



# CONTEMPT SPEECH, HATE SPEECH

Report from research on verbal violence  
against minority groups

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# Contempt speech and hate speech in Poland 2016

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In Toruń, in the early days of October 2016, a group of men attacked three Turkish exchange students staying in Poland. One of the attackers hit one of the Turkish students in his face. It was not the first such incident affecting Turkish people in Toruń – several months earlier, seven Turkish students were attacked, one of whom had to be hospitalised. There have been a number of incidents of violent acts on public transport: in October 2016 in Łódź, an Algerian woman was pushed out of a tram, in September on a tram in Warsaw, a university professor speaking in German with his colleague was attacked and beaten, and in December in Bydgoszcz, a group of Bulgarian and Turkish students were similarly attacked. Attacks also took place on the streets: in Warsaw, a Nigerian PhD student was attacked with paralysing gas, in Gdańsk, a British citizen of Egyptian origin was brutally beaten, in Brzeszcze a Ukrainian was attacked and in Rzeszów a Portuguese, in Szczecin an Italian and in Poznań a Pakistani were the victims of further assaults.

What is common to all the attacks, reported in the Polish press in 2016<sup>1</sup>, is their clearly racist background. In almost all cases, the attacks were preceded by insults directed at Muslims, Ukrainians or black people. Attacks motivated by the ethnicity or race of the victims are of a special nature, and are, in many nations, treated as being part of a separate category of offending. In Poland, we noticed that the psychological effects felt by the victims of such violent acts were more serious than those of victims of attacks that were not motivated by racist, religious or ethnic hate<sup>2</sup>. The concomitance

of hate speech, that is offensive statements addressed at gay people, Jews, Muslims or Ukrainians, and physical attacks against representatives of these groups suggests that hate speech might be seen as a justification for violence, making it more socially acceptable.

When we started our research on hate speech in 2016, we wanted to ascertain the scale of the phenomenon – after the two years that had passed since our earlier, similar survey. We wanted to acquire a deeper understanding of the possible effects of encountering hate speech and find out the extent to which its presence in public discourse can lead to discrimination, violence and atrophy of social norms. We tried to analyse how common hate speech is in the everyday life of Poles and who are the ones that use it. We also surveyed the incidence of hate speech perpetrated against groups that were not covered by our former survey of 2014: transsexual persons, lesbians, feminist activists and refugees.

The two surveys led in 2014 and 2016 let us assess the extent to which events in Poland during the last two years changed the attitudes of Poles. It was a time of dynamic political change in Poland – 2015 witnessed parliamentary and presidential elections, and during election campaigns the dangers associated with immigration were often highlighted, fear of refugees and Muslims was incited, and anti-Semitic or anti-Ukrainian resentments were exploited. At the same time, Europe faced challenges of receiving and integrating considerable numbers of migrants and refugees. In spite of the fact that the problem was not encountered in Poland, it was fiercely discussed in public debate. Thus, we decided that a new survey led on a representative sample of adults and youth was needed.

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1. See. Zadworny, A. (2016). From words to deeds and to beat blacks [Od słów do czynów i na murzynów]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6.12.2016; Klauziński, S. (2016). Rectors of Polish universities: Attacks on foreign students evoke shame in academia [Rektorzy polskich uczelni: Ataki na zagranicznych studentów wywołują wstyd w środowisku akademickim]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 1.12.2016.

2. Winiewski, M., Gorska, P. (2016) Hate violence [Przemoc motywowana nienawiścią], unpublished report

## METHODOLOGY:

The survey was conducted between 2 September and 2 October, 2016 by the Public Opinion Research Center on two random samples (simple drawing from the PESEL database): national sample of adults ( $N = 1052$ ) with the bottom age limit being 18 years and the youth sample aged between 16 and 18 ( $N = 682$ ). In both cases the survey was implemented using the technique of computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI).

The 2014 survey was conducted using the same methodology between 13 March and 1 April, 2014 on similar samples of youth ( $N = 653$ ) and adults ( $N = 1007$ ).

In order to improve the quality of estimates, in both surveys weights were used (post-stratification weights) taking into account sex, age, size of place of residence, education, voivodship and professional activity of respondents.

