

(ANTI)SOCIAL MEDIA

The benefits and pitfalls of digital
for female politicians

March 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rise of social media platforms has fundamentally changed the nature of political discourse. Never before have voters had such easy and immediate access to the political leaders who represent them, and never have political leaders had the ability to communicate so easily with voters without the filter of the media.

While this increased connectivity has benefits for both voters and political leaders, it has also provided a platform for the less desirable elements of political discourse. The immediacy and anonymity of social media means that derogatory and abusive comments can be easily shared and spread, with little recourse.

In this report, we illustrate and analyse the ways in which gender affects online political discourse, the impact that it has on female candidates and politicians, and what can be done to mitigate online harassment and abuse. We also explore the ways that digital campaigning tactics can be beneficial to female political leaders, despite the downsides of engaging on social media.

This report is the result of an in-depth analysis of social media conversations related to high-profile male and female political leaders as well as interviews with both female politicians and campaign strategists. It also draws upon recent research and policy proposals focused on strategies for tackling online harassment and abuse.

CHAPTER 1: ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS

In order to identify the ways in which discussion about male and female political leaders differs based on gender, we analysed social media conversations about three pairs of prominent politicians on three continents:

- **United Kingdom:** Theresa May vs. Jeremy Corbyn
- **South Africa:** Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma vs. Cyril Ramaphosa
- **Chile:** Michelle Bachelet vs. Sebastián Piñera.

We assessed five categories of gendered conversation:

- Comments on the person's physical appearance;
- Comments about the person's relationship or marital status;
- Comments about whether the person has children or not;
- Derogatory or provocative language used to describe the person and not their profession; and
- Comments about competence due to the person's gender.

Our analysis revealed several key findings:

- There was a **greater volume of conversation towards women** in all of the five gendered categories.
- **Women experience a significantly larger volume of conversation about their physical appearance and family life. Comments about their appearance and relationship status are also considerably more negative** than those towards their male counterparts.
- While male and female politicians had similar levels of derogatory comments, based on percentages, **women were three times more likely to see derogatory comments directly related to their gender.**
- In gendered conversations about all of the political leaders, **male authors dominated the discussion.** They were at least twice as prevalent as female authors.

Chapter One outlines the findings from our analysis, including detailed breakdowns of the conversations about each of the six political leaders.

CHAPTER 2: THE IMPACT OF ONLINE SEXISM, HARASSMENT, AND THREATS

Our findings show that gender has a significant effect on how political leaders are discussed online. But what impact does this have on the leaders themselves and on our democratic debate more broadly?

In Chapter Two we delve into this issue, drawing upon interviews with female political leaders and campaign strategists. We look at a range of ways in which online sexism, abuse, and threats have a detrimental effect, including:

- **Delegitimising women as leaders** and questioning their right to serve in political roles;
- **Depersonalising female leaders**, by raising the cost of sharing personal information;
- **Intentionally distracting female leaders** from focusing on substantive work, by forcing them to devote time and energy to dealing with abuse and threats;
- **Instilling fear** for their physical safety and the safety of their families, and compelling them to implement new security measures; and
- **Dissuading women from running for office** or engaging in political debate.

GRAPHIC CONTENT WARNING: This chapter includes examples of some of the misogynistic and racist abuse that female leaders have received. We debated whether or not to include this content, at the risk of giving abusers a further platform or offending readers with strong language. However, we determined that in order to truly convey the vile nature of this abuse it was important not to censor the content.

CHAPTER 3: A COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION

Having assessed the negative impact of online sexism and harassment, we then turn to the question of what can be done about it.

Currently, much of the burden falls on female politicians and their staff to address the abusive content directed at them, either by filtering and blocking it out, or by reporting abusers. We assess the tools and strategies currently available to female politicians to mitigate the abuse they receive, and their benefits and limitations.

We also illustrate what a more collaborative approach to addressing online sexism and abuse would look like, with recommendations for a range of actors including:

- Male candidates and politicians;
- Governments;
- Political Parties;
- Police and prosecutors;
- Social media companies; and
- Journalists.

Our recommendations are based on our team's extensive digital campaigning experience, our discussions with political leaders and strategists, and recommendations raised in other recent studies.

CHAPTER 4: THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING FOR FEMALE POLITICIANS

Finally, while it is clear that engagement on social media comes with a range of undesirable consequences for female political leaders, it also provides some important benefits.

We conclude with an assessment of the ways in which digital campaigning can help female politicians overcome some of the barriers typically stacked against them and connect with constituents and voters in new and beneficial ways.

1

ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS

With data provided by BrandsEye

METHODOLOGY

There have been a number of studies that have looked at the prevalence of online harassment and threats against female politicians. However, few have taken a more nuanced look at how gender impacts the way that politicians are discussed on social media. In partnership with opinion mining company BrandsEye, we set out to explore whether a politician's gender affects how they are spoken about on Twitter.

We analysed public tweets about three pairs of male and female politicians from the United Kingdom (UK), South Africa, and Chile between 1 September 2017 to 30 November 2017.

In the UK, we analysed tweets about Prime Minister Theresa May of the Conservative Party and Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, over a time period that included their respective parties' annual conferences. In South Africa, we analysed tweets about Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa, during a period when both politicians were campaigning to be President of their party, the African National Congress (ANC). Finally, in Chile, we analysed tweets about the outgoing President, Michelle Bachelet and her successor, Sebastián Piñera, during a period that included the final stage of the presidential election.

In order to assess gender bias on Twitter, we modified Christie Aschwanden's checklist known as the Finkbeiner Test. Aschwanden developed the test in order to examine the ways in which the media portray professional women. In order to pass the test, and therefore avoid gender bias, an article ought not to mention one, or more, of seven characteristics that identify the subject as female. This includes: the fact that the subject is a woman; her husband's job; child care arrangements; how she nurtures her "underlings"; being taken aback by potential competitiveness in her field; how she is a role model for other women; or that she is the "first woman to..."

Our modified Finkbeiner Test for analysing Twitter conversation has five categories of gendered conversation:

1. Comments on the person's physical appearance;
2. Comments about the person's relationship or marital status;
3. Comments about whether the person has children or not;
4. Derogatory or provocative language used to describe the person and not their profession; and
5. Comments about competence due to the person's gender.

The BrandsEye Crowd

Natural language processing algorithms that have been utilised to analyse sentiment typically produce an accuracy of around 60%. Algorithms still struggle to accurately interpret the nuances of textual human conversation with its tonal subtleties, sarcasm, slang, and mixed sentiment. To overcome these inaccuracies, BrandsEye augments its algorithms by employing human verifiers to review the sentiment contained in individual social media posts, thereby achieving accuracy levels of 95%. BrandsEye refers to their proprietary crowdsourcing platform of contributors as the Crowd. Their Crowd comprises trained and vetted contributors based around the world enabling them to analyse social media data in a number of languages.

For this analysis, a representative sample of all the tweets about each politician was verified by BrandsEye's Crowd. Each tweet was coded and verified by multiple Crowd members, who assessed the sentiment of the tweet on a five-point scale and classified it into one of the five gender-based categories or marked it as "none of the above". In order to achieve 99% confidence level and a 1.8% margin of error, 27,952 tweets were coded and verified by the Crowd. 796 (2.8%) of the 27,952 tweets were classified into the five categories of the modified Finkbeiner Test. The categories are not exhaustive and there was some gendered conversation that fell outside of the five categories.

BRANDSEYE'S CROWD VERIFICATION PROCESS



Lauren Gillespie
@LaurenEGillesp



Who actually dresses Theresa May??? They're taking the piss out of her never seen a worse dressed woman in my life

19:33 - 6 Oct 2017 · Strabane, Northern Ireland

7 See Lauren Gillespie's other Tweets



SORT FOR RELEVANCE AND IDENTIFY METADATA

Language	English
Location	Strabane, Northern Ireland
Gender	Female
Relevant	Yes - 'Theresa May'
Time	19:33, 06/10/2017

BrandsEye continuously seeks, gathers, and stores tweets based on predefined criteria. Their sophisticated machine learning algorithms evaluate each tweet to ensure relevance and the discovery of useful metadata.

DETERMINE SENTIMENT

A sample of the data is distributed to BrandsEye's proprietary crowd of trained human contributors. The crowd verify the relevancy of the data and then code the sentiment contained in the post (positive, negative, or neutral).

What is the sentiment of the mention?
Sentiment should be towards Theresa May

- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

CATEGORISE TWEETS

What is/are the topic/s being discussed?
Topics should relate to Theresa May

- The individual's appearance
- The individual's relationship or marital status
- The individual's children (or lack thereof)
- Derogatory language used to attack the individual's character
- Describes the individual as competent or incompetent due to their gender

The crowd is then asked to classify the mention into one or more of the categories.

KEY FINDINGS

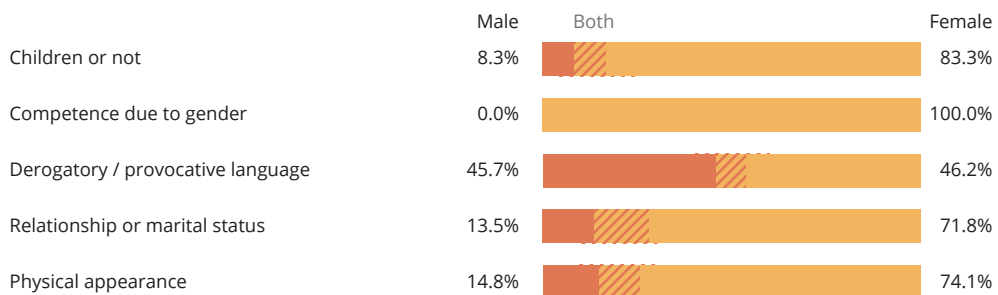
Share of conversation

Of the 796 tweets classified into the five categories, politicians achieved the following share of conversation: May 12.7%, Corbyn 7.2%, Dlamini-Zuma 41.6%, Rampahosa 19.7%, Bachelet 13.6%, and Piñera 22.5%. Tweets that contained references to two politicians were counted towards the share of conversation for both.

There is a larger volume of comments about women in all categories

Across all three countries, women had a larger volume of comments about them in each of the categories and 31.4% more comments overall.

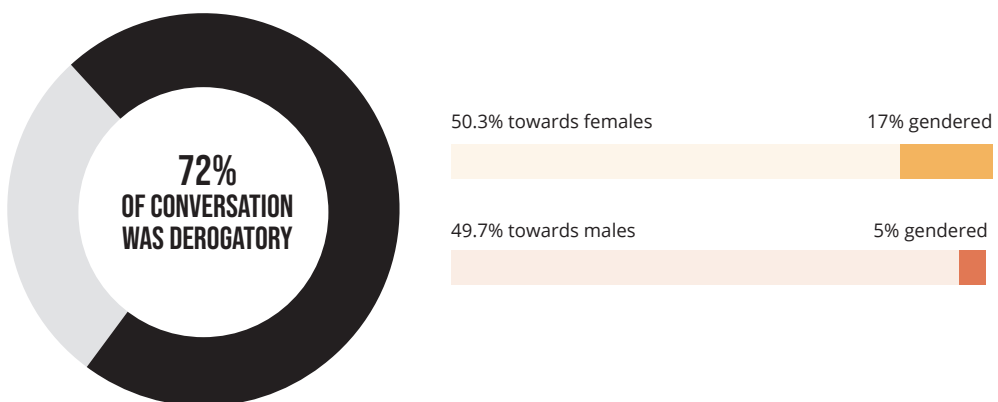
Gender breakdown of comments for each category



Derogatory comments about women frequently reference their gender, whereas comments about men do not

Female politicians were more than three times more likely to see derogatory comments directly related to their gender compared to their male counterparts.

Breakdown of gendered conversation within derogatory conversation

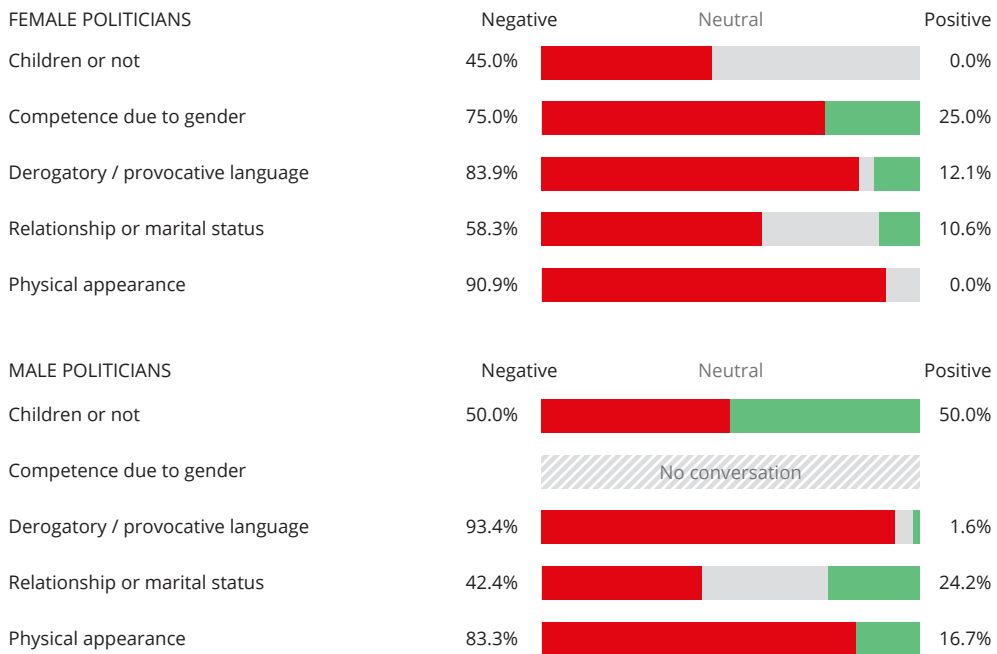


Male politicians were more likely to be criticised based on people’s perceptions of them as being corrupt, liars, or untrustworthy. None of the male politicians had derogatory comments that included the phrase “man”, whereas all three female politicians had a high volume of tweets that included the phrase “woman”. Comments about Theresa May often described her as “weak”, and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and Michelle Bachelet were both referred to as “old woman”. Cyril Ramaphosa also had some gendered conversation as he was described as a “womaniser” and “sugar daddy” due to alleged extra-marital affairs.

Comments towards women were more negative

Comments about women’s physical appearance and marital status were more negative than towards their male counterparts. They also received negative gender-related comments about their competence, whereas male politicians did not.

Sentiment breakdown of categorised tweets



Derogatory comments were the dominant category in all countries except for South Africa

South Africa was the only country where “relationship/marital status” had the highest volume of conversation of the five categories. The fact that Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma is the ex-wife of President Jacob Zuma was the primary cause of the high volume. She was often discussed in reference to her previous relationship to the President rather than based on her own political achievements.

Breakdown of categories within each country for all tweets analysed

	Chile	South Africa	United Kingdom
Children or not	1.8%	1.5%	1.2%
Competence due to gender	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%
Derogatory / provocative language	91.7%	45.7%	86.3%
Relationship or marital status	3.0%	49.1%	4.2%
Physical appearance	3.6%	2.3%	8.3%

Allegations of incompetence due to gender were only found in South Africa

Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma was the only politician whose competence was linked to her gender. Some tweets were positive and some were negative.

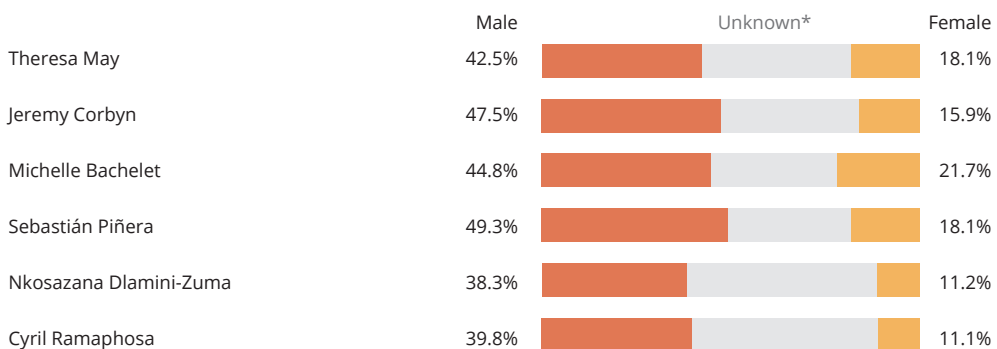
Example tweets about Dlamini-Zuma's competence



Male authors are far more prevalent than females

For all politicians, male authors were at least twice as prevalent as female authors. The starkest contrast was in South Africa, where male authors were 3.4 times more active than women in tweets about Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and 3.6 times more active in tweets about Cyril Ramaphosa.

