, 2017): She is punished not for what she advocates, but for visibly existing as a trans woman. The state's weaponization of vague regulations to fine her peer for sharing postsurgery experiences reveals how authoritarian governance deploys misogyny to police gender nonconformity. This is not random hostility, but systematic punishment designed to make trans visibility itself illegible and illegal. As Manne (2017) argues, misogyny targets those who transgress gendered expectations; in Turkey's authoritarian context, the state institutionalizes this enforcement through legal ambiguity, platform suppression, and social stigma.

Moreover, the fine imposed on Luna's peer for sharing a postsurgery testimonial exemplifies what Sarioglu (2021) theorizes as moral patriarchal punitiveness: The state punishes trans visibility not merely to suppress individual expression, but to demonstrate sovereign authority over gendered bodies. The punishment is deliberately disproportionate and legally tenuous—as Luna notes, "There's no such law"—precisely because its function is not legal enforcement, but political spectacle. It signals to the broader trans community that bodily autonomy itself is subject to state discipline, making punishment a technique of authoritarian governance rather than a response to any identifiable harm.

Luna viewed this case as a warning shot to the broader trans community—one that exemplifies how legal ambiguity is weaponized to police identity and discourage even the most personal forms of expression. As a researcher and woman from Turkey, I was struck by Luna's resolve and the deliberate care with which she described her strategies of survival. Every post, she explained, undergoes intense self-scrutiny. She avoids giving advice, even when asked directly by younger trans followers, and hesitates to respond to private messages, especially from minors. Fear, she said, is embedded in every digital gesture:

In this environment, you end up applying intense self-censorship to everything you share. Everything I post is heavily self-censored. Sometimes I can't even express my real thoughts. Especially on topics like the transition process, for example, I make a video, but I never give advice, particularly to people under 18. Even if they message me privately on social media, I don't respond to these topics. This is the biggest challenge of trying to do this work in such a hateful environment: self-censorship. You have to walk such a fine line: You can't offend anyone, yet you also need to express yourself and tell your story. I'm very afraid of being targeted. Because I know what happens. People have been "lynched" online for showing gender-neutral bathrooms. Malls have been targeted for simply having gender-neutral bathrooms. And now, even tea-drinking events are being banned by local authorities. This actually happened recently. In such an environment, you become hyperaware of every little thing you say. Did I say something wrong? Will I be targeted? What will happen to me? It's an incredibly difficult space to navigate. (Luna interview, July 2023)

This reflects a broader reality in which trans creators must carefully navigate between expressing their stories and ensuring their safety, often at the cost of authenticity and creative freedom. Luna's experience also highlights institutional complicity in perpetuating hate and repression. She cites examples such as bans on gender-neutral bathrooms and prohibitions on LGBTQI+ community events, including simple tea-drinking gatherings. These instances demonstrate how both online and offline spaces are heavily policed to uphold heteronormative norms, creating an environment of fear.

Luna's experience illustrates how trans creators in Turkey face dual silencing: first, through online harassment and hate speech and, second, through state intervention and societal stigma in offline spaces. Their digital presence exists within a precarious balance (Glatt, 2022) of visibility and safety, where even minor acts of self-expression carry significant risks. This delicate balancing act limits their ability to fully share their stories, build communities, and advocate for their rights, yet Luna's story remains largely absent from mainstream media, with little institutional follow-through despite advocacy efforts.

This institutional complicity demonstrates that digital violence is both a social issue and a structural tool of governance, functioning as an extension of the state's broader project of nationalist, heteronormative, and patriarchal control. Despite these conditions, Luna continues to maintain a digital presence through YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Discord, where she shares content on trans rights, feminist politics, and the everyday realities of marginalized identities. Her content, however, is shaped by constant self-censorship, both to avoid legal repercussions and to protect herself from targeted harassment. Luna actively moderates her comment sections and has invested in building a carefully curated Discord community, a safer space she created through rules, bot filters, and strict norms to guard against transphobia and misogyny. Still, she faces burnout and financial instability, as platforms like TikTok have denied her monetization because of bureaucratic loopholes, and Instagram's moderation tools often fail to curb coordinated attacks. In response, Luna adapts by experimenting with algorithm-friendly formats such as dual-screen videos and click-friendly titles, attempting to remain visible in a system that actively deprioritizes political and LGBTQI+ content.

For Luna, meaningful platform governance requires transparent enforcement, proactive support for vulnerable creators, and accountability for high-reach users who disseminate hate speech. She critiques algorithmic architectures that reward outrage while penalizing creators for being trans, feminist, or politically engaged.