Opinions of respondents on hate speech were surveyed based on their appraisal of genuine statements taken from the Internet and comments made by publicly known persons. The hate speech examples were chosen from the database of the Association Local Knowledge and comments posted under articles published on Polish news portals (onet.pl, gazeta.pl, polityka.pl, wsieci.pl, interia.pl and niezalezna.pl). The list of statements was supplemented by two public statements from known persons posted in blogs, in articles or reported in the media (because of their offensive nature). Then, in an initial survey, representatives of the relevant minority groups evaluated whether they saw the statements as offensive and harmful. We chose statements of publicly known persons based on an evaluation of the level of offensiveness indicated by the representatives of the relevant minority groups. Respondents in the main survey were given three examples of hate speech for each of ten minority groups (six chosen for the 2014 survey, and four added in the 2016 survey).

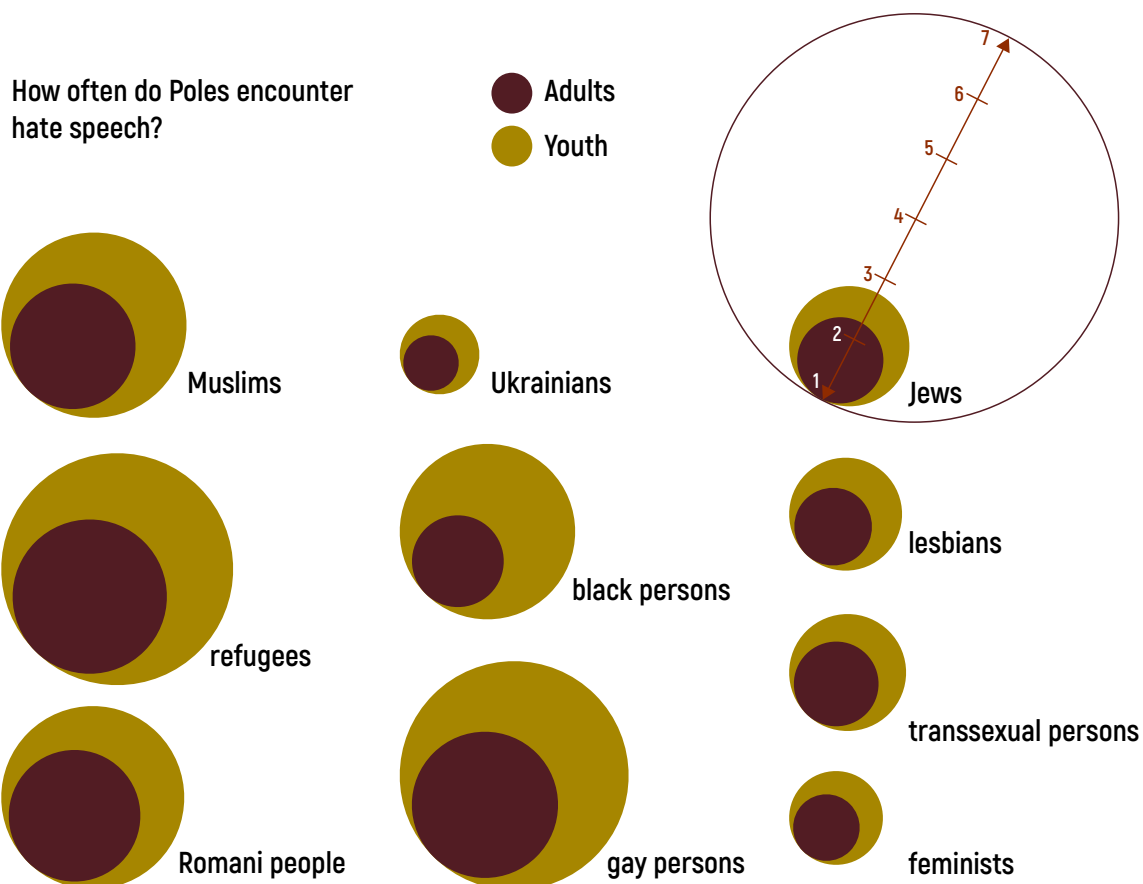


Figure 1. The average declared incidence of encountering hate speech against particular minority groups in 2016. The higher the average, the more common the contact with hate speech against a given group among adults and among youth.