Gender breakdown of authors for each politician



* The chart makes use of available gender data, where the author's gender is known from their Twitter profile.

DETAILED FINDINGS BY COUNTRY AND POLITICIAN

UNITED KINGDOM

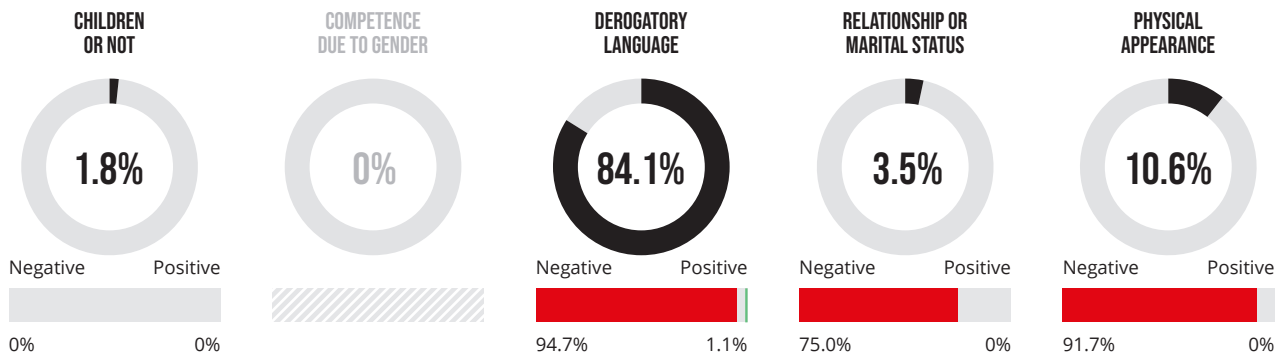
In the United Kingdom, we analysed tweets about Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May and the leader of the opposition Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn. The time period during which the tweets were analysed included the annual conferences for both politicians' parties, which tends to be a particularly active time for political conversation online. The timeframe also included a very busy period for Brexit discussions, which have dominated the political debate in the UK, both online and offline.

Our analysis of conversations about both politicians across the five categories revealed that derogatory comments represented the largest category by far. The most significant difference between the two politicians can be seen in the physical appearance category: May had more than three times the share of comments in that category than Corbyn.

Share of categorised tweets for each politician and accompanying sentiment breakdowns

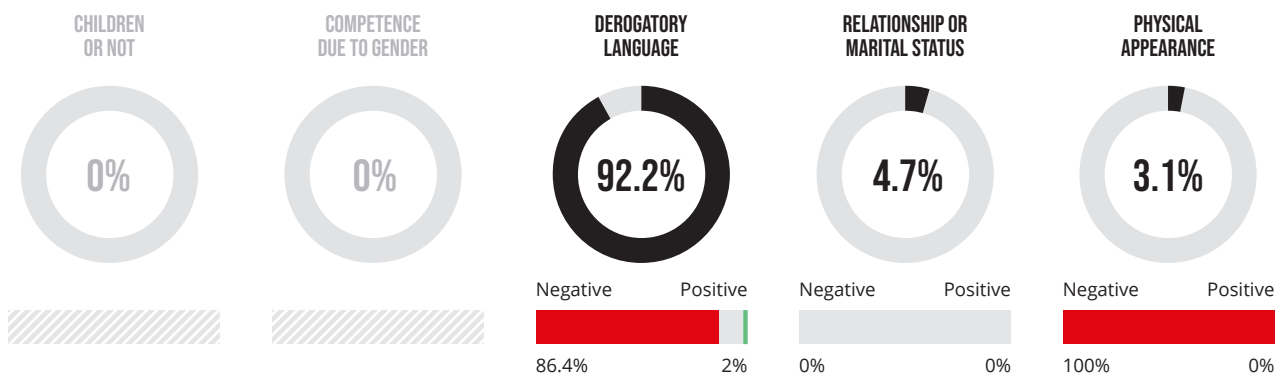
THERESA MAY

Negative Neutral Positive



JEREMY CORBYN

Negative Neutral Positive



Examples of tweets related to Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn in each category are included below. The category “competence due to gender” was not included, as neither politician received any tweets in that category.

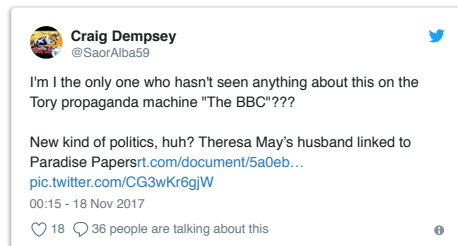
HERESA MAY

JEREMY CORBYN

Physical appearance



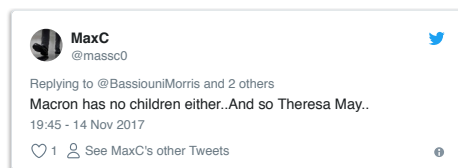
Relationship or marital status



Derogatory / provocative language



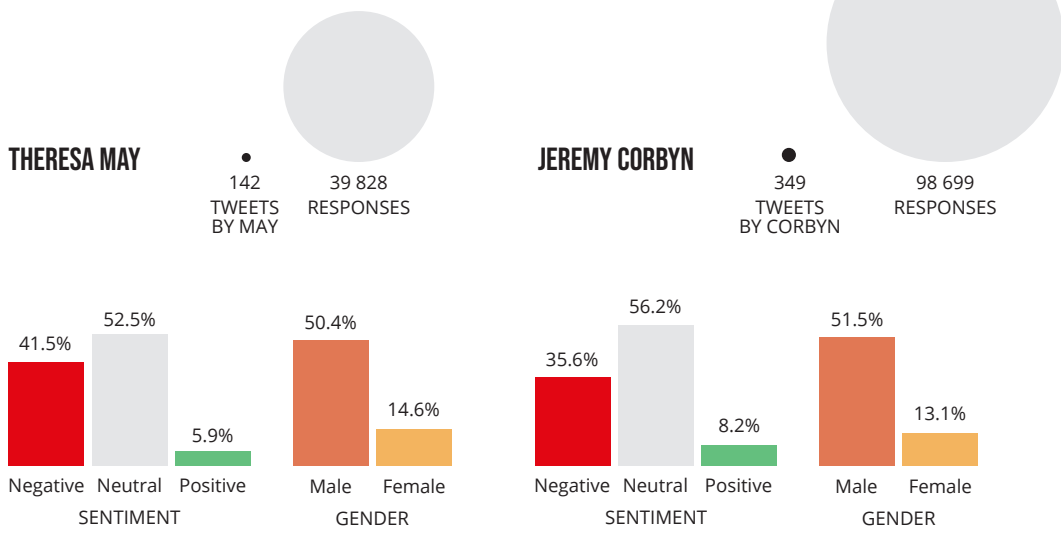
Children or not



When looking specifically at replies to tweets posted by the politicians themselves, differences also emerged. Jeremy Corbyn was significantly more active and had a slightly higher engagement rate than Theresa May.

Responses to May's posts were more negative than those to Corbyn's. May had approximately 6% more negative responses than Corbyn, and approximately 2% fewer positive responses. The gender breakdown of replies to each politician's posts was even more exaggerated than the general conversation about them, with men accounting for 3.4 times as many replies to May than women, and 3.9 times as many replies to Corbyn.

Twitter engagement with politicians



THERESA MAY

Conversation trends

LANGUAGE

May was repeatedly described as “weak” and “cowardly” and unable to make the necessary “hard” decisions required of a leader. Authors often used expletives when tweeting at her.

APPEARANCE

There was general negativity towards May and her physical appearance. She was criticised for dressing in a way that authors claimed was not befitting of a Prime Minister. Authors were particularly negative about her decision to wear a Frida Kahlo adorned bracelet during her much-maligned party conference speech.



MARITAL STATUS

There was negativity directed towards May due to the activities of her husband’s firm, which is embroiled in a tax scandal. Spousal activity, or the activities of prominent figures’ children, seem to affect male and female politicians equally.

CHILDREN

Neutral comments were made about the fact that May does not have children.

Female authors were slightly more positive towards Theresa May when compared to male authors. However, there was a less than 1% difference between female and male negative sentiment. Women tended to comment more often on public policy issues, often those specifically related to women, such as women's health and female refugees. They were also active in sharing online petitions in order to affect public awareness.

Male authors generally spoke more about financial issues that the Prime Minister was addressing or that they felt she should be addressing. This specifically included the cost of the Brexit deal. Authors were also active in discussing Brexit more broadly, including the implications of leaving the EU, both for the UK and the EU. Male authors tended to be negative towards Theresa May and the way she was dealing with Brexit, arguing that she was only concerned with the welfare of the rich and not the poor.

JEREMY CORBYN

Conversation trends

LANGUAGE

Authors often directed expletives at Corbyn and called him derogatory names such as "twat", "idiot", "vile", and "filthy". He was often called a communist, a Marxist, and a racist. Corbyn was considered by many authors to be untrustworthy and dishonest.

APPEARANCE

There was insignificant negativity towards Corbyn's appearance. Comments were mostly directed at his beard with one author referring to him as "grey beard".

MARITAL STATUS

Authors shared press sources commenting on Corbyn's marital status. One source referred to his alleged affair with fellow Labour Party politician Diane Abbott during his first marriage. A second article shared by authors described his current wife's business, which sells coffee that is sourced from Mexico. The article described the terrible conditions and poor wages that workers experience.



Although there was a high volume of generally negative sentiment directed towards Jeremy Corbyn, he did not receive many gendered tweets. Instead, most of the negativity revolved around his policies and political activities.

Themes in negative sentiment

Amongst negative comments in particular, several themes emerged.

The word "money" often appeared in negative posts, generally in relation to Labour Party policies, which authors argued were not properly costed or are not financially realistic.

Similarly to Theresa May, the word “power” often arose in negative tweets about Corbyn. Authors often commented that if he wanted to move from opposition leader to Prime Minister, he needed to earn the position.

Corbyn is also often accused of being a “communist”. One particular comment by famous British musician Noel Gallagher – in which he said “Fuck Jeremy Corbyn. He’s a Communist.” – was retweeted widely. Other authors attacked him as a “communist scumbag” and “Leader of the New Nasty Communist Party”. Authors often described him as outside of the mainstream due to his political views.

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) also featured prominently in negative comments about Corbyn. He was criticised for not unequivocally condemning the IRA, a paramilitary group that remains classified by the UK government as a terrorist organisation.

Example tweets for key themes in negative conversation

Stephen Holland #FBPE
@Phesnet

Replying to @Phesnet

Penny not dropped yet, but please @jeremycorbyn do the maths. Lower growth, higher borrowing, Brexit bill. Where is money for your policies?

13:44 - 24 Sep 2017

4 likes

Rory Marrow
@RoryMarrow

Do not say anything about condemning when you refused to condemn Venezuela and the IRA you useless fool

[twitter.com/jeremycorbyn/s...](#)

23:26 - 29 Nov 2017

1 like

Mud Month Gribble
@WCNchris

Dear @jeremycorbyn - if you aren't debating Brexit you aren't facing your country. You want power? Earn it.

21:21 - 24 Sep 2017

4 likes

john yates
@johnyates3

Noel Gallagher: “Fuck Jeremy Corbyn. He’s a Communist”

[nme.com/news/music/noe...](#)

12:04 - 30 Nov 2017

4 likes

Author gender analysis

Female authors were more positive towards Jeremy Corbyn than male authors. There were also differences in the topics discussed by male and female authors in relation to Corbyn.

Volume and sentiment by author’s gender



Female authors, like male authors, most often spoke about Corbyn and his views on Brexit. However, female authors commented less than male authors on the topic. The Labour Party conference was also a topic discussed by women as well as wages of public sector workers. Taxes and interest rates also featured in the discussion by female authors.

Male authors were vocal about their opinions of Corbyn and his stance on Brexit, more so than female authors. Comments about Corbyn as the leader of the Labour Party, and the main opposition to May, were regularly discussed by male authors. Generally they were slightly more positive than negative about him as a politician. Male authors also criticised Corbyn's comments during Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs).

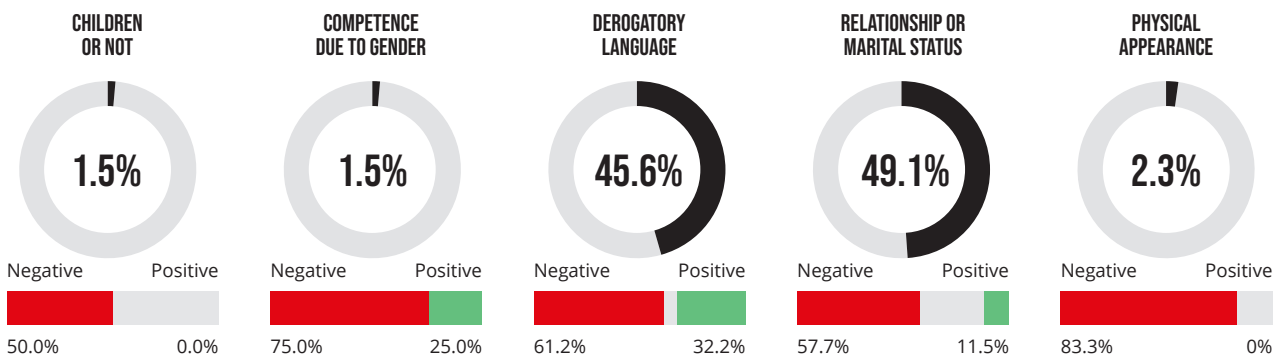
SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, we analysed tweets about Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa during a time when both politicians were vying for the presidency of their party, the ruling African National Congress (ANC). The contest for the ANC presidency was a topical conversation in South Africa, both online and offline, with the public holding strong opinions of the politicians.

Share of categorised tweets for each politician and accompanying sentiment breakdowns

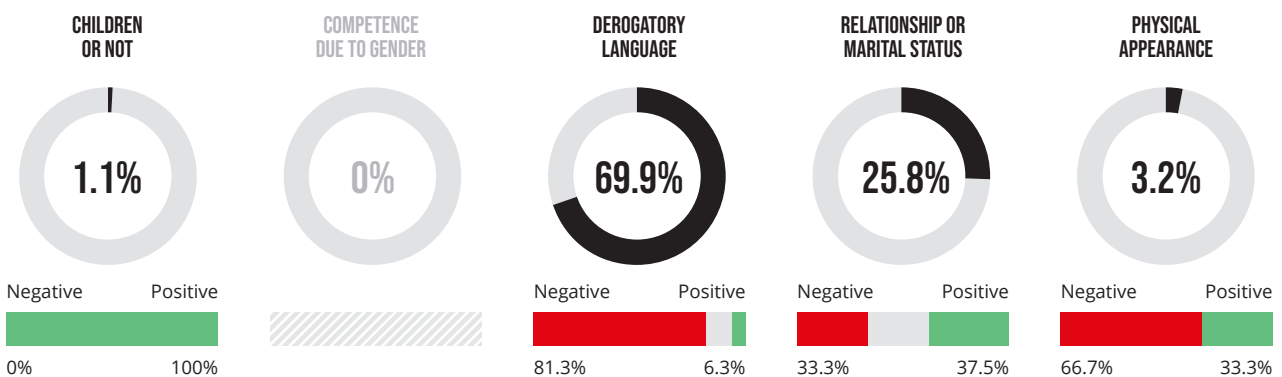
NKOSAZANA DLAMINI-ZUMA

Negative Neutral Positive



CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

Negative Neutral Positive



Examples of tweets related to Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa in each category are included below.

NKOSAZANA DLAMINI-ZUMA

CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

Physical appearance

Zohra Teke
@ZOHRAIETEKE

#DlaminiZuma needs to soften her look, smile and act more presidential than comrade. She looks stiff & outdated. She needs a new sassy look

23:18 - 11 Sep 2017

See Zohra Teke's other Tweets

Tomi Rikhotso
@TomiRikods

You clearly haven't seen Cyril Ramaphosa's nose

twitter.com/KanjaniSonto/s...