Luna's experience reflects a broader pattern in Turkey's digital landscape. This pattern reflects what Banet-Weiser (2018) terms "popular misogyny," but in Turkey, the backlash is not just cultural; it is structural. State-aligned troll networks, algorithmic invisibility, and a lack of legal recourse converge to create a hostile digital environment that reinforces patriarchal power. Luna's story shows how creators are punished not only for what they say, but for who they are and that, in Turkey, existing online as a woman or queer person is itself treated as a provocation.

Content Genre-Based Harassment

While identity-based harassment targets creators for who they are, content genre-based harassment targets them for what they say and the topics they address. İpek's experience is not unique; it reflects the serious forms of harassment that creators face in Turkey, especially those whose work engages with politically sensitive or environmental topics. The backlash she received after posting a video about plastic pollution is a portrait of how online harassment can transition from insulting comments to organized campaigns, deepening the layers of precarity for creators. The backlash İpek received began with a single comment calling her a "freak," but quickly spiraled into a coordinated attack by an organized harassment group. These groups exploit vulnerabilities in digital infrastructures and state systems, turning online aggression into tangible harm. İpek's experience highlights the deeply gendered and personal nature of these attacks, which are often designed to intimidate, isolate, and silence women activists:

On TikTok, I posted a video about a dead fish that had been caught by a man, with plastic inside its body. I showed this to highlight the issue and said, "Let's not throw plastic into our seas, and let's not fish and kill our marine life." After that, a kid—who I believe was affiliated with the fisherman in the video—commented under my post, calling me a "freak." . . . The kid shared my profile with his group, saying, "This girl called me a freak. Guys, let's finish her." Suddenly, I was hit with an SMS bombardment. They subscribed me to numerous services using my name and phone number. . . . Then, they escalated things—they sent the police to my house by filing a false report through CİMER (Presidential Communication Center). (İpek interview, July 2023)

İpek's case exemplifies genre-based misogyny as enforcement: She is punished not for her identity, but for speech challenging patriarchal authority, in this case, environmental advocacy that implicitly critiques masculine practices (fishing, resource extraction). As Manne (2017) argues, misogyny enforces not only who may speak but also what may be said. İpek's content violated an unspoken norm: Women should not publicly challenge men's practices or claim moral authority over public debates. The harassment escalated precisely because her critique was perceived as transgressing gendered boundaries of acceptable speech.

What makes İpek's case particularly revealing of punitive patriarchal governance is the institutional infrastructure through which harassment escalated. The progression from a TikTok insult to SMS bombardment to a police raid via CİMER demonstrates that the state does not merely tolerate networked misogyny—it provides the mechanisms that transform online hostility into physical punishment. The weaponization of e-Devlet data leaks and the Presidential Communication Center's false reporting system reveals how Turkey's administrative apparatus functions as an extension of patriarchal enforcement. This is not a failure of state protection, but an instance of what Sarioglu (2021) identifies as punitiveness becoming politically functional: The state's own infrastructure enables the punishment of women who claim public voice.

The harassment went far beyond verbal abuse into physical consequences, with the harassment group subscribing her to unwanted services, flooding her phone with thousands of messages, and falsely reporting an emergency that led to a police raid at her home and her boyfriend's home. These measures weaponized her personal data, turning online threats and attacks into acts of intimate violence (Zengin,

2024). Though İpek does not identify as an influencer in the traditional sense, her status as a micro-influencer in environmentalist circles (with tens of thousands of followers and regular collaboration with activist NGOs) means her content circulates outside her intended audience, exposing her to trolling from right-wing and nationalist groups.

İpek's case highlights how platforms, legal structures, and harassment networks work together to suppress political discourse. What begins as seemingly minor digital harassment—an insult in a TikTok comment—can escalate into real-world dangers when state-linked mechanisms (e.g., e-Devlet data leaks, CİMER false reports) are weaponized against content creators addressing environmental sustainability, feminism, and social justice, actively contributing to a culture of fear.

While İpek's harassment stemmed primarily from her content rather than her identity, the overlap between these two types of violence is crucial to understanding digital repression in Turkey (Kaakinen et al., 2018; Rigotti & Malgieri, 2024). This distinction becomes even more blurred in cases like Nehir's, where creators are not only targeted for their political speech but also for who they are. This convergence of identity-based and content-based harassment, where creators are attacked for both their gender identity and the topics they discuss, demonstrates how digital violence in Turkey is uniquely shaped by the intersection of authoritarianism, patriarchal nationalism, and networked misogyny.