In 2016, the most common victims of hate speech were refugees and gay persons. Respondents also declared that they relatively often encounter hate speech against Muslims, Romani people and black persons. Hate speech is predominantly encountered by Poles on the Internet (in particular by youth), on TV (mainly adults) and in everyday interactions on the streets.

From 2014 to 2016, a considerable increase can be seen in the percentage of persons encountering hate speech in media and in everyday life. Significantly, hate speech is more common today than two years ago in traditional media, which one might expect to be more responsible with the content they present. In 2014, one in five adult Poles encountered extreme anti-Muslim or anti-Ukrainian statements on TV, and today almost half of Poles declared that they encountered offensive statements against Muslims on TV, and one in four Poles encountered hate speech against Ukrainians

on TV. There is also an observable increase in incidents of hate speech in the press: the number of young and adult Poles who encountered offensive statements against Muslims doubled. In recent years, Muslims have become the most offended against group in the press – while the number of Poles reading anti-Muslim articles increased, the number of persons who declared reading anti-Semitic, anti-Romani or racist articles slightly fell. Notably, the Internet remains the most common source of hate speech. In 2014, roughly half of young Poles encountered anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim or anti-Ukrainian hate speech on the Internet, while today as much as 75% of youth declared that they saw anti-Semitic statements on the Internet, 80% witnessed Islamophobic statements and 71% observed anti-Ukrainian statements. After only two years we reached a point where the vast majority of youth is immersed in a reality full of hateful statements against various minorities.