11:09 - 24 Oct 2017

See Tomi Rikhotso's other Tweets

Relationship or marital status

Trending Crimes SA
@CICArSa

The ANC has just announced that Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma will be sworn in as a member of parliament.

Husband & wife government. Cute.

18:35 - 8 Sep 2017

78 people are talking about this

Sine Themba
@savethebay4

Replying to @KunjaloD @DlaminiZuma

#CR17 has never denied that he has a relationship with the 8 women.

Why must #NDZ call it a "smear" campaign when CR had the relationships?

00:03 - 6 Sep 2017

See Sine Themba's other Tweets

Derogatory / provocative language

Melchizedek
@mmilindwa

Dlamini-Zuma sworn in as MP, criminal, corrupt, self-centred addition to da ANC looting, radically transform their families, no public interest

16:17 - 21 Sep 2017

See Melchizedek's other Tweets

lint inmo
@lint_imos

#Ramaphosa is sold out to #WMC & we don't want a #womanizer #murderer or #blesser as our next #president.

Why #DlaminiZuma deserves to be our next president?

#NDZ17, a very strong lady who did fight against #corruption for SA blacks. #SupportRET #Vote #NDZ17 @ANCWomensLeague pic.twitter.com/caCJKBm9Aq

07:29 - 20 Nov 2017

See lint inmo's other Tweets

Children or not

chandler
@chandle84327860

NDZ has made peace with Jz to make sure that the Zuma empire (estate, loot etc) does not suffer. She's a beneficiary. Her kids & fam r too

twitter.com/pierredevos/st...

23:33 - 25 Sep 2017

See chandler's other Tweets

Muhammad Paruk
@muhammadjparuk

Fact is...cyril or his family 9never stole state money ever...the same can't be said about @DlaminiZuma faction. ... They are a bunch of rogues....

twitter.com/Adamitv/status...

20:42 - 29 Nov 2017

See Muhammad Paruk's other Tweets

Competence due to gender

Uncle Wiz
@Wizba

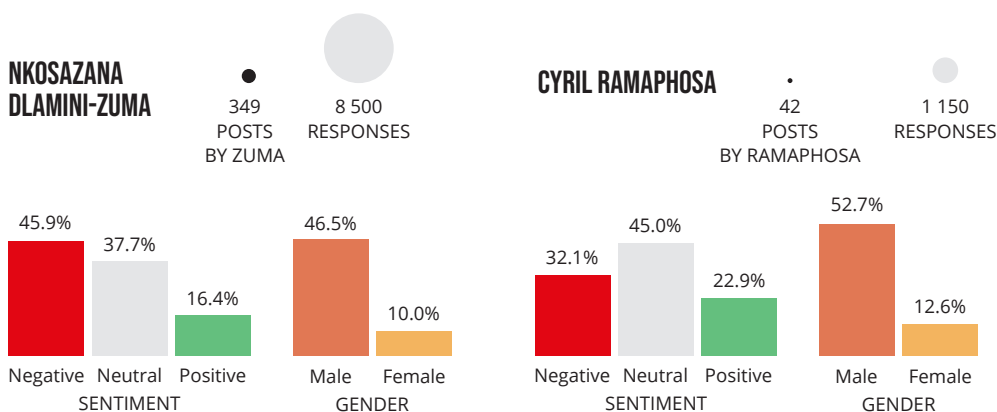
Listening to Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, haayi this woman can't be a President of the country should she win the ANC elections first, too soft

19:04 - 5 Dec 2017

See Uncle Wiz's other Tweets

Dlamini-Zuma was significantly more active than Ramaphosa, however both had a similar engagement rate on their posts. Responses to Dlamini-Zuma were considerably more negative than those to Ramaphosa. For both politicians, male commenters dominated the replies.

Twitter engagement with politicians



NKOSAZANA DLAMINI-ZUMA

Conversation trends

LANGUAGE

The most prominent negative descriptor used in reference to Dlamini-Zuma was “corrupt”, which was often due to her connection with South Africa’s President, Jacob Zuma. Her family ties were often referred to in a negative way due to her previous marriage to Jacob Zuma. She was often negatively referred to as an “old woman” or a “gogo” – the Zulu word for grandmother.

APPEARANCE

Comments on Dlamini-Zuma’s appearance had a generally negative sentiment. Authors often described her as “ugly” and “old”. Detractors also described her appearance as “un-presidential”.

COMPETENCE

Dlamini-Zuma was the only politician accused of being incompetent due to her gender. Detractors of her recent campaign to become ANC president made negative comments about a woman’s ability to serve as president.

MARITAL STATUS

Dlamini-Zuma was often not taken seriously as a political candidate. Her own political credentials were ignored and her competence and political agenda were directly linked to that of her ex-husband, whom she divorced in 1998.

CHILDREN

Authors commented about Dlamini-Zuma being both a mother and a grandmother. Derogatory comments about Jacob Zuma, and by extension Dlamini-Zuma, running South Africa like their own private kingdom with their children inheriting their power, were also observed.



Themes in negative sentiment

A large proportion of the negative sentiment towards Dlamini-Zuma revolved around her relationship to former President Jacob Zuma. This was reflected in the large number of tweets including the words “family” and “wife”. This theme was prevalent not only in social media conversations about Dlamini-Zuma, but also in traditional media coverage. South Africa’s largest broadcaster, SABC, was forced to apologise after referring to her as Jacob Zuma’s ex-wife rather than acknowledging her own political achievements. This incident was picked up on social media and led to a spike in both conversation volume and negative sentiment towards Dlamini-Zuma.

The word “woman” was often used in negative comments about Dlamini-Zuma, indicating the gendered nature of the negative conversation about her.

“Corruption” was also a prominent theme, with comments both about her ex-husband and allegations about her own actions in her campaign for the ANC presidency.

Example tweets for key themes in negative conversation

Enoch Mthembu
@enochme

This is legacy of Zuma and his family Dr Nkosazane will execute the destruction of SA further. pic.twitter.com/LZivQIZL8J

18:49 - 3 Sep 2017

See Enoch Mthembu's other Tweets

Alfred Shabalala
@AlfredShabalala

Replying to @DlaminiZuma

I hope you have learned from Zimbabwe that wife can't succeed her husband as a President

15:47 - 28 Nov 2017

See Alfred Shabalala's other Tweets

el jefe
@DavidMokwena12

A vote for NDZ in December is a vote for corruption .This must stop pic.twitter.com/XL7vCptCid

18:00 - 11 Nov 2017 · Soweto, South Africa

See el jefe's other Tweets

Karin Morrow
@rinmor

NDZ is an obstinate obturate woman who doesn't take kindly to being advised about issues .. oh and she can't sing or dance either 😏

17:09 - 10 Sep 2017

See Karin Morrow's other Tweets

Author gender analysis

Male authors were more negative towards Dlamini-Zuma than female authors, though she received a high proportion of critical comments from both genders. Male authors also accounted for a significantly greater proportion of conversation.

Volume and sentiment by author's gender



The most prominent topic of discussion among female authors related to Dlamini-Zuma's family ties. Comments related to both her previous marriage to President Jacob Zuma and their four children who people jokingly claimed would take over the presidency after Dlamini-Zuma. Positive comments from female authors were generally positive about having a woman standing as a candidate for ANC party president.

Male authors were vocal about the country and the state it is in. They were negative about Dlamini-Zuma's ability to improve the current situation. They also commented about corruption and the possibility of Dlamini-Zuma also being "captured" by the corrupt activities of her ex-husband. Some male authors also dismissed her as just another Zuma family member.

CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

Conversation trends



LANGUAGE

Ramaphosa was hit by a scandal after private emails were leaked which allegedly linked him to affairs with students whose education he sponsored. Ramaphosa was called a #womanizer and #sugardaddy. Despite the accusations causing increased negative sentiment for Ramaphosa, they did not generate a massive volume of conversation.



APPEARANCE

Cyril Ramaphosa's appearance was often mentioned in relation to Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. Dlamini-Zuma was not considered to have a presidential appearance, whereas Ramaphosa was.



MARITAL STATUS

Ramaphosa was accused of having numerous extra-marital affairs, specifically with students, which increased negativity towards him and led to him being called a #womanizer and a #sugardaddy.



CHILDREN

The few tweets that Ramaphosa had in this category portrayed his children positively in comparison to Dlamini-Zuma's.

Themes in negative sentiment

A significant amount of the negative conversation about Cyril Ramaphosa centred on the #RamaphosaLeaks, in which he was accused of having extra-marital affairs with students who he supports financially, and discussion about #WMC (white monopoly capital), or the control of the South African economy by wealthy white elite. Both narratives were employed over the analysis period as tools to discredit Ramaphosa and his campaign for ANC party president.

The words "corrupt" and "corruption" also featured prominently in negative posts about Ramaphosa, with authors accusing him of not having the country's interests at heart.

Authors also negatively referred to Ramaphosa's quest for power, alleging that it is driven by personal gain rather than for the good of South African people.

Example tweets for key themes in negative conversation

Author gender analysis

Male authors made up a larger proportion of comments towards Ramaphosa than females. They were also much more positive towards him.

Volume and sentiment by author's gender



Female authors prominently discussed ANC branches and the announcement of their votes for ANC party president. Authors shared results from branch votes as well as potential foul play in the representation of branches. Female authors also commented on Ramaphosa standing for party election against a woman. Two main themes dominated the conversation: that Ramaphosa was a womaniser running against a woman; or that people preferred Ramaphosa not because they did not want a female president, but because they preferred anyone to Dlamini-Zuma.

Male authors generally spoke about the December 2017 ANC elective conference. Males also discussed corruption both within the ANC party as well as in relation to the two candidates.

Ramaphosa was viewed more favourably than Dlamini-Zuma who, along with her ex-husband, were seen to be proponents of state capture in the country. The media and its influence were also discussed by male authors: detractors accused Ramaphosa of using media, specifically white owned media, to run smear campaigns against Dlamini-Zuma.

CHILE

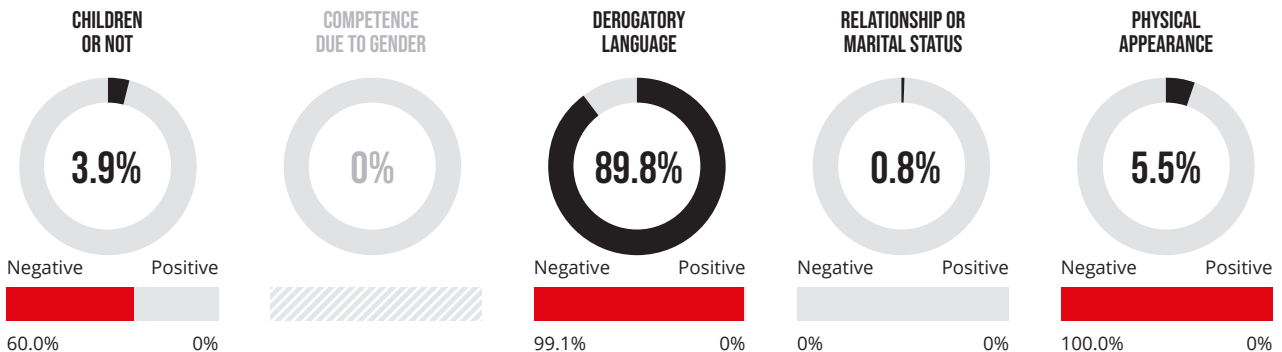
In Chile, we analysed conversations about outgoing President Michelle Bachelet and then presidential candidate (and former president) Sebastián Piñera. The period analysed included the final stage of the campaign, ending with the election of Piñera.

Similarly to the United Kingdom, comments in the derogatory language category comprised the greatest proportion of conversation volume, for both Michelle Bachelet and Sebastián Piñera. Somewhat surprisingly, given the very low domestic approval rating for Bachelet at the time and accusations of corruption against her son and daughter-in-law, Piñera experienced a larger proportion of derogatory comments. Bachelet had more than five times the proportion of conversation related to her physical appearance than Piñera had.

Share of categorised tweets for each politician and accompanying sentiment breakdowns

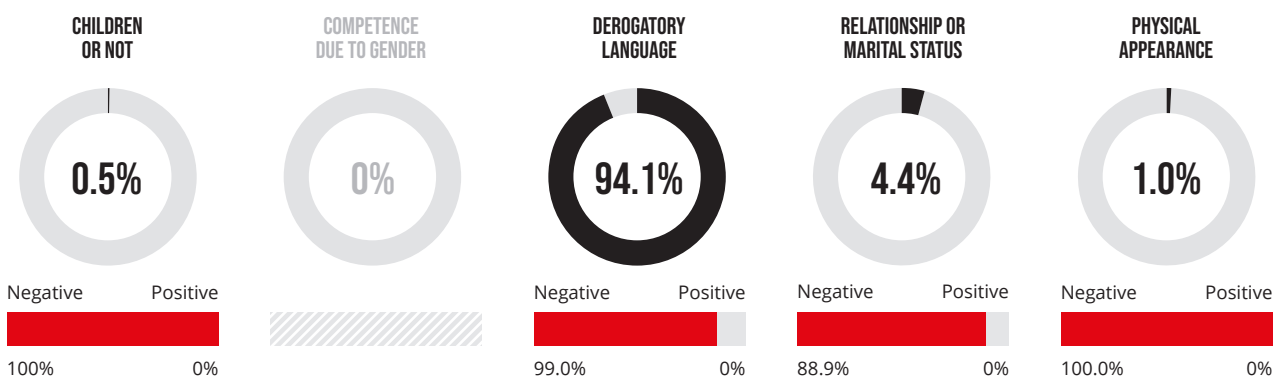
MICHELLE BACHELET

Negative Neutral Positive



SEBASTIÁN PIÑERA

Negative Neutral Positive



Examples of tweets related to Michelle Bachelet and Sebastián Piñera in each category are included below. The category “competence due to gender” was not included, as neither politician received any tweets in that category.

MICHELLE BACHELET

SEBASTIÁN PIÑERA

Physical appearance

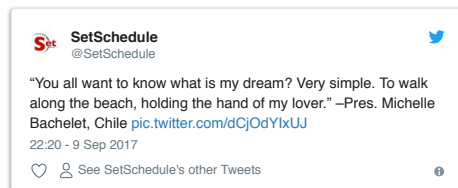


TRANSLATION — ...and this woman @mbachelet still insists on wearing a doctor's coat? Shameless woman.



TRANSLATION — @sebastianpinera is yet again in the spotlight, surely not for his good looks #PiñeraSQM

Relationship or marital status



TRANSLATION — Misogynist! Watch the ugly and humiliating way in which Sebastian Pinera shoves his wife Cecilia Morel (+VIDEO)

Derogatory / provocative language



TRANSLATION — The nice thing is that today they'll elect @mbachelet's replacement in Chile. Goodbye boring hag.

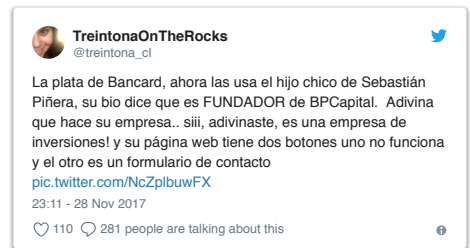


TRANSLATION — You have no values, they change as they suit you. We know that!