Nehir's case, which follows, reveals how these forms of harassment reinforce one another. For creators whose identities and content both transgress authoritarian norms, the risks are multiplied. Nehir's case exemplifies how gendered digital surveillance and political harassment converge, demonstrating that in Turkey, gender-based and queer oppression are not separate forms of violence, but deeply interwoven mechanisms of control (Savcı, 2021).

With over 100K followers across Instagram and TikTok, Nehir is considered a macro-influencer in Turkey's sexual wellness and feminist education space. Her branded partnerships, Q&A videos, and curated aesthetic distinguish her from grassroots creators, but her outspoken political stance, especially around sexuality and gender justice, makes her unusually vulnerable among creators at her level. As a bisexual woman creator and sexuality educator, Nehir is harassed for both who she is and what she talks about. Her gender identity subjects her to obsessive digital monitoring, while her content on sexuality and bodily autonomy invites politically charged backlash, yet the threats she describes are not always overt; instead, they operate through the constant anticipation of harm and the need for self-surveillance in response to potential stalking. This mode of gendered repression constitutes a form of networked privacy harm that blurs the lines between privacy invasion, parasocial obsession, and structural silencing:

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about the things that make me uneasy. Honestly, what we're doing is kind of crazy. Last week, I traveled to another country for a conference. I didn't know its laws, language, or even how to get around. If someone obsessed with me wanted to, they could have found me there. For security reasons, I no longer share real-time updates from most places I visit. It's not because something has happened to me, but because it only takes one person with bad intentions. . . . People can become unexpectedly obsessive. For example, there's one guy who sends me a message every

single day, never anything outright threatening, just random comments: “Yes, ma’am, what you posted was really good,” or “You look very pretty today.” Maybe he’s harmless, just someone who likes my content, but it could also be something entirely different. That’s what’s unsettling: You never really know what’s going on inside someone’s mind. . . . Because of this, I’ve started being extremely cautious. I live in a central area of the city. If I shared a balcony photo, someone familiar with the city could easily identify my location, so I don’t tag my current locations. If I visit a place, I only share photos after I’ve left. Nothing has ever happened to me directly, but the combination of aggressive comments and sexist remarks has made me much more careful. It’s not about what has happened; it’s about what could happen. (Nehir interview, July 2023)

Nehir’s experience demonstrates how identity-based and genre-based harassment converge when creators embody multiple transgressions. As a bisexual woman sexuality educator, she faces transmisogyny (Serano, 2007), the intersection of sexism and transphobia that polices both feminine expression and queer identity, compounded by punishment for discussing taboo topics. Her constant anticipation of stalking and obsessive monitoring reflects what Manne (2017) terms “himpathy”: a system that centers male entitlement to women’s attention and punishes women who refuse it. The daily messages from a follower who may be “harmless” or dangerous illustrate how misogyny weaponizes uncertainty, forcing women into perpetual hypervigilance. This is enforcement through ambient threat: Nehir is disciplined not by overt violence, but by the constant possibility of it, which restricts her movement, speech, and digital presence.

This ambient enforcement reflects what Kandiyoti (2016) describes as masculinist restoration: the reassertion of male authority and entitlement in response to women’s growing public presence. Nehir’s daily monitoring by followers who feel entitled to her attention—the man who messages every day with comments on her appearance—is not simply parasocial behavior, but an expression of a patriarchal order in which women’s visibility is understood as existing for male consumption. When Nehir withdraws from real-time posting, avoids geotags, and delays sharing her location, she is navigating a landscape where masculinist restoration operates not through spectacular violence, but through the disciplinary weight of its possibility. The state’s failure to address stalking and obsessive surveillance of public women is not incidental, but structurally consistent with a regime that benefits from women’s self-restriction.

boyd’s (2010) concept of context collapse helps explain how Nehir’s public-facing identity becomes inseparable from private vulnerability when observers, both benign and threatening, coexist in the same digital space. In response, she adopts protective visibility strategies (Jackson et al., 2020), leveraging digital platforms while shielding herself from exposure that can escalate into harm.

Nehir’s experience further demonstrates how visibility itself becomes a disciplinary mechanism under authoritarian patriarchy. The harassment she faces—mass reporting, moral accusations, and invasive monitoring—exemplifies what Manne (2017) terms misogyny as enforcement: a system that punishes women who claim visibility, authority, or autonomy beyond their prescribed social roles. When feminist speech is reframed as immorality, the boundary between moral regulation and digital governance dissolves. Moreover, the targeting of her sexual education content, combined with attacks on her bisexual identity, reflects transmisogyny: an intertwined structure of sexism and transphobia that polices feminine expression

and queer embodiment (Serano, 2007). In Turkey's context, where the state mobilizes "family values" as a tool of moral control, such disciplinary visibility transforms digital harassment into an instrument of patriarchal governance.