### Encountering hate speech on TV

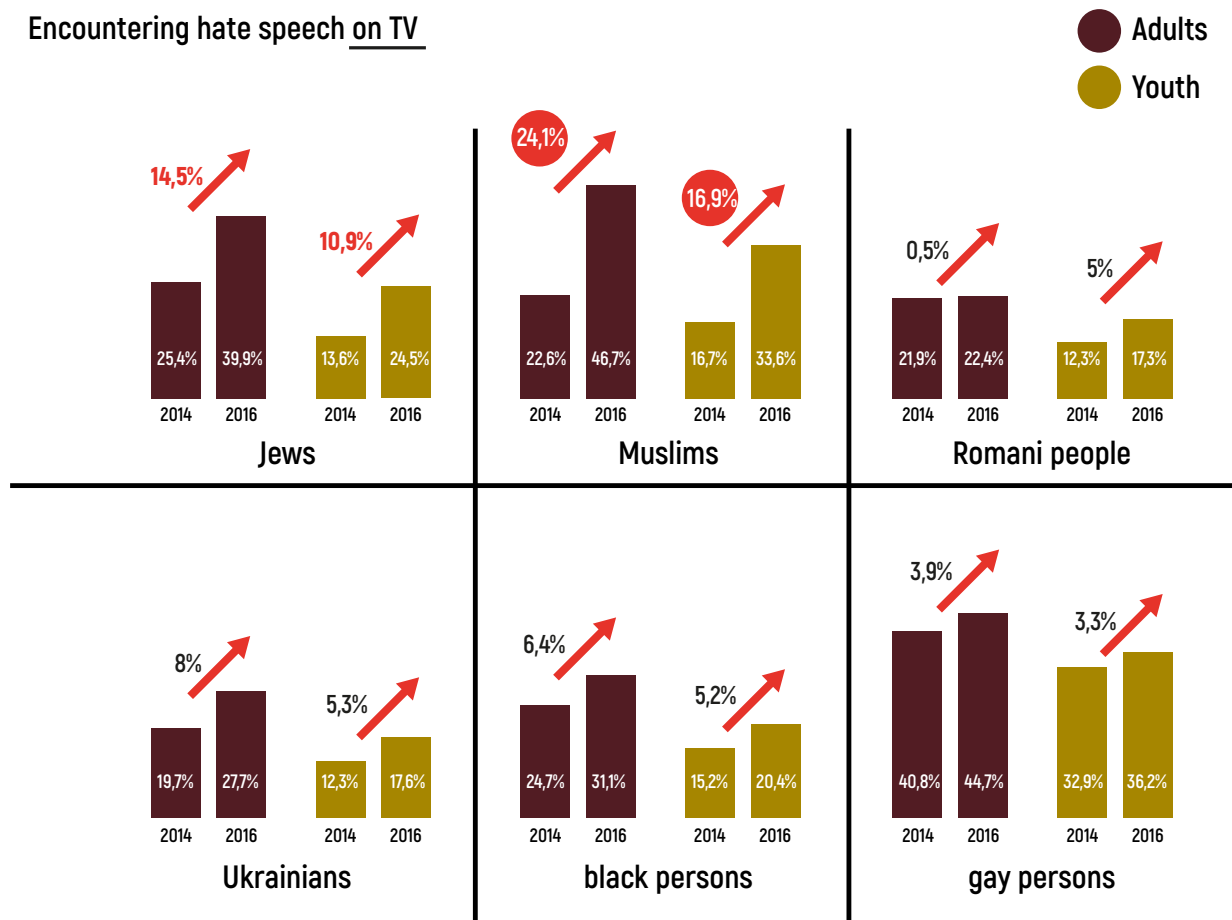


Figure 2. Percentage of Poles (adults and youth) declaring that they have encountered hate speech against different minority groups on TV.