Children or not



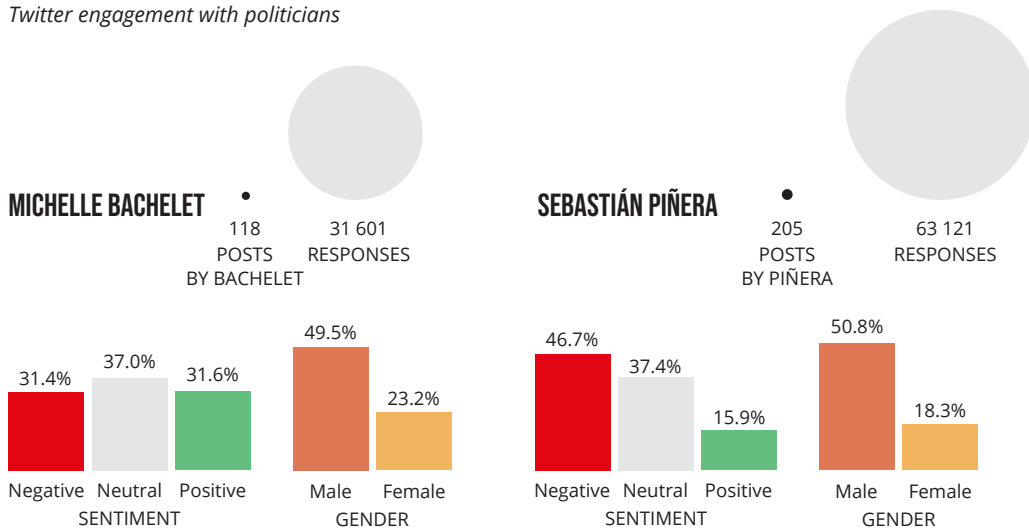
TRANSLATION — #ANbachelet the legacy of @mbachelet is her lovely daughter-in-law and horrible son.



TRANSLATION — Bancard's money is now being used by Sebastián Piñera's youngest son, his bio says he's the FOUNDER of BPCapital. Guess what his company does... yes, you guessed it, it's an investment company! And his website has two buttons one of which doesn't work and the other is a contact form.

Bachelet and Piñera had similar levels of engagement with their content. Piñera had a greater proportion of negative responses to his posts than Bachelet.

Twitter engagement with politicians



MICHELLE BACHELET

Conversation trends

LANGUAGE

Michelle Bachelet was most often described as “vieja” (old woman) in conjunction with other negative language. Crazy, corrupt, and lying old woman were often repeated allegations levelled at Bachelet. Detractors also used the term “mujer” (woman) negatively to refer to Bachelet. Conversation about her decision to ease abortion restrictions contributed to negative comments using that term.

APPEARANCE

Michelle Bachelet had a low volume of conversation about her physical appearance. However, people did criticise her for wearing a doctor’s coat during a public event.

RELATIONSHIP STATUS

Bachelet was quoted by a Real Estate company selling beach-side homes as saying: “You all want to know what is my dream? Very simple. To walk along the beach, holding the hand of my lover.” These comments were retweeted.

CHILDREN

Bachelet received negative comments related to accusations of tax fraud against her son and daughter-in-law. Some authors stated that this was Bachelet’s legacy that she left behind at the end of her presidency.



Themes in negative sentiment

The word “señora” and its abbreviation “Sra” (“Mrs.”) as well as the word “mujer” (“woman”) appeared prominently in negative posts.

The word “legado” (“legacy”) also appeared regularly in negative posts, reflecting authors’ negative perception of her tenure as president and sometimes used in reference to the tax fraud allegations against her son.

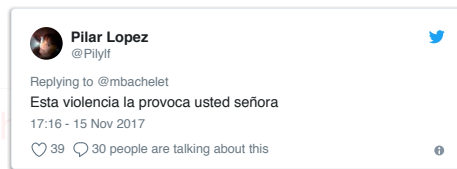
Example tweets for key themes in negative conversation

TRANSLATION — The #Caval Case another legacy from the queen of corruption @Mbachelet #HappyWednesday



fachorodriguez @fachorodriguez
 Caso #Caval otro legado de la reina de la corrupción @mbachelet #FelizMiercoles
 13:58 - 15 Nov 2017
 5 See fachorodriguez's other Tweets

TRANSLATION — This violence is being caused by you, ma'am.



Pilar Lopez @Pilylf
 Replying to @mbachelet
 Esta violencia la provoca usted señora
 17:16 - 15 Nov 2017
 39 30 people are talking about this




Acida @luciaovu
 ... y esta mujer @mbachelet insiste en delantal de doctora !? #mujer sin dignidad. pic.twitter.com/X4ff4S79oh
 02:44 - 29 Nov 2017
 2 See Acida's other Tweets



Aida Vandiest @aidavandiest
 Replying to @joseantoniokast @mbachelet
 Que imbecil esta Sra como ella ya se lleno los bolsillos con el dinero de los ciudadanos y de las pensiones lo peor ha sido esta mujer..
 02:49 - 1 Sep 2017
 See Aida Vandiest's other Tweets

TRANSLATION — What a moron this lady as she's already filled her pockets with the citizens' and pensioners' money this woman has been the worst...

TRANSLATION — ...and this woman @mbachelet still insists on wearing a doctor's coat? Shameless woman.

Author gender analysis

There were differences in both the sentiment and topics addressed by male and female authors.

Volume and sentiment by author's gender



Female authors were generally more positive towards Bachelet compared to male authors. A prominent topic of conversation for female authors was thanking the president for her service to the country after the national general elections took place. Women also contributed to high volumes of sarcastic comments about various issues, such as how the economy had performed under Bachelet.

Some male authors also thanked Bachelet for her service as president after Piñera was announced the winner of the national election. However, male authors were more negative towards her, often comparing her and incoming president Piñera. Bachelet was often criticised for her socialist policies – the political stance of her party – and this was also a basis for comparison between her and Piñera.

SEBASTIÁN PIÑERA

Conversation trends



LANGUAGE

Authors often referred to Piñera's previous term in office, during which many felt he had engaged in corrupt practices. Piñera was described as "corrupto" (corrupt), "mentiroso" (liar), and "ladrón" (thief). They accused Piñera, a businessman, of sinister dealings and profiting off the Chilean people. Many negative tweets also claimed that they would not want him to have another term as president.



APPEARANCE

Few authors commented on Piñera's appearance, however one stated that he was not chosen as a candidate based on his good looks.



MARITAL STATUS

The majority of authors that commented on Piñera's marital status referred to the same incident where he was caught on camera pushing or nudging his wife out of the way during a press event. A few authors went as far as to call him misogynistic and some commented that he did not want his wife to steal his spot in front of the camera.



CHILDREN

There was one tweet about Piñera's son and the company he claims to have founded.

Themes in negative sentiment

Several themes emerged in the negative conversation about Piñera. The word "candidato" ("candidate") appeared in many negative posts about him. Authors called him "inepto" ("inept") and referred to his refusal to engage in debate.

The word "gobierno" ("government") also appeared frequently, with authors referring to his legacy during his previous tenure as president.

The word "mentiroso" ("liar") also appeared regularly in negative tweets about Piñera, where authors questioned his trustworthiness and truthfulness.

Allegations that Piñera evaded taxes ("impuestos") were also frequently referenced in negative posts about the politician.

Unlike with conversation about Bachelet, gendered terms did not appear prominently in negative tweets about Piñera.

Example tweets for key themes in negative conversation

TRANSLATION — Undoubtedly @SebastianPinera is a useless candidate that runs from political debate. Chile doesn't deserve you!



TRANSLATION — This is the legacy that was left to us by the outstanding government of @SebastianPinera @Pablo_Longueira #SQM



TRANSLATION — Piñera CORNERED BY HIS OWN LIES this thief CAN'T be president! Unworthy, liar, THIEF, con artist, Chile DOESN'T deserve this @SebastianPinera #ZeroTolerance

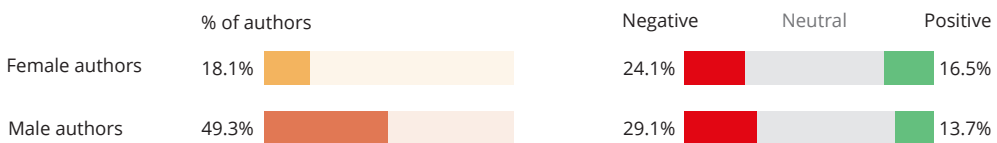


TRANSLATION — @SebastianPinera is an actual sociopath, he stole from the Bank of Talca and dodges taxes, but it's "others" who are "greedy" according to him.

Author gender analysis

Both male and female authors were more negative than positive towards Piñera. However, female authors were almost 3% more positive towards him.

Volume and sentiment by author's gender



Female authors commented on the government and whether Piñera was a positive figure to have as a leader. Generally, women were quite negative about Piñera as a future president. Women who

were positive about his candidacy often shared the hashtag #Tiemposmejores (Better Times) which was Piñera's campaign slogan. Women also had mixed reactions to his policy platform.

Male authors had a much higher volume of conversation compared to females. They commented largely on the same topics, but were more negative towards Piñera than female authors. There was a lot of commentary from men regarding Piñera's campaign leading up to the national elections. Authors were not very positive about how he had conducted his campaign and he was often accused of being afraid to directly face his opponent.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis revealed significant differences in both the volume and sentiment of gendered conversation about male and female political leaders. The findings illustrate the challenge that many female politicians face in focusing discussion on substantive policy issues rather than superficial or sexist commentary. The following chapter will look at the impact this has on both female politicians and on our broader democratic debate.

2

THE IMPACT OF ONLINE SEXISM, HARASSMENT, AND THREATS

GRAPHIC CONTENT WARNING: This chapter includes examples of some of the misogynistic and racist abuse that female leaders have received. We debated whether or not to include this content, at the risk of giving abusers a further platform or offending readers with strong language. However, we determined that in order to truly convey the vile nature of this abuse it was important not to censor the content.

THE CONTEXT

WOMEN FACE A DIFFERENT SCALE AND NATURE OF ATTACKS THAN MEN

As illustrated in our analysis of social media conversations, the online discussion about female politicians – and the attacks levelled at them – are different than for male politicians. Other recent studies looking specifically at online harassment have found that women are subject to a significantly greater volume of attacks and threatening language online. These are often of a gendered or sexualised nature, differentiating them from the attacks levelled against men.

A survey conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) of 55 women parliamentarians from 39 countries across five regions found that 81.8% were subject to psychological violence and that social media was the “number one place” in which that violence played out.¹ This psychological violence takes the form of “sexist and misogynistic remarks, humiliating images, mobbing, intimidation and threats”.² Attacks can often be graphic in nature, with 41.8% of women reporting “extremely humiliating or sexually charged images [of themselves] spread through social media”.³

The experience of former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff shows the grotesque form that these attacks can take. Crude, sexually explicit images of Rousseff circulated on social media and were turned into “car stickers that fit around the gas tank, depicting Rousseff with legs splayed and inviting drivers to penetrate her every time they fill up”.⁴ In another incident, a blogger photoshopped an image of Rousseff covered in mud, which called her “The Lying Prostitute of the Planalto [Brazil’s presidential palace]”.⁵



1. Source: Feminist Current

A 2016 study looking at leadership contests in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia also found that abusive language and threats on social media were much more prevalent towards women than towards their male counterparts. Hillary Clinton received abusive tweets at twice the rate of her opponent, Bernie Sanders, and former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard was similarly subjected to approximately twice as many abusive tweets as her male rival Kevin Rudd.⁶

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If you look at the ways that women are being threatened it is very different than the way that men are often attacked. So, you see that men are often criticised for their policy viewpoints. That’s a very democratic critique. Sometimes people say they disagree with women and criticise them on policy grounds, but a lot of the attacks are very personal, and they’re often couched in very gendered terms.

We spoke with Dr. Mona Lena Krook, an expert on gender and politics who has done a substantial amount of research into violence against women in politics. She explained the issue: “If you look at the ways that women are being threatened it is very different than the way that men are often attacked. So, you see that men are often criticised for their policy viewpoints. That’s a very democratic critique. Sometimes people say they disagree with women and criticise them on policy grounds, but a lot of the attacks are very personal, and they’re often couched in very gendered terms. They’re not saying, ‘you’re stupid’, but ‘you’re a

stupid woman'. It gets to this idea that as a woman you have no right to say something. And it's not even that they necessarily disagree with your viewpoint. It's that they feel affronted that it's a woman who is taking the space".

ATTACKS AGAINST WOMEN OF COLOUR AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES ARE PARTICULARLY VICIOUS

Attacks against women of colour and religious minorities are even more vicious. A study by Amnesty International found that Black and Asian women Members of Parliament (MPs) in the UK received 35% more abusive tweets than white women.⁷ Asian women MPs received the greatest number of abusive tweets per MP, despite making up just 8.8% of women MPs in the UK.⁸

Of those abusive tweets, half were directed against one woman: Labour Party MP and Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott. Speaking during a parliamentary debate about the racist and sexist abuse she endured, Abbott said: "We have to be clear that we are talking not about robust debate,

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I have had death threats, and people tweeting that I should be hanged 'if they could find a tree big enough to take the fat bitch's weight'.

however robust it is, but about mindless abuse. In my case, the mindless abuse has been characteristically racist and sexist. I have had death threats, and people tweeting that I should be hanged 'if they could find a tree big enough to take the fat bitch's weight'. There

was an English Defence League-affiliated Twitter account—#burnDianeAbbot. I have had rape threats, and been described as a 'pathetic useless fat black piece of shit', an 'ugly, fat black bitch', and a 'nigger'—over and over again. One of my members of staff said that the most surprising thing about coming to work for me is how often she has to read the word 'n*gger'. It comes in through emails, Twitter and Facebook".⁹

Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, former MP for the Scottish National Party and the first Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) woman from Scotland to be elected to any Parliament, explained the toll that online abuse takes, during an interview with Amnesty: "I am from a Scottish-Asian community. I am a Muslim. And I'm a woman. So it's everything. It has an exponential effect, so

people will pile on for a variety of different reasons. Some of them because you are all of these things, and some because you are one of these things, or two of these things, which makes it so much more difficult to deal with, because you just wonder where do I start with this?"¹⁰



2. Source: *The Daily Stormer*, a neo-Nazi and white supremacist website that has organized attacks against Berger.

29 October 2014 Last updated at 16:02

MP wants action over hilarious Twitter abuse of fugly kike sow



Since today Antisemite trolls began calling out the MP on her sick Jew master, she has consumed over 2500 dogpiles to snub her grid.

Labour MP John Mann has demanded action over what he says is the "vitriolic and violent" anti-Semitic abuse directed at colleague Luciana Berger on Twitter.

Mr Mann said the abuse had got worse since a man was jailed for four weeks for sending offensive tweets to the MP for Liverpool Wavertree.

Finally, the BBC is on our side. I knew this day would come. Regrettably, their proofreader was a Jew, so they had to fire him.

Related Stories

Niggers rioting again

Ben Garrison: A hero's tale

3. *Photoshopped BBC article posted on The Daily Stormer*, a neo-Nazi and white supremacist website that has organised attacks against Berger.

British Labour Party MP Luciana Berger has been the subject of misogynistic and anti-Semitic attacks, several of which have risen to the level of credible death threats. Some of her attackers – Joshua Bonehill-Paine, John Nimmo, and Garron Helm – have been jailed for their threats. At the peak of the abuse, Berger received 2,500 anti-Semitic tweets in just a three-day period.

Many of the abusive tweets directed at her used the hashtag #filthyjewbitch, illustrating the combined sexist and anti-Semitic

sentiment behind them. Some of the abusive social media activity was organised by *The Daily Stormer*, a neo-Nazi white supremacist website. Berger's decision to report the abuse and pursue the prosecution of the perpetrators led to even more anti-Semitic attacks, including the photoshopped BBC article shown here, which still appears on *The Daily Stormer* website.

Sexist, racist, or bigoted abuse can often impact female politicians' staff as well. We spoke with Jenna Lowenstein, who served as the Digital Director for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign. Lowenstein told us about the impact that racist and sexist abuse had on campaign staff: "A number of people on our team, all women, of course mostly women of colour, over the course of the campaign became the target of horrific bullying and trolling and violent language that rose to the level of it having to be considered serious threats".

SOCIAL MEDIA LOWERS THE BARRIERS FOR HARASSMENT

Harassment against women in politics is not a product of the social media era. However, social media does lower the barriers to harassment.

We spoke with Argentinian political strategist Ana Iparraguirre, who has worked both in the United States and in campaigns across Latin America. She explained: "What you tend to find online is very similar to what you used to hear offline. The main difference is that now it's easier to put out sexist comments, and you're more anonymous. It's not the same even for a journalist to ask something face-to-face with a candidate than to write it on Twitter. I think it gives a platform for all these more primal, more basic things that people just say out of pure instinct and emotion that they may

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I think it gives a platform for all these more primal, more basic things that people just say out of pure instinct and emotion that they may not rationalise or think through.

not rationalise or think through. So, I think it happens the same that it used to happen – or even still happens – offline, but it's just faster and much more aggressive and with less barriers".

