Review into Intimidation of Candidates at the General Election 2017
Written Submission: Scottish National Party
October 2017

19 October 2017

Call for Evidence Intimidation of Parliamentary Candidates

Dear Lord Bew,

Please find below a submission recording the Scottish National Party's experience of candidate intimidation during the General Election 2017 and our views on the matter. The SNP would like to take this opportunity to be clear that the intimidation and abuse of candidates and elected members is not solely confined to election periods.

Nature of the Problem

1. The nature of the problem is extensive. Abuse reaches candidates and Members through multiple channels, including Twitter, Facebook and email. The ability to monitor, block or report abuse varies depending on the platform used. The response to abuse through these different channels also varies. Notably, candidates and Members do not report this same level of abuse in person from constituents or members of the public when performing their duties, holding surgeries, appearing at hustings etc. The anonymity provided by social media and other online forms of communication appears to give the confidence to certain people to make abusive comments without fear or exposure or legal action.

2. The abuse received is multi-faceted. While all candidates and Members can be at the receiving end, it particularly targets candidates who are Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME), LGBT, women or disabled. Candidates feel overwhelmed as abuse can be directed because they are some of these things, because they may be all of these things, because they are one of these things, or two of these things.

3. The quantity of abusive messages can be so vast it's difficult to count them all. At points where a candidate or Member is taking part in a TV broadcast or high visibility campaign event the abuse will be at its peak. Amnesty International's report '*Unsocial Media: Tracking Twitter Abuse against Women MPs*' (published September 2017) identified SNP Members as receiving on average 0.8 abusive tweets per day. The report also showed SNP MP Joanna Cherry QC as receiving the third largest amount of the most abusive tweets in the six weeks prior to the 2017 snap election.

4. The content of the abuse can vary from vile to uncomfortable. It must be made clear that any abuse will not be tolerated and will be actioned. SNP candidates received abusive tweets which ranged from sexist, homophobic and racist. In some instances the abuse included more than one of those things. While any form of abuse can be disturbing, the threats of sexual violence made against female candidates in particular, are something that any reasonable person would expect social media platforms to act on.

5. Social media platforms give a legacy effect to the abuse. The profile of candidates and Members remains active and they do, long after holding office, still receive abusive

messages. Many of these will be known perpetrators who have identified a candidate or Member and will continue to abuse them no matter their position in political life.

6. ANNEX 1 – Examples of some of the abuse received by just one SNP Member/candidate.

Recommendations for Action

1. The SNP welcomes Amnesty International's report '*Unsocial Media: Tracking Twitter Abuse against Women MPs*' published September 2017. We urge both Twitter and Facebook to invest more resources in enforcing transparent reporting mechanisms for candidates and Members. In addition, Twitter and Facebook staff – in all departments – must be trained about the various ways online abuse grows on the platforms.

2. The SNP would like to share good practice through our Social Media team's Community Managers. Our dedicated staff work to 'hide' abusive comments on Facebook. The platform's 'hide' button enables candidates and Members to get rid of abusive messages so that others cannot join in or add to the stream. However, Twitter is much more difficult to monitor or 'hide' abusive messages.

3. We encourage political parties to have Candidate Liaison Teams in elections. This can be an important support for new candidates and those who receive distressing messages or threats which need actioned through criminal proceedings.

4. Community police officers should also be fully trained in providing support for individuals receiving large amounts of online abuse or threats against them and their family. Regular contact and on-going support can create a level of confidence and protection for the victim.

5. The SNP call on the UK government to ensure that any response to this issue recognises online abuse against women as an extension of existing offline discrimination and abuse against women.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Blackford MP

SNP WESTMINSTER LEADER

ANNEX 1

Tweet

Tasmina needs to be grabbed by the 😷😷😷 #bbcqt

10/11/2016, 23:33

Tweet

Tasmina needs to be poked with a massive

10/11/2016, 23:36

EE WiFiCall   18:46   24%

Tweet

In reply to Nicol Sinclair

paul .....
@psmythe72

@NicolSinclair @S_U_A_R @TasminaSheikh @stevesayers1 you could poke someones eye out with that nose

13/11/2016, 18:38

Reply to paul ..., Nicol Sinclair, Jon Smith, Ste...

Home   Notifications   Moments   Messages   Me

Tweet

In reply to Tasmina Sheikh MP

Steve
@suzukisteve11

@TasminaSheikh The same old Misogynist abuse? It's not because you are a woman, it's because you are a vile

11/11/2016, 20:45

Tweet

In reply to مركز صواب

Alternative Writer
@SpecWriteWell

@sawabcenter @TasminaSheikh @AlArabiya Check your head lady maybe it's contaminated with sharia fairytales? How can Islam be cure for ISIS?

13/11/2016, 19:17