### Encountering hate speech on the Internet

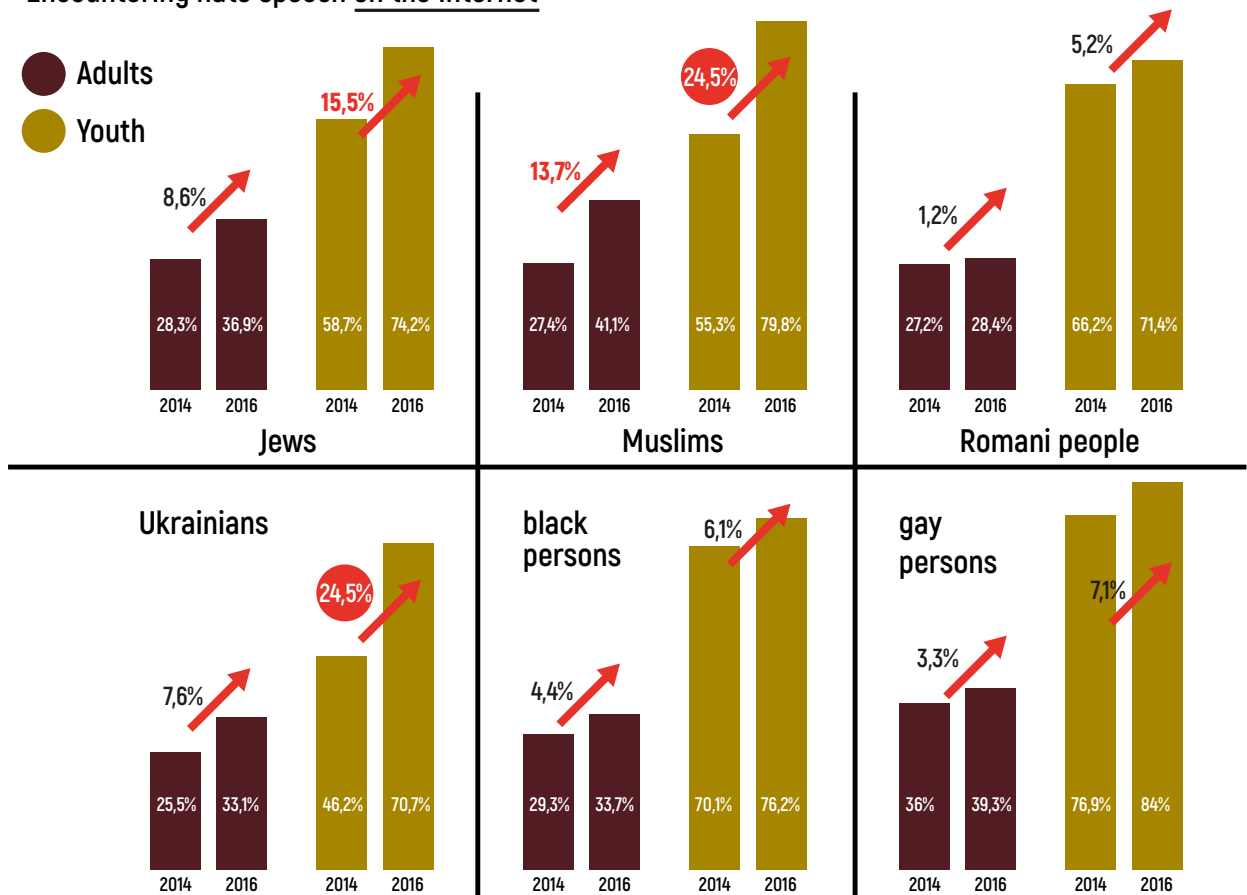


Figure 3. Percentage of Poles (adults and youth) declaring that they have encountered hate speech on the Internet against different minority groups.

This state of affairs has significant consequences. Research conducted by the Warsaw University Center for Research on Prejudice indicates growth in the desensitisation of Poles: the more that people encounter hate speech in their social environment, the more they become accustomed to it and cease to view it as a grave social problem. This is plain from the analysis presented in this report. Today, a considerably lower percentages of young and adult Poles view anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic and anti-Romani statements as clearly offensive (the tendency is markedly more pronounced among youth). This is particularly observable in the case of Muslims – i.e. the group for which the increase in incidents of hate speech was the strongest in the last two years (on TV, in the press and on the Internet). In addition, sensitivity to homophobic statements decreased among young Poles: in 2016 such statements were seen as definitely offensive by a lower percentage of youth than in 2014 (see Figures 2 and 3).

Persons encountering hate speech in their environment are more willing to use hate speech themselves. Contact with hate speech is particularly dangerous for youth and results in a kind of atrophy of social norms among them. The results of our research indicate that young Poles encountering hate speech are also more willing to break other social rules, are more likely to use violence in everyday life and may also be more in favour of repressive measures against refugees (using isolation measures, closing frontiers, invigilation). Most importantly though, the more frequent the incidents of hate speech in a given social environment, the greater the willingness to use it. Hate speech is mostly used by youth. The greatest percentage of youth – almost 42% – declare using hate speech against gay people and refugees and about 40% of youth respondents declared using anti-Muslim and anti-Romani statements (see Figure 5). Young female Poles use such language almost half as often as young male Poles.