Social media has also increased access to politicians. Where you used to have to show up at an event or write and mail a letter to hurl abuse at a political leader, now all you have to do is tweet or post a comment on their Facebook page. Social media can also come with an added element of anonymity, which can make people feel more comfortable sharing abusive or sexualised content than they would otherwise.

The recent rise of troll armies and bots amplifies the scale of the problem, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel discovered. Just days after setting up her Twitter account, Merkel was subjected to a wave of abuse from an army of Russian trolls, many of whom posted derogatory and sexualised comments and threats. A picture of Merkel meeting Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko became a particular target for the trolls, who posted comments comparing both leaders to Nazis, insulting Merkel's appearance, and making aggressive sexual threats.¹¹

As we now know, Hillary Clinton was also a target of Russian bots. Though during the campaign the attacks these bots were using blended into a wider backdrop of abuse that made it harder to detect, as Lowenstein told us: "One of my biggest personal mistakes in the campaign was not understanding where the sexist attacks directed at Hillary stopped and where Russian bot campaigns began. I think that because we had become so conditioned, for 20 years the narrative about her was so deeply sexist, that it wasn't surprising to us when we saw the narrative repeated online during the campaign and it didn't raise the flag as urgently as it might have if we didn't already expect this kind of attack. From day zero we understood that was going to be a strong part of the online conversation about this candidate and so I think it kept us from catching something that might have been evident a little bit earlier".

IMPACT

Gendered comments and threats made against female politicians online have a wide-ranging impact, both on the politicians themselves and on broader democratic debate.

DELEGITIMISING WOMEN AS LEADERS

The intent of gendered and sexualised attacks against women is often to delegitimise them as leaders and to question their right or their ability to serve in leadership roles. Even when attacks are not made with that conscious intention, the impact is still the same.

In our interview with Mona Lena Krook, she explained the effect that sexualised comments have: “There’s a lot of research that shows that when you sexually objectify somebody, people tend to believe that the woman is less competent. So, it’s definitely this whole strategy of delegitimising

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... when you sexually objectify somebody, people tend to believe that the woman is less competent

women and undercutting their authority, on top of trying to get into their headspace to get in the way of being able to do their political work”.

In one such experiment, researchers created two Facebook feeds about a hypothetical female candidate. Both feeds discussed the candidate’s

policy credentials, but one feed also included commentary on the candidate’s body. Those exposed to the objectifying content were more likely to rate the candidate as less competent and less serious than those who were only exposed to the content discussing policy credentials.¹²

This is something that the President of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, has experienced first-hand, as she explained on an episode of *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*: “Maybe two days after the election, we go online and there’s these movie clips from literally a porn movie...claiming that it’s me ‘in action’...You know when I Google my name and I see all sorts of photos that is actually not me, especially in bathing suits, it makes you feel like an object, rather than as an actor”.¹³

The photos she referred to include her face photoshopped onto the bikini-clad body of Coco Austin, an American actress and model. The images were spread widely online, along with demeaning and sexual commentary. The faked images and videos were a clear attempt to attack her credibility.

Even when not sexual in nature, gendered comments or comments that pose double standards for female and male political leaders can also have a damaging impact.

British MP Rachel Reeves experienced this in 2015, shortly before the parliamentary elections. Reeves was serving as Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary and would have therefore been expected to have a Cabinet role if the Labour Party had won the election. She also happened to be pregnant, a fact which some used to question her ability to do her job.

We spoke with Reeves about the impact that it had on her at the time: “I was quite shocked at the time that anyone would have the slightest issue to be honest, because lots of male MPs had children whilst being in the cabinet. No one would have questioned their ability to do their job. And I was also surprised that people, even if they thought it, would then be willing to say it. The fact that so many people still had those views I was quite surprised about, and it did me in for a few days. That’s all I could talk about rather than important policy areas I was covering. This wasn’t just online. On radio phone-ins and newspapers people were expressing their views. I’m sure that people are more willing to say things with anonymity online, but even publicly, people are willing to say these things”.

Reeves unfortunately isn’t alone in this experience. The vast majority of elected women have experienced some form of misogynistic or harassing behaviour. As Nancy Peckford, Executive

Director of the Canadian organisation Equal Voice, explained in an interview with *CBC*, “misogynistic and sexist undertones and explicit commentary [is] used to diminish women’s contributions to public life and also undermine the confidence and the leadership female elected officials are offering”.¹⁴

DEPERSONALISING

The way in which female political leaders are forced to respond to this commentary also has a damaging impact on our democratic systems. Many of the female politicians we spoke with noted that online attacks have impacted the amount and type of information they share about themselves publicly.

We spoke with Baroness Anne Jenkin, a member of the UK House of Lords, who has been outspoken about the impact of sexism and abuse on female political leaders. She explained to us: “I think the most powerful thing a politician can do is be themselves, and it is their stories and their backstories that makes it interesting. You know, ‘who are you’, ‘where have you come from’, ‘why are you doing this’. I think that it inhibits women from telling that story, because they don’t want to personalise themselves, and of course they are worried about their families. So, I think it in a way depersonalises

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If I was doing a normal job and was a normal person, I would have a Facebook page where I would, like a normal mum, share pictures of my kids and what I’m doing in my private life. There’s no way I would do that because I don’t want my children to be in the public domain in any way.

them which is a shame because we have a huge variety of backgrounds of people in politics. Far more diverse than most people are aware. And yet they don’t want to talk about where they come from for that reason”.

Rachel Reeves echoed this sentiment: “If I was doing a normal job and was a normal person, I would have a Facebook page where I would, like a normal mum, share pictures of my kids and what I’m doing in my private life. There’s no way I would do that because I don’t want my children to be in the public domain in any

way. So, I do think it affects you, if you are constantly trying to be very private about your private life because as soon as you make it public then you sort of feel that your family will be fair game in the future”.

Abuse aside, women also face a double-edged sword when it comes to sharing their personal side. Jenna Lowenstein highlighted the challenge this posed in Hillary Clinton’s campaign: “Lots of studies for years have shown that one of the biggest challenges for women candidates, particularly women candidates running for executive office, is their need to credential themselves. People don’t take their experience seriously, and they don’t take their occupation seriously. So, it was an important responsibility for all the communications apparatuses of the campaign to do that credentialing work for Hillary. Turns out that the flip side of that is that it makes people think you’re all resume, no soul. So, I think one of the biggest challenges for women candidates is walking a line between that necessary work of credentialing and not coming across as only accomplishments, and I’m not a hundred percent sure how to do that to be honest”.

In fact, studies have shown that women whose communication style focuses on displaying their competence are often *less influential*, particularly with male audiences. As a 2001 study on gender and social influence notes, “women communicating in a mitigated and less competent style were better able to influence men than women using a more competent style...men, but not women, reported that highly competent women were more threatening and less likeable than less competent women, and these negative perceptions reduced influence”.¹⁵

The double standard for male and female candidates adds a layer of complexity for strategists, Lowenstein explained: “I think the concept of authenticity is sort of bullshit — feel free to quote that.

I think that what we reward as authenticity are qualities that are rewarded in men and punished in women. So, being unscripted, for example. People think of Joe Biden as rogue and funny and Hillary as unprepared, that she makes mistakes, or she speaks out of turn. I think even at the appearance level, there's a real rewarding of authenticity in a candidate like Bernie Sanders who can show up in a rumpled suit and having not brushed his hair in seven years, but a woman candidate or frankly a candidate of colour could never do that because it detracts so much from them being taken seriously".

INTENTIONALLY DISTRACTING FEMALE POLITICIANS FROM GETTING WORK DONE

Almost everyone we spoke with highlighted the fact that harassment and attacks on social media are a distraction from focusing on real, substantive issues that are central to the job of being a political leader.

Whether you are trying to get your message across and are faced with sexist comments in return, or whether you are preoccupied by genuine physical threats, both have a damaging impact on a politician's ability to focus on the work at hand. This is not an unintentional side-effect. It's often the aim of those perpetrating the attacks.

As US Member of Congress Katherine Clark explained in an interview with *The Atlantic*: "Any woman who is using the Internet for her professional life or for her personal life has come across that moment where there is all of the sudden a hateful or sexist comment coming back at you...You do internalize it, and even though it is not someone directly in front of you, there is something about the anonymous nature of it—when you don't know where a threat is coming from—that really gets into someone's psyche".¹⁶

British Labour Party MP Jess Phillips has been the target of vicious online attacks, at one point receiving 600 rape and death threats in a single day. She told us about the impact that relentless abuse can have: "When it first happened to me it was like a new phenomenon that I just wasn't expecting and didn't see coming. It was harrowing. It was just a tiring and constant pile-on with people being very, very aggressive and threatening towards me. I just was really shocked the first time. I wasn't frightened. I didn't

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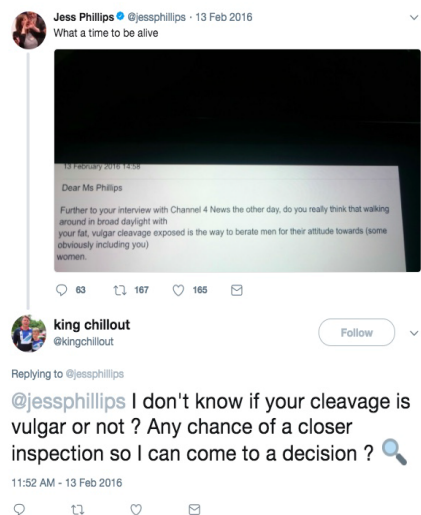
When it first happened to me it was like a new phenomenon that I just wasn't expecting and didn't see coming. It was harrowing.

feel fear that people were actually going to hurt me, to be honest. But just the sheer volume of it is very, very tiring. When I reported it to the police, it became even more tiring because they relied on me to sift

through thousands of messages across different platforms—Twitter, Facebook, my emails—to find all of the stuff that I was getting. And it fell on me to prove where the locus of that was. That will just do your mental health no good sifting through thousands of pieces of paper. And, when I got to the police they had done a similar thing and it was literally like a stack bigger than a phonebook. That was a bit depressing".



4. Source: Twitter



5. Source: Twitter

Phillips now has filters in place on her social media accounts so that she doesn't see the worst of the threatening messages. However, that doesn't shield her from the constant, demeaning comments about her appearance. She told us: "I get an awful lot of comments about my appearance, and certain clothes that I wear. And because I've got quite big boobs I get a lot of comments about that. If I ever show any cleavage, I'll get attacked for that. People will find the most unattractive picture of you. They'll snapshot something off the telly when you've been speaking and then pull apart your appearance. And men are a bit dull to look at, aren't they, I suppose. They're allowed to be craggy faced and tired and women aren't. People will say something like 'put on some makeup luv'. Lots of people will comment on my teeth, lots of people will comment on my weight, my hair, whether it's clean or not. And it's not always clean, it's certainly not clean today. That definitely affects me more than the obviously sexist aggressive stuff. The obviously sexist and aggressive stuff is just bad people."

The comments aren't just limited to her appearance, Phillips explained: "Because I've got a regional accent people will talk about how I'm 'common', and I'm 'stupid' because of my voice. It's terminology like 'fish wife', 'harpy', those sorts of gendered comments. Even the way I am sitting on the television people will criticize. It's like, I just put my bum on a chair".

Asked about the impact that the constant derogatory comments have on her, Phillips told us: "It's not nice. I wish that it impacted what I wore, but I am really not going to get out of bed half an hour earlier to sort my life out. I would rather stay in bed, I work incredibly hard. But it affects my self-esteem more than it changes my behaviour. I grew up with three brothers, and they know how to pick on the thing that you feel uncomfortable about yourself. The worst thing is that when people say those things, it's what women think about themselves. So, it's like confirmation bias and that affects your self-esteem".

FEAR FOR PHYSICAL SAFETY OF THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES

When harassment escalates to the level of physical threats, female political leaders are also forced to contend with fear for their own safety and the safety of their families.

US Member of Congress Katherine Clark had been fighting against online harassment and "swatting" (deceiving police into responding to a fake emergency) when she became a target herself. When sitting at home with her family, police suddenly surrounded her house in response to a fake report about a shooter. As she told *The Atlantic*, "There was just that moment of panic that something very bad was about to happen or had happened...As much as I had heard about swatting, it's a very different situation when you are all of the sudden standing between your family—between your children—and a very engaged, active police presence in your front yard".¹⁷

The Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Laura Boldrini, has also had to face this issue. Boldrini has faced numerous death threats, often perpetrated by right-wing groups opposed to immigration. One of the threats she endured followed the death of a woman and the arrest of three African immigrants for her murder. Boldrini's face was photoshopped onto a severed head alongside the comment "This is the fate she must endure in order to appreciate the customs of her friends".¹⁸



6. Source: Facebook

Boldrini explained the impact of the threats on her family in an interview with *The Guardian*, saying: “[This is] something that really affects me a lot...It’s absolutely terrible. Sometimes they also say, ‘We know where your apartment [is], we know your address’. I have a daughter. She’s studying in the UK; she is 20. And when she is here I am always very anxious. Because I don’t want her to have a problem because of me”.¹⁹

DISSUADING WOMEN FROM BEING POLITICALLY ACTIVE

The intent of harassment and attacks is often to intimidate and to dissuade women from running for office. But is it working?

Baroness Anne Jenkin, who co-founded the Conservative campaigning group Women2Win in 2005 with Theresa May, told us that it hasn’t dissuaded the female candidates she worked with in the last election: “We have quite recently done a big survey of the 150 women who were on the candidates list. The vast majority of those who fought seats last time want to go on with it. They are resilient people, and they were determined not to be beaten by this. Of all the qualities I think you need in stepping forward into public life, resilience is number one. Stamina, good memory, there are loads of other ones, but resilience above all. What I do think is that it is a deterrent when women are thinking about coming forward, when they are weighing up the balance and they don’t know anything about the job, or the process, or how to do it, I’m pretty sure that women think ‘well women get this extra abuse, perhaps I won’t, even if I’m thinking about it’. So, we have to deal with that”.

Rachel Reeves told us it’s something she discusses with potential first-time candidates: “I would say to people who ask my advice on whether they should stand, that [harassment] is one of the things that they should think about. Because when I became an MP, which was only seven and-a-half, eight years ago, these things weren’t nearly as bad as they are today. Twitter barely existed. You didn’t have the same sort of culture either, I think it’s gotten worse in the last few years. And it’s something that I would advise people to think about carefully before they become an MP, so they know what they’re getting into. I think it’s a shame that that’s one of the things that people have to consider”.



Of all the qualities I think you need in stepping forward into public life, resilience is number one.

Research has shown that social media attacks do indeed have a chilling effect, particularly on first-time female political candidates. Women frequently cite the “threat of widespread, rapid, public attacks on their personal dignity as a factor deterring them from entering politics”.²⁰

The impact goes beyond candidates to political activists, Jess Phillips told us: “I’ve had activists get in touch with me and ask me to undo retweeting things that they’ve said. Because I’ve retweeted it, or they’ve mentioned me in a comment, they’ve got loads of grief. I’ve had more than one occasion where they’ve had to come to me and ask me to be the person who stops it. And they say, ‘I’m really sorry I obviously appreciate everything you do, but I can’t be associated with you’”.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that online harassment and abuse have a detrimental impact on both female political leaders themselves, and on our democratic system more widely. From the emotional toll of being subjected to constant derogatory comments, to the legitimate fear of physical violence, female candidates and officeholders are forced to pay a considerable cost for engaging in public life. The next section of this report will look at what can be done by a range of actors to lower that cost and effectively address the problem.

3

A COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION

There is a temptation to view harassment and threats as simply the cost of entering politics, or to believe that nothing can be done to address it. A number of organisations have been working to challenge this notion.

Through its #NotTheCost campaign, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has worked to expose the heavy toll that these threats take on both female politicians themselves and on democratic systems. They highlight the impact of psychological violence, which is increasingly perpetrated online: “Patterns of abuse and harassment that become psychological violence can seek to delegitimise women as political actors by undermining their confidence, competence and visibility in the political sphere, negatively affecting the way they are portrayed and, therefore, how they are perceived... Digital media outlets and digital technology, in particular the huge reach of social media platforms, magnify the effects of psychological abuse and other forms of violence”.²¹

Similar initiatives have launched around the world in recent years. In 2016, a cross-party group of female Members of Parliament in the UK launched the “Reclaim the Internet” campaign to draw attention to the issue. Conservative MP and Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee



Challenging online abuse can't be done by any organisation alone. This needs everyone.