Nehir's case underscores the need to reconceptualize online violence in authoritarian regimes as a hybrid form of oppression in which misogyny, queerphobia, and state control converge to uphold patriarchal and nationalist ideologies through digital platforms.

Conclusion

The Gendered Cost of Political and Digital Visibility

In Turkey, the intersection of political engagement and digital visibility creates heightened risk for women and LGBTQI+ creators, making them vulnerable to networked misogyny and state-backed repression. Politically outspoken and highly visible creators face intensified scrutiny. Women, feminists, and LGBTQI+ individuals are policed for their identity and political expression. Unlike male political commentators, who may engage in debates without becoming targets, women and queer creators are subjected to attacks that center on their physical appearance, sexuality, and morality. This reinforces patriarchal structures that seek to control not only what they say, but how they exist in public spaces, both online and offline. The experience of creators like Luna and Nehir underscores this dynamic. Luna, a trans creator, is penalized simply for sharing personal experiences about gender-affirming surgery, while Nehir, a sexuality educator, faces both gender-based surveillance and targeted harassment for discussing socially taboo topics. Their visibility makes them easy targets for state censorship and coordinated digital attacks, illustrating how misogyny and transphobia are weaponized to silence dissenting voices.

The expectation of backlash ("linç edilmek," or being lynched online) shows how political and gendered oppression converge in Turkey's digital landscape. Women and LGBTQI+ creators must constantly negotiate their online presence, knowing that any act of political expression, no matter how small, can provoke disproportionate and deeply personal attacks. This creates a culture of fear, where visibility itself becomes a form of resistance, but also a site of extreme vulnerability.

Digital Violence as a State-Enabled Mechanism of Gendered Oppression

Networked misogyny in Turkey operates as a state-enabled mechanism of authoritarian patriarchal enforcement. Drawing on Manne's (2017) framework of misogyny as enforcement and Sarioglu's (2021) theorization of moral patriarchal punitiveness, I identified two forms of enforcement: identity-based harassment, which punishes visible existence by demonstrating state authority over gendered bodies (Luna's case), and genre-based harassment, which punishes transgressive speech through institutional mechanisms that transform online hostility into physical punishment (İpek's case). Creators like Nehir, who face compounded violence when both identity and content transgress patriarchal expectations, illustrate Kandiyoti's (2016) masculinist restoration: a regime in which male entitlement to women's visibility is enforced through ambient threat and perpetual surveillance.

The relationship among patriarchy, authoritarianism, and misogyny in Turkey's digital landscape is mutually reinforcing. Patriarchy provides the ideological scaffolding justifying women's and queer people's subordination. Authoritarianism weaponizes this ideology through state institutions and legal mechanisms. Misogyny functions as the enforcement mechanism—the systematic punishment of those who transgress these norms. Together, they create conditions where visibility itself becomes a site of punishment: To exist publicly as a woman or queer person, especially while claiming authority or challenging norms is to invite violence.

In Turkey's digital landscape, misogyny and online harassment are not just reactions to political content, but part of a broader system of patriarchal control. Women creators are monitored, policed, and reduced to their physicality, regardless of their field of expertise. The ever-present threat of backlash ("linç") forces women to constantly negotiate their visibility and expression online. Moreover, state-backed antiwomen and anti-LGBTQI+ policies create an ecosystem where gendered violence (digital and physical) is normalized and encouraged. Digital harassment functions as more than just social hostility; it is an extension of state control, reinforcing patriarchal and nationalist ideologies in the digital sphere.

Nonetheless, clear patterns of resistance also emerge. Creators employ protective visibility (Jackson et al., 2020), calibrating their digital presence to balance expression with survival. Luna continues creating despite legal threats. İpek maintains environmental advocacy despite coordinated attacks. Nehir educates about sexuality despite obsessive surveillance. This resistance, however, should not obscure the structural violence they navigate: Visibility under authoritarian patriarchy is always conditional, always punishable.

This study contributes to digital activism scholarship by demonstrating how patriarchy, institutionalized by authoritarian states, transforms platforms into sites of gendered punishment—dynamics undertheorized in literature shaped by liberal democratic contexts. Turkey's case reveals the hybrid nature of contemporary digital repression: a confluence of state control, platform governance failures, and cultural backlash. The *Monument Counter* continues to update its tally—a stark reminder that digital violence is inseparable from offline gendered violence that continues to claim women's lives.

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