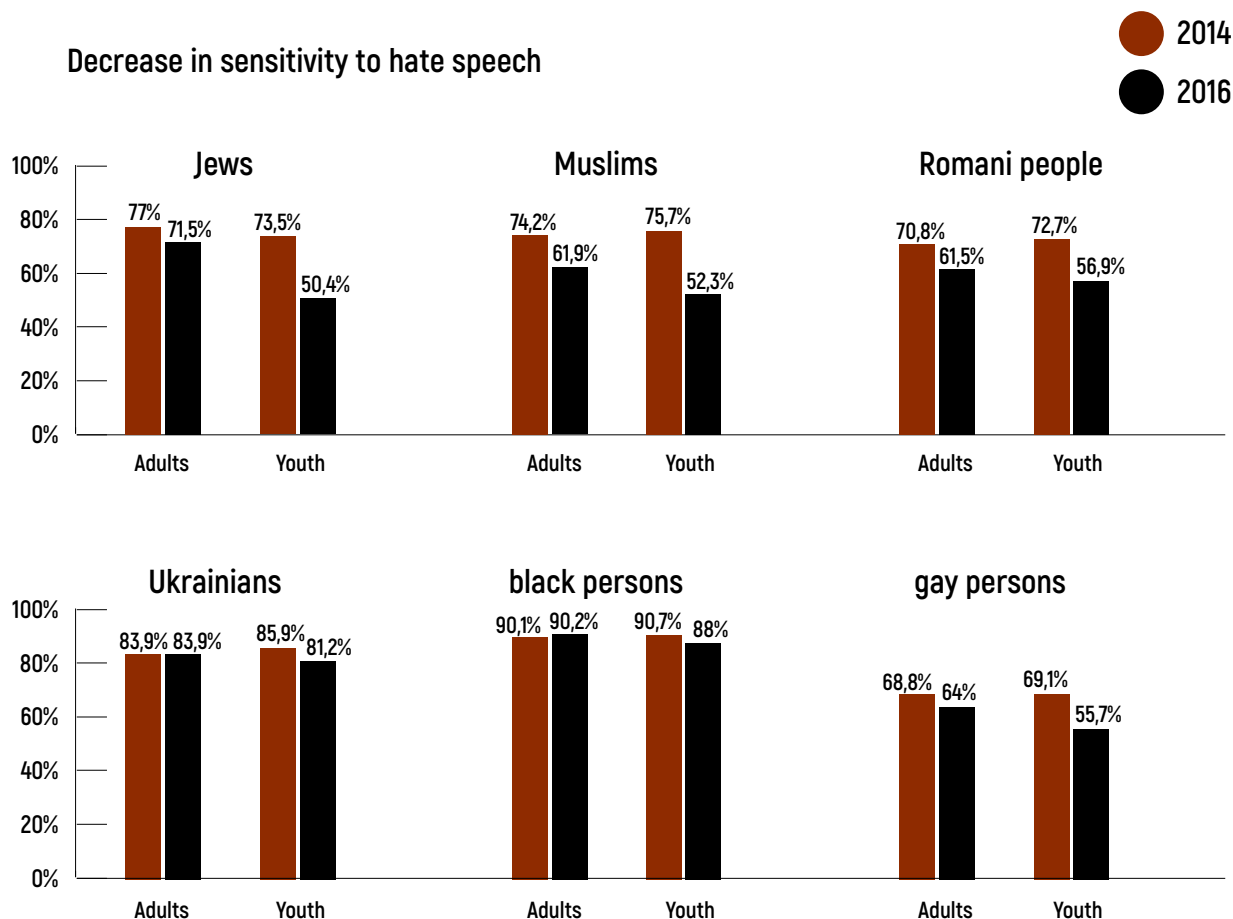


Figure 4. Change in percentages of Poles who considered at least one out of three examples of hate speech definitely offensive.