Maria Miller was one of the founders of the initiative. She explained to *The Guardian* why the campaign was started: “What I want to see is a more honest and open conversation about what is and isn't acceptable behaviour

online...I think at the moment people simply accept online abuse that verges on criminal behaviour without really questioning whether that is acceptable”.²²

Yvette Cooper, a Labour Party MP also involved in the group echoed this sentiment, saying at the launch: “Forty years ago women took to the streets to challenge attitudes and demand action against harassment on the streets. Today the internet is our streets and public spaces. Yet for some people, online harassment, bullying, misogyny, racism or homophobia can end up poisoning the internet and stopping them from speaking out. We have responsibilities as online citizens to make sure the internet is a safe space. Challenging online abuse can't be done by any organisation alone. This needs everyone”.²³

This chapter seeks to address what that collaborative approach could look like, and what a range of actors including female and male politicians, political parties, government, police and prosecutors, social media companies, and the media can do to play their part. It draws from our own experience in digital campaigning, our discussions with political leaders and strategists, and recommendations raised in other recent studies.

WHAT FEMALE CANDIDATES AND OFFICEHOLDERS CAN DO

Let us be clear up front that it should not be the burden of female candidates and officeholders to address the harassment and threats directed at them online. The victim of any other type of attack wouldn't be held responsible for stopping it, and female politicians shouldn't be held to a different standard. That said, there are some tactics that they can use to mitigate the problem while more systemic change is pursued.

RAISING AWARENESS

The first is raising awareness. This can often be easier for appointed, rather than elected, political leaders who can sometimes suffer a cost for simply speaking out, particularly if they do so during a campaign.

Baroness Anne Jenkin has been one of the leading figures drawing attention to both online and offline abuse and harassment of female politicians in the UK. She made headlines earlier this year when she said the word “cunt” during a debate on social media regulations in the House of Lords.

In order to convey the vile nature of abuse received by female politicians, she told her fellow peers: “During the election campaign in June, the Ealing Central and Acton Conservative candidate was met daily outside her home by a large group of Momentum and Labour activists yelling at her, and I quote—and please, my Lords, forgive the unparliamentary language and block your ears if you are sensitive or easily offended—“Fucking Tory cunt”. This young woman has a young child. How can this be acceptable? How does this not deter other mothers from stepping up? Her activists and volunteers were routinely spat at. They told an Asian activist that she deserved to have her throat slit and to be in the ground for being a Conservative—and much, much more, especially on social media...This abusive behaviour is fuelled by the anonymity which social media platforms provide. This is just one example of many where, during an attempt to take part in the democratic process, a candidate was subject to abuse, intimidation, libel and slander. Civil, criminal and electoral laws were broken, yet no action was taken. Online platforms have a responsibility to play their part in preventing this in future”.²⁴

The reaction was swift outside the chamber, with a flurry of commentary both in the media and online. The focus of the discussion centred around the use of the word “cunt” for the first time in Parliament, but it also elevated attention to the wider issue of abuse against female politicians.

We spoke with Baroness Jenkin about whether the strong reaction was something she had intended to provoke. She told us: “When I was preparing for the debate, I genuinely wasn’t thinking ‘I’m going to make a big thing of this’. And, when I was thinking shall I just say ‘offensive language’ or should I actually repeat the language, I probably wasn’t aware that nobody had used that word in the chamber before. Obviously, people outside the chamber picked it up very quickly on Twitter, and there was quite a lot of activity around ‘Baroness Jenkin said the word cunt in the chamber’ from mostly media people. Down at my end of the chamber it wasn’t very well-populated and I was speaking and didn’t look up, but I am told that there was a sharp intake of breath from the cross benches”.

She added that the reaction to the word itself did slightly take her by surprise, particularly given that it’s a term used against female political leaders on a regular basis: “It did cause more of a stir, if you like, than I expected. But I hadn’t really thought about that. I wasn’t out to shock people, but this sort of abuse happens to women candidates. I made the point in the speech, and as is clear in the report [by the Committee on Standards in Public Life], this is disproportionately for women and Conservative women in particular”.

The fact that she spoke up also led to further abuse, this time directed at her. She told us, “This was not a word that I would use lightly, it’s not a word that I would use myself to describe anybody, no matter how unpleasant. And, it’s not a word I liked describing me. But, of course on social media various left-wing groups cut those three words, put them on a loop, and said ‘this describes you perfectly’. So, immediately I have been called that myself, which doesn’t bother me but might bother some people”.

Across the Atlantic, a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Alberta, Sandra Jansen, took a similar tactic to raising awareness of the level of abuse directed at female politicians in Canada. She took to the floor and read some of the comments used against her,²⁵ which included:

- “What a traitorous bitch. You are both a disgrace to Alberta. Lying bitches”.
- “Now you have two blond bimbos in a party that is clueless”.

- “Another useless tit goes NDP. Dead meat”.
- “Sandra should stay in the kitchen where she belongs”.
- “Dumb broad, a good place for her to be is with the rest of the queers”.

She told her colleagues, “If you are stunned by the words you have heard in the last few days, if you reject the inherent violence behind them, and you know that harassment and abuse, even if it’s verbal, even if it’s online, and even if it’s directed at a political opponent, is poison. Let us be strong and clear in our resolve that no matter where we sit along political lines, we stand together against this. If we don’t feed it, we must oppose it...Don’t ignore it, don’t look the other way, don’t excuse it. Because our daughters are watching us. They are watching the challenges facing women in politics today. And imagine if we let that poison become normalized. Or if our daughters forgo the political arena altogether. That scares me”.

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**If we don’t feed it, we must oppose it...
Don’t ignore it, don’t look the other way,
don’t excuse it.**

Advocacy organisations have also sought to give female politicians a platform to speak out about the abuse they have endured. As one example, the Women’s Media Center released a video highlighting the experiences of female politicians in the US, as part of their #NameItChangeIt campaign.²⁶ In the video, they read some of the abusive comments they have received, including being called a “bad mother”, “abortion Barbie”, “baby killer”, and “dumb bitch”. Others recounted threats of physical violence, including one candidate being told, “It’s women like you that make men like me want to rape and kill women like you”.

These advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns are essential for highlighting the pervasive problem of online violence and harassment against women and pressing for tangible solutions.

PUSHING BACK

In addition to raising awareness, some female political leaders choose to push back directly against the perpetrators of harassment.

One high profile example is Canadian Environment Minister Catherine McKenna, who has been branded with the sexist nickname “Climate Barbie”. The term was coined by the right-wing website *The Rebel* but was quickly picked up more widely on social media.

When the term was used about her on Twitter by Conservative MP Gerry Ritz, McKenna decided to push back directly. Several other female politicians then called out the MP for his comments, and he later apologised and deleted his tweet.²⁷

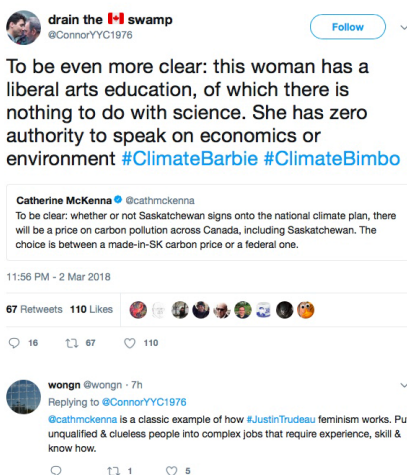
Despite this victory, the use of “Climate Barbie” has persisted. McKenna called out a reporter for *The Rebel* in November for their continued use of the derogatory nickname, saying: “So you’re the Rebel Media that happens to call me ‘climate Barbie.’ I certainly hope that you will no longer use that hashtag”.²⁸

When pushed, the reporter committed not to using it himself, with the caveat that he didn’t have editorial control over others. However,



2017-09-19, 10:23 PM

7. Source: Twitter



8. Source: Twitter

after the exchange he wrote on Twitter: “Our Alberta bureau chief coined the phrase ‘Climate Barbie,’ a reference to McKenna’s shallowness. She did not disprove that tonight”.²⁹

Even if *The Rebel* did stop using the term, it has now taken on a life of its own, demonstrating how quickly abuse spreads on social media and how difficult it is to effectively push back.

Speaker of the Italian Parliament, Laura Boldrini, has also been quick to respond and push back against the sexism and threats directed at her. Boldrini has been a target of the Five Star Movement, whose co-founder Beppe Grillo has deliberately stoked abusive and threatening comments about her. In a Facebook post, Grillo asked Five Star supporters “What would you do if you found Boldrini in a car?” Responses included “Take her to a gypsy camp and let the chief of the camp screw her”.

Boldrini pushed back, tweeting that the commenters were potential rapists, to which one of Five Star’s communications officers replied: “Dear Laura, I wanted to reassure you. Even if we are all rapists, you are not in any sort of danger!”³⁰

In another tweet, Boldrini called out abusive comments and threats she has received, challenging the idea that they should be tolerated as “freedom of expression”. The comments included:

“Boldrini you are a whore”, “I’d slap your face with my dick!!! Milf”, “WILL ANYONE KILL THIS TERRORIST???” and “Boldrini you are a handicapped whore go home do the right thing 4 once gooooo awaaaaaaaaay”.³¹

Politicians aren’t the only ones pushing back. Some female campaign strategists are also standing up against the sexism and abuse they receive.

We spoke with Andrea Bozek, who is the only person to have served as communications director for both the House and Senate campaign committees for the Republican Party in the United States. In addition to directly advising female candidates, she now works with the campaigning group Winning for Women, which is focused on increasing the number of conservative women in Congress. She told us about the every-day sexism levelled at her and her decision to call it out: “I live in Buffalo,

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I have learned that you have to fight back. I believe when these things happen we can’t sit back and allow these sort of comments and sexist statements to be made.

New York, and I moved home after being in Washington for the last 11 years. I was home and doing some reaction to local election night coverage at one of our local television studios. I have been on different cable shows, but I haven’t been on TV a lot here locally. And, the media critic at The Buffalo News wrote this whole column about how he didn’t know who I was and that the only thing he knew about me was who I was married to. And obviously I took a little offence to that because I had been dealing with Buffalo News political reporters my whole career. So, if he just would have gone down the hall to the political reporters he would have been educated on my background. I’m not trying to be arrogant, but I think that I earned the right, with my 11 years in politics and being the only person to be the communications director of both the House and Senate campaign committees, to not be identified as who I was married to. So yeah, I had some choice words for him and so did my husband on Twitter. I think I have learned that you have to fight back. I believe when these things happen we can’t sit back and allow these sort of comments and sexist statements to be made”.



9. Source: Twitter

TURNING THE TABLES ON SEXISM

Another strategy that female candidates and their advisors can use is to turn the tables on the sexism directed at them in order to rally their supporters.

A good example of this is how Hillary Clinton's campaign responded after Donald Trump said of his opponent, "The only thing she's got going is the woman's card, and the beautiful thing is, women don't like her".³²

The campaign immediately leveraged the comment as an opportunity to rally their base, sending out a fundraising appeal and promising to send donors their very own Woman Card in the mail if they contributed.



10. Source: Hillary for America campaign email

It was an immediate success, as Digital Director Jenna Lowenstein explained to us: "It was the biggest fundraising moment of the campaign outside the convention, and it certainly was the biggest moment at that point. But outside of fundraising, one of the things that I know folks on the campaign really loved is you would go to rallies and there would be hundreds of women who had printed out their cards or they had got their cards in the mail and they would get those plastic badges at Staples and they would make them into pins for themselves. People took that so personally and so seriously".

The tactic wasn't without its downside, though, as Lowenstein noted: "The challenge with that, or really any of that kind of communication directly from the campaign, is of course that as energizing or enervating as it is for aspects of our base, it's isolating or objectionable to folks on the other side of the aisle. In 2007, her campaign made a very different choice about how it was going to discuss the historic nature of her candidacy and really steered clear of that messaging. In 2015 and 2016, I think she felt much more comfortable participating in that conversation, and I think that it brought really important energy to our base and was actually authentic. Here's where you get that authenticity Catch-22. It was an authentic source of energy for our campaign, and people didn't like it. So, this is a challenging concept for that reason".

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To me the most effective strategy ... is the element of surprise.

or enervating as it is for aspects of our base, it's isolating or objectionable to folks on the other side of the aisle. In 2007, her campaign made a very different choice about how it was going to discuss the historic nature of her candidacy and really steered clear of that messaging. In 2015 and

Another way that female candidates can turn the tables against sexism is by using low expectations to their advantage.

Argentinian political strategist Ana Iparraguirre explained to us: "To me the most effective strategy—that I use personally in many meetings that I'm surrounded by men and that I have had my female candidates use—is the element of surprise. They assume they're going to be weak and naive and that you're going to have these big bullies, the union leaders are going to come and run them over and they're not going to be able to stand up for themselves. And I believe a lot of these guys are very surprised when these women stand up for themselves".

She pointed to María Eugenia Vidal, who is now the Governor of Buenos Aires Province, as an example of how to use this tactic: "During her whole campaign they called her 'Heidi'. Sort of laughing at her. Buenos Aires Province is very hard to govern, so they would say: 'What is this Heidi going to do? This little girl trying to run in the mountains with her grandfather, there's no way she is going to be able to run the thing.' They called her that during the whole campaign. A few months



11. Source: Facebook

ago, after she won the election, she was in an interview against a left-wing journalist who is very aggressive, and she stood up and made him shut up with a lot of facts and energy. She was very strong, with very good knowledge of the territory and the right tone. The guy stared at her, and a guy who is always fighting the person who he's interviewing, he just couldn't counter-argue with her. It was so strong. So, I think that that element of surprise when used in the right dose, has an extreme effect that women can still use in their advantage".

The video of the exchange quickly went viral online, because people were surprised to see 'Heidi' standing up. Many believe that the success of Vidal's party in the legislative elections was boosted by the exchange, Iparraguirre said.

DOCUMENT AND REPORT VS. BLOCK AND IGNORE

The issue of how to deal with online harassment and abuse is something that divided the political leaders and campaign strategists we spoke with. Some chose to simply block and ignore all forms of abuse and threats, whereas others chose to document and report everything they received.

When it came to comments that were not direct physical threats, most agreed that ignoring, muting, or blocking them was generally the best tactic.

Republican political strategist Andrea Bozek told us: "I try to tell candidates to ignore the noise and the fodder and I feel like most candidates that do that are in a better place because we're able to focus on the mission of the campaign instead of getting side-tracked about what one nut-job is saying on Twitter".

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I try to tell candidates to ignore the noise and the fodder...

Clinton Digital Director Jenna Lowenstein echoed that sentiment, particularly when it came to the barrage of comments about

Clinton's physical appearance. Lowenstein told us: "Largely I would say we ignored it. I think we assumed that those sorts of attacks were baked into the larger environment and the cost of us responding to them and backlash would not be worth any sort of gain we got".

Former Digital Director for the UK Conservative Party, Bethany Wheatley, told us that her advice has evolved as the nature of attacks has changed: "The advice I used to give female candidates was to ignore the trolls and go on with your online existence. I also advised that blocking on Twitter or banning a person from a Facebook page was a very last resort. Ignoring has become increasingly hard as pressure groups have started to target specific candidates and MPs, directing their entire membership to pile on. And the uptick in bot accounts also makes it difficult to ignore and cut through the noise. So, the advice has evolved: ignore when you can, document and report anything you feel is intimidating or threatening, and report to the police anything that could be criminal. And muting, blocking, or banning is now a more acceptable solution, implemented much earlier on in the process".

When the comments rise to the level of direct threats of violence, there were more divided views as to the best approach.

For British MP Jess Phillips, the best approach is to filter out abusive comments: "I haven't gone to the police in a long time, because now I don't see a lot of it. I worked quite a lot with Twitter on how they improve it for everybody, but I have all sorts of really robust filters on my Twitter account. I still get hate mail via email. It's less aggressive on email, although quite sexist, because obviously you can trace an email easily. But I've got used to it and I've also come up with systems to stop myself from seeing it".