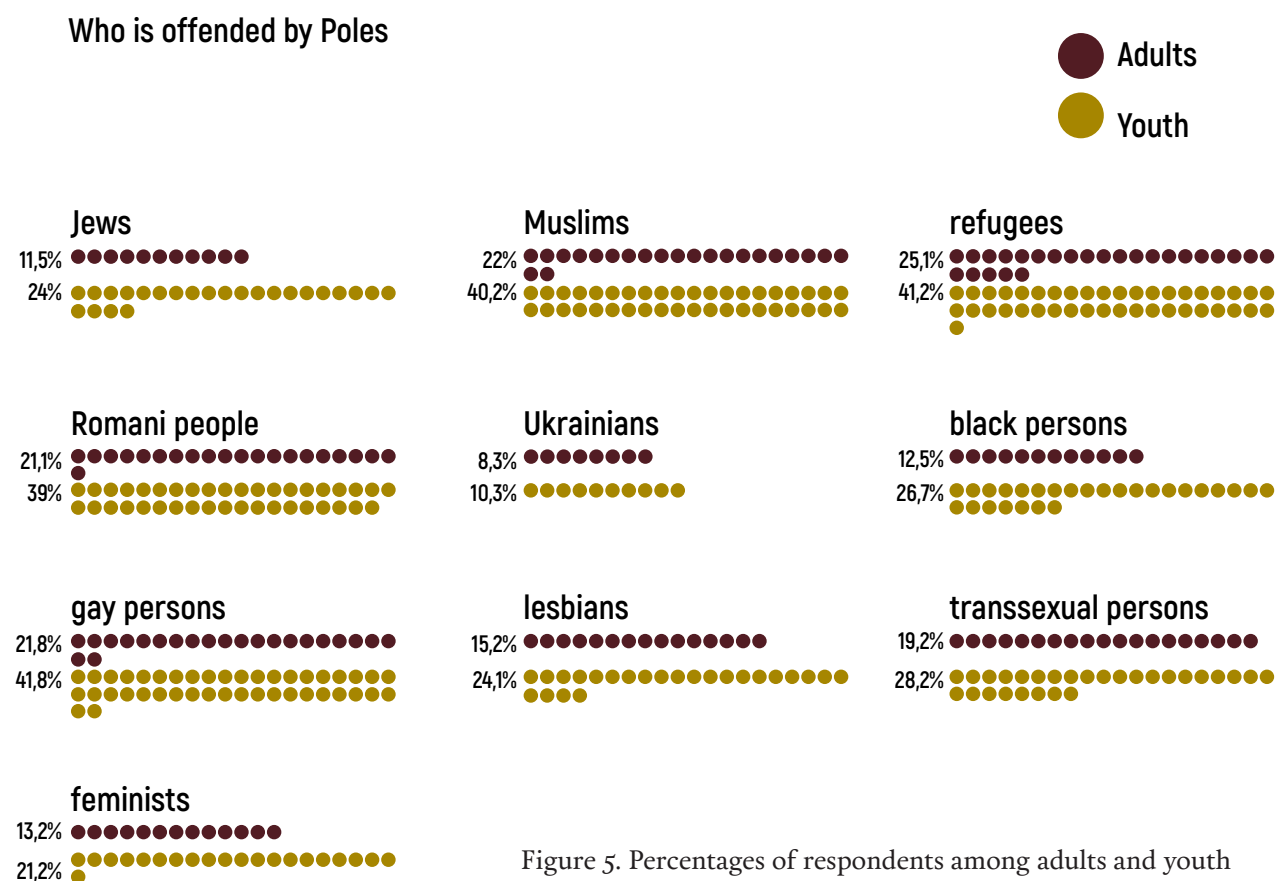


Figure 5. Percentages of respondents among adults and youth who at least once used hate speech against the indicated groups.



## Do offensive statements against minority groups come from hatred or contempt?

● Contempt  
● Hatred

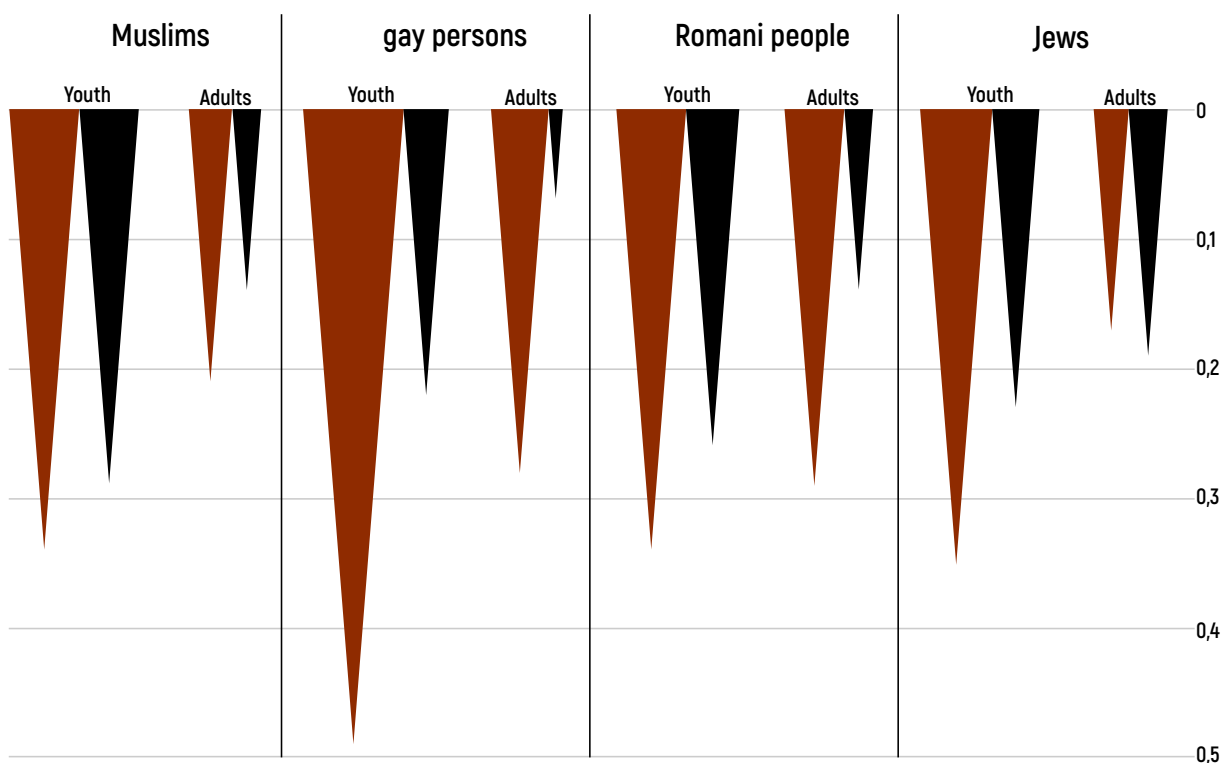


Figure 6. Correlation between feelings of hatred and contempt toward representatives of four minority groups and using offensive language against the groups. The longer the bars the stronger the correlation between feelings of contempt and hatred and the willingness to use offensive language against the groups. The scale shows standardised regression coefficients. All bars over 0.1 are statistically significant ( $p < 0,05$ ).

That finding seems to be in line with the results of earlier research conducted by the Warsaw University Center for Research on Prejudice that highlighted particularly problematic behaviours and attitudes of young men among whom prejudices and racist and discriminatory views are much more common than among young women.

Among adult Poles, hate speech is considerably less common. The greatest percentage of them using hateful statements, is directed against refugees and Muslims – 25% and 22% respectively. Slightly lower percentages of them declared using hate speech against Romani people (21%) and transsexual persons (19%). Like in the case of youth respondents, more men than women declared that they had at least once used hate speech against one of the nine groups covered by the survey.

Results from the 2016 survey show that gay persons are not protected in Poland by norms of

correctness. Most respondents are against introducing bans on hate speech against gay persons, lesbians and transsexual persons. Our surveys – like many others – indicate that men are decidedly more distanced from homosexual persons than women are. This is particularly observable among youth respondents. Both adult and young men are most distanced from gay persons. We obtained similar results for attitudes towards refugees: it was young men who were most hostile towards refugees in their social environment and most supportive of using exclusion and violence to solve the refugee ‘problem’.

Finally, we noticed that what is commonly called „hate speech” is more likely to be the result of contempt than hatred. For four groups: Jews, Romani people, Muslims and gay persons, the respondents were asked about their feelings – mainly hatred and contempt – toward them (e.g. “Do persons

like you feel contempt toward gay people?”). The results show that in both adults and youth, the feelings of hatred and contempt toward particular groups are conducive to the use of hate speech against them (see Figure 6).

Of note, what appears to be crucial are feelings of contempt. Contempt is linked to a lack of respect for others and viewing them as *inferior*, worthless and incompetent. Contempt towards other persons or class of persons leads to the atrophy of compassion and feelings of guilt or shame, instead triggering anger and aversion<sup>3</sup>. Presumably, it is the emotions related to contempt (anger and aversion, rather than compassion), tied to a cultural perception of particular social groups, that lead to the use of hate speech. This supports our earlier supposition that the phenomenon in question should instead be termed „contempt speech”. Such speech appears to be driven by a desire to demean the target of the speech, thereby preventing any empathic responses and it instead objectifies the other person<sup>4</sup>.

**Full version of the report is available at:**  
[www.ngofund.org.pl/no-hate-speech/](http://www.ngofund.org.pl/no-hate-speech/)

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4. Bilewicz, M., Kamińska, O., Winiewski, M., Soral, W. (in press) From disgust to contempt-speech. The nature of contempt on the map of prejudicial emotions. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.