Asked if there was a trade-off between not having to see the comments and perhaps not catching a credible threat, Phillips told us: "Absolutely, there is a trade-off with that, which is that I may not see credible threats against me. But I actually think that credible threats don't do it on social media. I like to think that if there is a credible threat against me the police are looking into that anyway.

I know Rosie [Cooper] had credible threats against her from far-right extremists and it was found out about online before she ever knew anything about it. So yeah, there is a trade-off, but I pick my mental health”.

Other female politicians we spoke with have continued to report the abuse they receive. It’s a lonely process reading through death and rape threats, documenting them, reporting them to the police, and in some cases going through lengthy legal processes. For those who choose to do it, the motivation often goes beyond themselves, taking into account the other victims of their abusers who don’t feel strong enough to come forward.

For any political leader, it is a difficult choice without any good options: either block and ignore, at the risk that you are missing signs of real danger or put yourself through a daily barrage of sexism and hate.

SHIFTING PLATFORMS

For some female political leaders, part of the solution is to be more selective about which social media platforms they choose to use or to change their behaviour based on the platform.

A number of the political leaders and strategists we spoke with highlighted Instagram as a platform that tends to have less sexism and abuse, and where you are more able to show a personal side.

Jess Phillips explained why she likes the platform: “Instagram is much more personal. It’s funny because I would never tweet pictures of my children. I have an open Instagram account, so it’s not even like I hide it. But I do put pictures of my family and my normal life and my house on Instagram. I would never do that on Twitter, ever. So, even I change the way that I behave between platforms. And mostly what you are putting on Instagram isn’t controversial anyway. It’s not an opinion. It’s just a snapshot. And usually you take snapshots of interesting things. So, if you put a nice image of a lovely picture you’ve seen in an art gallery, it’s very difficult for people to be like ‘ugh, you’re part of the neo-liberal state, you hate Jeremy Corbyn”.

Asked what makes the platform different, Phillips said: “It doesn’t have a pack mentality. You can’t repost people’s stuff, you can only talk at that person. So, there isn’t a pack conversation that goes on like on Twitter or on Facebook comment sections where people just have rows with each other for ages. That doesn’t happen so much on Instagram. Also, I think it’s where Facebook started off, in that people are far more selective about the people they follow and allow to see their pictures, in a way that Facebook was originally where it was friends. And it’s quite easy to block people. I just think the nature of the [Instagram] platform not being about arguments sets a tone, doesn’t it? It’s like bake sales and bunting, rather than Union Jack flags and pictures of hammers and sickles. It has a different feel”.

How long Instagram will remain a relatively safe space remains to be seen, as those who experienced the kinder, friendlier days of Facebook and Twitter can attest.

SETTING RULES

While it doesn’t stop attacks from taking place, setting clear rules about which comments will or won’t be accepted can also be helpful.

As Argentinian political strategist Ana Iparraguirre explains: “You have to establish certain rules, a certain level of aggressiveness or comments that you’re not going to allow to happen. So, those ones you are going to delete, because then they include certain tone or words that you just won’t allow to have there”.

By setting these rules, it sends a signal to commenters and also gives staff clear guidelines for how to handle abusive content.

PUTTING COMMENTS INTO PERSPECTIVE

Finally, while it may be easier said than done, many of the strategists we spoke with said they encourage female candidates not to take the trolls too seriously.

As Iparraguirre said: “I find that most of those comments don’t really matter in terms of your chances in the election, because most of the people who go online and put those comments already made up their mind and I’m not going to change them. They are either trolls or they’re people who totally hate you and you’re never going to convince. So, it’s not worth wasting your time”.

This feedback was echoed by Amy Dacey, former CEO of the Democratic National Committee and former Executive Director of EMILY’s List, which works to get pro-choice Democratic women elected in the US. Dacey told us: “It’s hard not to take it personally if you’re new to it. You see some of the things that are said about you online in reaction to something you posted, and it’s hard not to feel that way. I think that it’s really deciphering what’s a legitimate, real criticism versus just the negative vitriol that is out there. We always advise candidates if you read the comments a lot of these people are not people that are going to be with you. A lot of these people are not even commenting on the issue, and it’s not constructive”.

WHAT MALE CANDIDATES AND OFFICEHOLDERS CAN DO

Male candidates and officeholders also have an important role to play in discouraging online abuse and sexism.

DON’T FUEL THE FIRE

The first and most obvious thing they can do is not fuel the fire themselves. Donald Trump’s rhetoric during the 2016 US presidential election showed what can happen when male candidates fail to do this. During the campaign, he made repeated sexist comments against Hillary Clinton, even resorting to condoning violence. As Jenna Lowenstein told us: “When Donald Trump said that the ‘second

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When Donald Trump said that the ‘second amendment people’ could take care of Hillary Clinton and he wasn’t held responsible for that as a threat, I think that that was a pinnacle of the violent language towards her.

amendment people’ could take care of Hillary Clinton and he wasn’t held responsible for that as a threat, I think that that was a pinnacle of the violent language towards her. That’s the biggest one I would say. There were repeated cases during the campaign, up and down. Trump supporters—and him—threatening actual violence toward Hillary and her supporters that just weren’t ever taken seriously”.

DON’T BE SILENT

Other male candidates, while not directly condoning threats or sexism against women, are lost when they come up against a female opponent, explains Ana Iparraguirre: “I find male candidates running against female candidates completely lost and unable to figure out how to treat them as equals. They’ve never experienced this before because most of the guys who end up running against a female candidate it’s the first time. It’s not that they ran against a female candidate on the school

board, and then when they were running for Senate, and then when they ran for Governor. No, it generally it just happens once. It's so exceptional that when it happens, they don't know what to do, they haven't been trained for that". While this doesn't feed sexist rhetoric, it leaves the door open for their supporters to say what they like.

DO SPEAK UP

In the best-case scenario, Amy Dacey explains, male candidates and their advisors should be held responsible for setting the tone of the campaign: "We have to count on male candidates and male operatives to also say that they won't use those tactics. You would hope at the beginning of any campaign if it's a man and a woman running against each other that there will be a commitment to talk about the issues. And I think that's something that we have to emphasise and get candidates to agree that that's how they want to proceed as well. You lead by example. So, people at the highest levels have to be the ones to say that they're rejecting those tactics and they won't stand for it. I think we have to go a lot farther to get those commitments".

British MP Jess Phillips agreed that more male politicians needed to speak up against sexism, but when asked if she thought that might happen any time soon, she said: "No, I think we're a long way off it yet".

WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO

As governments seek to tackle this thorny issue, they face a difficult balance between protecting freedom of speech and protecting victims of abuse and harassment. Violence carried out on social media platforms, "benefits from a significant degree of legal and moral impunity. Legally, there is often a fine line between actionable harassment and abuse that cannot be regulated (including online 'trolling')".³³

Each country has its own laws and regulations relating to hate speech, intimidation, and threats of violence. Many of these were drafted and implemented long before social media emerged as a driver of public discourse, which means that they are often not fit for purpose. National governments are increasingly taking a fresh look at their regulations, to ensure that they take into account our current communications environment.

SHIFT LIABILITY TO SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES FOR ILLEGAL CONTENT

The Committee on Standards in Public Life assessed the steps that the UK government should take to better tackle online harassment and threats, many of which could be applied in other countries. One of their key recommendations is to "shift the liability of illegal content online towards the social media companies".³⁴ Explaining the need for this shift, the Committee notes: "Currently, social media companies do not have liability for the content on their sites, even where that content is illegal. This is largely due to the EU E-Commerce Directive (2000), which treats the social media companies as 'hosts' of online content. It is clear, however, that this legislation is out of date. Facebook, Twitter, and Google are not simply platforms for the content that others post; they play a role in shaping what users see. We understand that they do not consider themselves as publishers, responsible for reviewing and editing everything that others post on their sites. But with developments in technology, the time has come for the companies to take more responsibility for illegal material that appears on their platforms".³⁵

This is a contentious proposal, and one that social media companies have strenuously resisted. However, it comes as many governments have recognised that previous, voluntary commitments from social media companies have not gone far enough. Following pressure from the European Commission, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Microsoft signed a code of conduct in 2016, pledging to “review ‘the majority’ of hate speech removal requests within 24 hours and remove or disable access to content where necessary”.³⁶ They also pledged to “put in place ‘clear and effective’ processes for reviewing potentially illegal content on their platforms”.³⁷ But nearly two years later, hate speech and abuse remain a problem.

In response to pressure from member countries to take stronger action, the European Union has recently stepped up its efforts, issuing new guidelines urging companies to remove illegal content within just one hour. The guidelines apply to “all forms of illegal content ranging from terrorist content, incitement to hatred and violence, child sexual abuse material, counterfeit products and copyright infringement”.³⁸ However, the guidelines are just that. They are essentially recommendations to social media companies without any associated legislation to give the rules teeth.

IMPOSE FINES ON SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES FOR FAILING TO REMOVE ILLEGAL CONTENT

Meanwhile, national governments such as Germany are looking for options to punish social media companies that do not act swiftly to remove abusive content. German lawmakers have considered imposing a hefty fine (€500,000) for each item of hate speech that remains on a social media platform for over 24 hours.³⁹

INTRODUCE NEW MEASURES TO PUNISH PERPETRATORS

Some governments are also weighing new measures to punish perpetrators. The UK’s Committee on Standards in Public Life has recommended considering “the introduction of a new offence in electoral law of intimidating Parliamentary candidates and party campaigners”.⁴⁰ Similar laws could be explored in other countries without protections for candidates.

PROTECT CANDIDATES’ PERSONAL INFORMATION

Other measures have focused on protecting candidates’ personal information, in order to help prevent threats from turning into physical intimidation or violence. For example, the Committee has urged the government to “bring forward legislation to remove the requirement for candidates standing as local councillors to have their home addresses published on the ballot paper”.⁴¹

WHAT POLICE AND PROSECUTORS CAN DO

Police and prosecutors are clearly constrained by the laws that they are able to enforce. However, even within that limitation, they have a certain amount of discretion in terms of the level of focus that they place on prosecuting crimes and providing support to victims.

ISSUE GUIDELINES FOR PROSECUTING ONLINE OFFENCES

In the UK, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) rolled out new rules in 2016 aimed at stepping up prosecution of online harassment.⁴² Under the new legal guidelines, cyber offences that could result in criminal charges include:

- Creating a hashtag to encourage online harassment;
- Urging others to spread “grossly offensive” images;
- Doxxing, which is defined as publishing an individual's home address or bank details; and
- Posting “disturbing or sinister” photoshopped images.

Speaking about the guidelines, Director of Public Prosecutions Alison Saunders said: “Ignorance is not a defence and perceived anonymity is not an escape. Those who commit these acts, or encourage others to do the same, can and will be prosecuted”.⁴³

Other countries should follow the lead of the CPS, issuing clear guidelines on what constitutes a prosecutable offence and ensuring that such actions are taken seriously.

ESTABLISH SPECIALISED POLICE UNITS TO HANDLE THREATS AGAINST POLITICAL FIGURES

The Metropolitan Police in the UK have also stepped up their efforts. Following the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox, they established a Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team (PLAIT) in order to quickly respond to threats against MPs. While many of the people we spoke with acknowledged that this was a positive step and praised police for their efforts, one questioned whether they were well-resourced enough to deal with the “copious” numbers of threats being reported to them. Indeed, in its first year alone, the PLAIT team dealt with 102 complaints.⁴⁴

PROVIDE RESOURCES TO CANDIDATES, NOT JUST ELECTED OFFICIALS

Baroness Jenkin added that while elected politicians now have better security, candidates are another story: “I think that there is quite a lot of support for MPs now, partly as a result of what happened to Jo Cox, but of course that doesn’t really extend to candidates. You’ve got panic buttons and all the rest of it now. So, I think if you are an actual MP you are reasonably well protected, although of course any madman can jump up and shoot anybody at any time. But it’s more that I don’t think the candidates felt protected”.

In order to ensure that candidates are prepared for the behaviour they may encounter online and what they can do about it, police should “produce accessible guidance for Parliamentary candidates giving clear advice on behaviour they may experience during a campaign which is likely to constitute a criminal offence and what they should do in the face of such intimidation”.⁴⁵

IMPROVE POLICE TRAINING

Specialised police units alone are not enough, local police must also have “sufficient training to enable them to effectively investigate offences committed through social media” as well as “guidance on the context” in which political officials and candidates work, so they understand how best to provide support.⁴⁶

WHAT PARTIES CAN DO

There are a range of actions that parties can and should be taking to address harassment and threats against female political leaders and candidates.

SET CLEAR GUIDELINES ON BEHAVIOUR OF CANDIDATES AND MEMBERS

First, they must set clear guidelines on acceptable behaviour of both candidates and party members. Every party should have a code of conduct to which both candidates and members must adhere.

Mona Lena Krook emphasised the important role that parties play in setting standards of behaviour: “I really think political parties could do a lot more to try to hold their own candidates and party members to account. I know that there have been steps in some places to try to do that but it’s not clear that they would actually kick someone out for being a troll. And the anonymity of these online attacks means people can say, ‘well it wasn’t me it was a fake account’”.

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I really think political parties could do a lot more to try to hold their own candidates and party members to account.

ENFORCE INFRACTIONS

In addition to setting the tone of what is and isn’t acceptable within the party, they must also ensure that there are enforcement guidelines in place and that they are quickly acted upon. This should include options to deselect candidates and suspend or expel party members guilty of abuse.

SPEAK UP WHEN ABUSE OCCURS

It is also essential that political parties speak up when abuse occurs, even when it is perpetrated by fringe groups.

As MP Rachel Reeves told us, national party leadership has an important role to play in setting the tone: “I’ve never had any problem with my opponents in these ways. None of them ever in any way encouraged or failed to shut down anything critical of me. No, a lot of the critical stuff comes from supporters of a party nationally or people from different factions within your own party. So, I think that the focus should be on leadership candidates and on the leaders of political parties to crack down on that abuse. I don’t think that much of that would happen on a local level”.

ESTABLISH INDEPENDENT BODIES TO INVESTIGATE ABUSE

MP Rachel Reeves emphasised the importance of having an independent reporting and evaluation system to ensure that cases of abuse were objectively assessed: “I think that in political parties the reporting system and the evaluation of cases should be done independently rather than through party committees. I think my party is guilty of not making this process independent enough. I think all parties have got to do more in terms of the processes they’ve put in place for reporting and then investigating harassment and abuse. I still don’t think that the lessons have been learned from the recent harassment cases”.

Parties should also ensure that they are collecting data on the number of complaints they receive and how those complaints are handled. Where possible, they should collect data on the demographic profiles of both victims and perpetrators of abuse, so that the proportion of gendered or racist attacks can be measured.

PROVIDE ROBUST TRAINING AND SUPPORT TO CANDIDATES, OFFICEHOLDERS, AND STAFF

Parties should also offer training and guidance for officeholders, candidates, and their staff on how to deal with online abuse when it occurs. This training should include: steps they can take to block, mute, and report content; education on the resources open to them through both the party and the social media platforms themselves; and training on how to recognise behaviour that should be reported to police.

It should also take into account specific training and guidance for groups that are more likely to be subjected to intimidation, including ethnic and religious minorities as well as LGBT candidates.⁴⁷

In terms of the training that parties could provide, MP Jess Phillips noted: "I don't know about the structures of other parties, but in the Labour Party we do need to be addressing it much more at the grassroots level. We should say to young women who are in the party and who are active that: this may well happen to you because it seems very common for women, and here is what you can do when it does happen, whether that's through the party system or criminal justice structures or [social media] platform structures".

Phillips made a public appeal for greater training of candidates and officeholders by political parties last summer. Asked if there had been any movement since then, she told us: "No, there's been nothing, and there won't be anything either, I shouldn't have thought".

WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES CAN DO

Social media companies have faced wide-ranging criticism for their failure to effectively tackle illegal content posted to their platforms. This goes beyond the issue of abuse and threats against female political leaders and also includes posting of terrorist content or incitement to violence more generally.

Their defence largely rests on their assertion that they are a "host" of content published by their users rather than a "publisher" of content. This assertion has been challenged in recent years, both by governments seeking to impose greater regulations and by advocacy groups pushing for more robust action.

There are several steps that social media companies could take to address online abuse and violence, which if implemented effectively could help them avoid further, more onerous regulations.

DEVELOP AUTOMATED TECHNIQUES TO IDENTIFY AND REMOVE ABUSIVE CONTENT

First, they can develop and implement better automated techniques to identify and remove illegal content or to prevent it from being posted in the first place. This would help prevent instances where a piece of content is successfully reported and removed after being posted by one user, only to have it pop up again and again as other users post the same content. The technology exists to implement automated filters and content takedown, but it is not being used by most platforms.

IMPROVE FILTERING TOOLS AVAILABLE TO USERS

They should also improve the tools available to users to filter out abusive messages directed at them. This is an area where social media companies seem to have placed the most focus in recent years. However, it only addresses part of the problem. While targets may not see the content themselves, it is still visible to other users on the platform.

PROVIDE TRAINING AND REGULAR UPDATES TO POLITICAL PARTIES

While it's not realistic for social media companies to provide individualised training to every candidate for public office, they could provide better training to political parties, so they can assist their candidates in dealing with abuse and threats.

Most of the larger social media platforms already have specialised teams tasked with engaging with political parties. However, their engagement protocols and resources should be assessed to ensure that they are providing sufficient support in light of the scale of abusive content. They should also ensure that they are sending regular updates to parties when new tools are available to them.

ENSURE CONSISTENCY IN TAKEDOWN POLICIES

They should also ensure consistency in their takedown policies and provide better and more timely support when abusive content is reported. The political leaders and advisors we spoke with recounted varied experiences in terms of both responsiveness and actions of social media companies, illustrating the ad hoc nature of the processes currently in place.

One of the political leaders we spoke with categorised the response she has received from Twitter as substandard, noting that it takes a lot of prompting before they are willing to take content down.

In contrast, Jess Phillips told us: "They have been very responsive to me actually, because I'm a public figure. I doubt everybody gets the same treatment. One of my main problems online is the

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dog-piling effect. Even if I block the person that starts it, then with everyone else retweeting it you still get to see some of it. So, we worked with them on blocking conversations, blocking groups, and looking at better filtering systems. So, since it first happened to me actually Twitter have done quite a lot. They can't keep people from saying it, that's the problem. I think that

all the platforms need to be more robust about kicking people off. But they have stopped me being affected by those things, and they were responsive".

A recent study by Reclaim the Internet and the UK women's rights group the Fawcett Society sought to expose the scale of the problem. They reported abusive tweets to Twitter, which included "threats of rape, racist comments and abusive images of women, all of which breached Twitter's guidelines. However, a week after reporting these comments, none of the tweets had been removed".⁴⁸

INCREASE TRANSPARENCY

Social media companies should be more transparent in disclosing data on the number of reports they receive, the percentage that is subsequently removed, and the amount of time it has taken to remove it. This should be reported on a country-by-country basis.

EXPLORE SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES DURING ELECTIONS

As recommended in by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, social media companies and government should explore ways to work together to develop independent bodies that can flag illegal and intimidating content during the fast-paced context of an election, when the volume of comments tends to increase and the impact they can have is at its peak.⁴⁹

STREAMLINE TOOLS FOR REPORTING CONTENT TO POLICE

Finally, social media companies should implement tools that enable users to easily escalate reports to local police, where appropriate. Additional features could be added to the companies' reporting tools in order to enable users to more easily flag content to relevant authorities.

SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES AND REPORTING ABUSE

Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have reporting methods built into each piece of content posted. These tools have become easier to use and more visible in the last few years as social media companies have increasingly come under fire for their lack of responsiveness to abusive behaviour on their platforms. A repeated criticism is that their stated policies are applied inconsistently, though they have pledged to get better at protecting users.



Twitter's general policy is that they don't intervene directly in disputes between users or mediate content, but they do have a clear set of rules governing behaviour on the platform. According to the 'Twitter Rules' on the Help Center, Twitter prohibits "behavior that crosses the line into abuse, including behavior that harasses, intimidates, or uses fear to silence another user's voice". They include under this umbrella the specific topics of 'violence and physical harm', 'abuse and hateful conduct', and 'private information and intimate media'.

How to report violations: Anyone who has been targeted or who sees a tweet that they feel breaches the rules can report it. Each tweet includes the function to report it specifically and each user profile also includes this option. Once a user is on the 'report' form, they can provide additional examples and further information. Once the report is submitted, you're given several additional actions to choose from if you wish (blocking or muting the account) and Twitter alerts you when a decision has been made.



YouTube describes their "Community Guidelines" as "common-sense rules that'll help you steer clear of trouble." The platform, owned by Google, specifically prohibits the following types of content: 'harassment and cyberbullying', 'hateful content', 'threats', and 'harmful or dangerous content', among other things.

How to report violations: If you think content is inappropriate, use YouTube's report button on a specific video or the flagging feature to submit a report for review by YouTube staff.



Instagram's "Community Guidelines" aim to create an "authentic and safe place for inspiration and expression". The company, owned by Facebook, asks that users "post only your own photos and videos and always follow the law. Respect everyone on Instagram, don't spam people or post nudity".

How to report violations: If you see something that you think violates Instagram guidelines, they ask users to report it using the built-in reporting tool located on each post. Instagram has a global reviews team that looks at reports and removes content that doesn't meet guidelines. When you complete a report, provide as much information as possible, such as links, usernames, and descriptions of the content, so it can be identified quickly. After reporting, users are given additional options to block or unfollow an account.



Facebook's "Community Standards" address the rules governing behaviour on the platform. Facebook specifically prohibits content that includes any of the following areas: 'violence and threats', 'self-harm, bullying and harassment', 'hate speech', 'graphic content' and 'identity and privacy'.

How to report violations: Facebook removes content that doesn't follow the Facebook Terms (e.g. nudity, bullying, graphic violence, spam). If you see something on the platform that violates the Facebook Terms or Community Standards, use the 'report' link near the post or photo to submit a report. The best way to report abusive content or spam on Facebook is by using the 'report' link that appears near the content itself. Once the report is submitted, you're given several additional actions to choose from if you wish (blocking or unfollowing the account) and Facebook alerts you when a decision has been made.

WHAT THE MEDIA CAN DO

The media also have a role to play in tackling abuse and harassment. There are a number of steps that media outlets can take.

IMPOSE CODES OF CONDUCT FOR JOURNALISTS

Media companies should ensure that they have online codes of conduct in place for their journalists, prohibiting them from engaging in abusive or derogatory language on their own social media accounts.

CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF REPEATING SEXIST ATTACKS

While there is journalistic value in reporting sexist attacks committed by political figures and their supporters, there is a line between exposing the problem and amplifying the abuse. This is something that media outlets should consider in their editorial decisions.

As former EMILY's List Executive Director Amy Dacey told us: "I think there has to be a commitment from journalists, and I think there's a constant education process there. We have to get them to be accountable for what they're reporting and there has to be a commitment from the highest levels in different news media to say that they won't let reporters use this in their reporting or they won't go down to that level".

CONCLUSION

In order to tackle the increasingly pervasive issue of online harassment and violence, all actors across the political system need to do their part. Female candidates and officeholders currently bear too much of the burden for addressing this issue. It's time for others to step up.

4

THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING FOR FEMALE POLITICIANS

By Bethany Wheatley

Anecdotal and hard evidence show that female candidates and politicians are more likely to be targeted, criticised, and attacked because of their gender on social media. While these tactics aimed at delegitimising and undermining credibility aren't new – female politicians have historically had to overcome more hurdles than their male counterparts – the anonymity and instantaneous nature of social media has simply made the worst aspects of this abuse easier to see.

The idea of abandoning social media might be momentarily appealing, but it's impractical. Growing numbers of people get their news from Twitter and Facebook, rather than newspapers or broadcast reports, and not meeting them where they are puts a politician at a distinct disadvantage. If walking away is not a viable option, what is?

Part of the answer has to be preparedness. With an awareness of what to expect, a clear plan and the motivation of achieving a goal, female politicians can use social media to make in-roads into what is still something of an 'old boys network'. If used effectively, the benefits of digital campaigning outweigh the negatives.

FUNDRAISING

In most countries, political party structures for finding, funding, and supporting candidates continue to be male-dominated. Online fundraising has opened doors for female candidates that did not even exist a decade ago. They can take their message directly to specific groups and reach beyond their local community to connect with out-of-area supporters who might want to donate or spread the message.

Hillary Clinton's Digital Director Jenna Lowenstein firmly believes in digital's ability to connect female candidates directly to supporters. She told us: "This was what made the work worth it. If it was all this bad stuff, we all would have quit. In a number of ways, the historic nature of her candidacy was such a unique advantage for her. First, in fundraising: the majority of the campaign's donors were women and it was the first time that's been true in a presidential campaign in the United States. People think of the political class as old and male, and it just wasn't true for our campaign's donors. Most of the time, it was about 60% female, a wide range of ages, and that was true outside of fundraising too".

Republican political consultant Andrea Bozek agrees that online fundraising can break down traditional barriers, opening up new streams of support: "It sort of takes off the plate the smoke-filled backroom of the good ol' boys club. Digital can open a lot of new worlds for female candidates

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It sort of takes off the plate the smoke-filled backroom of the good ol' boys club. Digital can open a lot of new worlds for female candidates that maybe they wouldn't have been able to connect with before the advancement of a lot of these technologies.

that maybe they wouldn't have been able to connect with before the advancement of a lot of these technologies. So yes, absolutely, I think it can be a powerful tool that women candidates can use to not only get their message out, but to also reach low-dollar donors or more grassroots supporters that identify with their message".

Amy Dacey, former Executive Director of EMILY'S List, adds: "For any candidate,

specifically women, I think when you're looking at building your fundraising plan you have to be smart about using every tool available to you to get the most you can to get your message out".

CONNECTING AND PERSONALISING

Despite the threats and intimidation that can come from putting yourself, your life, and your candidacy online, digital also offers a unique way to personalise your story and connect with supporters. Telling a story that connects directly with your supporters and is unfiltered by traditional media allows women to have more control over their own narrative.

Argentinian political strategist Ana Iparraguirre believes that harnessing the power of one-to-one connection is vital and that digital provides the tools to expand its reach: “One of the things that I try to do as much as I can is to replicate one-on-one contact. I find that women – not every woman and

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...the way that I use Twitter particularly, and Instagram in fact, is to try and humanise myself as much as possible for the sake of people believing in politics. It is actually thought through. It isn't accidental.

it's horrible to generalise – but many of the women candidates that I have worked with are very, very good at one-to-one contact. We political consultants always tell our clients: don't talk about public policy, don't talk about statistics, talk about individual people, individual schools. Well, I find that female candidates can do that much better than men, who tend to go to the technical side faster.

Clearly that one-on-one interaction is not something that happens online, but I do it offline and I try to take it online. So, I do a lot of taped conversations between the female candidate and individual people, not groups of people, but just one person”.

Social media – Twitter and Instagram in particular – also allows connection on a more human level than many people have typically had, letting voters see that politicians are not all that different to you and me. Being immersed in the weekly, sometimes even daily, habits of the people elected to represent you can make it more difficult to ‘other’ them.

British MP Jess Phillips told us: “I do think that there is a real benefit [to social media]. For me personally and the person who I am and the kind of politician I always sought to be, was to be somebody that made people believe in politicians again and see that they were like them. So, I believe that the way that I use Twitter particularly, and Instagram in fact, is to try and humanise myself as much as possible for the sake of people believing in politics. It is actually thought through. It isn't accidental”.

And for Hillary Clinton, one of the most discussed and written-about political candidates of modern times, using video to reach supporters, volunteers, and donors was key. Lowenstein told us: “The contradiction of Hillary Clinton is that when you're in a room with her you love her and almost nobody gets a chance to do that. We definitely took it as our personal mission in digital to use the tools available to us try to give people a sense of that intimacy wherever we could. For us, video was a key tactic, we really just wanted to use as much video as possible to give people that exposure”.

GOING WHERE PEOPLE GET THEIR INFORMATION

In 2017, there were 328 million monthly unique users on Twitter, 700 million on Instagram and 2 billion on Facebook. In America, 45 million people per week get at least some of their news from Facebook.⁵⁰ It may be tempting to try, but ignoring or circumventing social media simply isn't possible.

Social media also provides female candidates and politicians with an opportunity to connect with journalists, who in turn influence public opinion by sharing their coverage online. Journalists are active on Twitter because the demands of their job have changed. The increased pressure to publish multiple times a day and always have the latest news means many newspapers and broadcast outlets will run stories based on social media posts. These stories, combined with the direct and targeted appeals, help to set the tone of public discourse around elections and politicians.

Knowing where your supporters are is a significant part of the battle. If you put a statement out on your website and Facebook, but your supporters are primarily on Instagram or Snapchat, then you're not harnessing the power of digital and are missing a chance for your message to connect.

As former Democratic National Committee CEO Amy Dacey told us: "We used to push out information and people would come get it whether that was fundraising or communications or whatever. But now you really have to tailor messages and go to where people are getting information. You just have to put it out to more places and find places where people are gathering their information and trying to inject yourself in that conversation".

And if candidates or their advisors are resisting using social media as a central part of their campaign, then they're already starting at a disadvantage.

CONCLUSION

As more women enter into the highest levels of politics, the attitudes towards female leadership are beginning to change, which will in turn impact political discourse, both online and offline.

As Jenna Lowenstein told us: "Just from a pure representation perspective, studies have shown over and over again that people need to see examples of what they can aspire to. And now, you could

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Just from a pure representation perspective, studies have shown over and over again that people need to see examples of what they can aspire to.

be 18 years-old [in the US] and never have known a presidential election without a candidate of colour or a female candidate. That's just so revolutionary and that will change the shape of politics for generations to come. [Hillary's] concession speech was largely focused on speaking to young girls that had been inspired by the campaign, and her desire for them to not be discouraged by the outcome, but just

encourage them to keep fighting. And I think that's the role this campaign will serve in history, the energizing force that spawned the Women's March, that spawned Run for Something, that spawned a million flowers blooming".

While it may often feel like an uphill battle in the face of harassment and threat, it's one worth fighting for the sake of our democratic systems and the benefit of the next generation of female political leaders.

AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

ATALANTA

Our mission: To increase the number of women holding senior government positions worldwide and accelerate programmes that tackle the root causes of gender inequality.

Atalanta commissioned and led the drafting of this report. Atalanta was created to fill a gap in the advisory services that female candidates and officeholders have access to, providing professional expertise and strategic guidance through a female-led team of experienced consultants. We are structured as a social enterprise, dedicating 1/3 of our profits to providing pro-bono or low-bono support for clients who can't afford our services. We are also committed to diversity and gender balance within our own organisation, setting us apart from many other traditional political consulting firms.

Eva Barboni | Founder & CEO

Eva is the lead author of this report. She is a campaign strategist with experience managing projects across four continents, in often complex and demanding environments. Since her first national campaign in 2003-2004 on behalf of US Presidential candidate Howard Dean, Eva has developed and implemented innovative communications and grassroots engagement strategies for a diverse range of clients. She has extensive global campaign experience, with a strong focus on the EMEA region, where she has managed multilingual projects in numerous countries.

Nicola Brooks | Senior Associate

Nicola provided research and editing support for this report. As a Senior Associate at Atalanta, she provides communications and research support to clients including government ministries, political parties and candidates, multinational corporations, and non-governmental organisations. She has extensive experience in communications, having worked for both American and Middle Eastern media outlets as well as international consulting firms and NGOs.

BRANDSEYE

BrandsEye is an opinion mining company. They use a proprietary mix of artificial intelligence and crowdsourcing to mine online conversations for sentiment. In 2016, they used this technology to predict the outcomes of the Brexit referendum and US presidential election. Today, they provide accurate and granular opinion data to governments and businesses around the world. Nadine Schlebusch, a senior analyst at BrandsEye, provided data analysis for Chapter 1 of the report.

BETHANY WHEATLEY

Bethany Wheatley contributed invaluable guidance and support for the report and authored the final chapter looking at the benefits of digital campaigning for female candidates. Bethany is an Associate at Brunswick working across Digital and Campaigns. Previously Digital Director for the Conservative Party, Bethany has a wealth of experience across campaigning, social media and digital communications. Bethany led the digital strategy for Boris Johnson's London mayoral re-election campaign from 2010-2012 and began her career in the UK as a consultant at a boutique public affairs and PR firm. She has worked across the US, UK and Europe on both political and non-profit campaigns.

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