Intimidation in Public Life

Written evidence

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Committee on Standards in Public Life inquiry into the Intimidation of Parliamentary Candidates

Written submission from: THE CONSULTATIVE PANEL ON PARLIAMENTARY SECURITY (CPPS)

1. The Consultative Panel on Parliamentary Security (CPPS) comprises Members of both Houses of Parliament. It is a consultative body with a broad remit to consider matters of security affecting Parliament. Its current Members are: Rt Hon Lindsay Hoyle MP (Chair); Sir Paul Beresford MP; Rt Hon Alan Campbell MP; Ian Paisley MP; Julian Smith MP; Patrick Grady MP; Earl of Courtown; Lord Laming; Lord McFall of Alcluith; Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Lord Stoneham of Droxford; and Lord Tunnicliffe.

2. CPPS is an informal body with the following functions:
   i. To support the Speaker and the Lord Speaker in the discharge of their political responsibility for security
   ii. To receive regular briefings from the Parliamentary Security Director, in order to maintain a thorough, up-to-date understanding of the security of Parliament
   iii. To provide a forum in which the views of Members of both Houses can be communicated and discussed effectively
   iv. To provide effective advocacy to other Members for any necessary changes in security arrangements
   v. To ensure better awareness by Members of security management and governance arrangements.

3. CPPS is chaired by Rt Hon Lindsay Hoyle MP, Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Ways and Means. Mr Hoyle is willing to give oral evidence to the inquiry following this submission.

Abuse and intimidation of MPs

4. Members of Parliament, and their staff and families, are facing unprecedented levels of unjustified abuse and threats. This abuse is conveyed face-to-face (for example, at constituency surgeries), in writing and online. CPPS is of the firm belief that no-one should have to endure this as 'part of a job'.

5. Abuse was experienced widely by parliamentary candidates during the April-June 2017 election campaign. As the Chair of CPPS, Rt Hon Lindsay Hoyle MP heard from MPs—new and returning—from all over the country about their experiences. 20 new MPs took part in a survey for The Telegraph with three out of four reporting online abuse during the campaign.

6. Abuse of MPs on social media has risen to levels not previously seen. CPPS believes this to be a particularly insidious form of abuse. Some individuals assume that they can rain down insults, threats and abuse on MPs and other public figures with impunity. Social media has amplified their reach.

7. These experiences were laid bare in the Westminster Hall debate on the apparent rise in abuse and intimidation on 12 July. Very troubling experiences were described from across the House.[1] Racism, sexism, anti-Semitism and other pernicious forms of abuse were vividly—often movingly—recounted. Members had experienced death threats and expressed concern for their families and staff as well as themselves.

8. University of Sheffield analysis of 840,000 tweets sent during the campaign has shown the shocking extent of the abuse.[2] While the highest overall percentage of abuse in their Twitter mentions was received by male Conservative candidates, women MPs were singled out for the most pernicious forms of abuse: gendered insults (some sexually violent) and greater incidence of the word "kill".

9. CPPS welcomed the announcement of this inquiry during that debate. It stands ready to assist this valuable inquiry in any way it can.

Parliament's response to abuse and intimidation of MPs

10. Parliament has been working for some time to support members better with their security. Since the tragic death of Jo Cox MP in June 2016 these efforts have been stepped up. The Parliamentary Security Department works closely with IPSA, the police and other partners to ensure that MPs (and Peers) get the right support they need to be safe.

11. In March 2017, Lindsay Hoyle, Chair of CPPS, together with Eric Hepburn CBE, Director of Security for Parliament, appeared as oral witnesses before the Commons Home Affairs Committee's inquiry into Hate Crimes. Mr Hoyle set out the scale of the abuse. He said that all MPs are vulnerable, especially ethnic minorities and women, and that the risk extends to staff and families. Both he and Eric Hepburn emphasised the increase in online abuse toward MPs. They highlighted the January 2017 BBC 5Live survey – in which more than one-third of the UK's 195 female MPs at the time participated – which found that two-thirds felt "less safe" since the murder of Jo Cox with many having received online and verbal abuse. This had led some to say they had considered quitting politics altogether.[3]

12. Parliament's Members' Security Support Service (MSSS) supports the work of local police forces across the UK whose responsibility it is to protect Members when they are away from the Parliamentary estate. Security measures for all MPs are funded by IPSA based on measures recommended by the National Police Chiefs' Council. In September 2016, the House of Commons authorities introduced a new service to make the process of obtaining these security measures for MPs simpler and more straightforward. If any Peer feels under threat the arrangements are in place to provide appropriate help. Extra resources have also been provided to the Metropolitan Police

[1] https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-07-12/debates/577970DD-1AEF-4071-8AE0-3E3FC6753C6A/UKElectionsAbuseAndIntimidation
[2] https://www.buzzfeed.com/tomphillips/twitter-abuse-of-mps-during-the-election-doubled-after-the?utm_term=.dqPDOprz2#.wb6Z27brW
[3] http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/oral/49182.pdf

Unit based in Parliament to liaise with police forces across the UK. Staff are also in place to offer specific advice and support regarding social media.

13. Parliament also works with both internal and external security experts to provide personal security advice to help Members and their staff. These partners include the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure, the National Counter Terrorism Security Office, and the Suzy Lamplugh Trust who has recently assisted with personal security training.

14. Parliament has recently set up a dedicated social media service within MSSS. This offers expert advice (drop-in and pre-bookable) for Members needing support with managing their social media accounts. This could be either practical advice on settings and techniques, or more urgent assistance with abuse and inappropriate messages (many of which would be passed to the police).

15. Lindsay Hoyle and Eric Hepburn would be happy to explain more about Parliament's response to abuse and intimidation experienced by MPs during a private session with the Committee.

Consultative Panel on Parliamentary Security

7 September 2017

From: Amy Binns, senior lecturer, journalism division, University of Central Lancashire

Introduction:

I have been researching difficult behaviour on social media for several years and have run research projects concerning the online experiences of journalists and teenage girls. Following the death of MP Jo Cox, I began working with colleague Dr Martin Bateman on a project to track hostility to MPs. We began capturing tweets sent as @messages to British MPs in December 2016 and now have a complete dataset of millions of tweets, including deleted tweets. We are still capturing tweets, but the figures mentioned below relate to tweets sent between 18 March and 11 June. There is a natural break of a few days at this point as the set of accounts changed due to MPs winning or losing seats. We intend to continue tracking as a long-term project.

These @messages were then categorised as positive, neutral, disagree or hostile using bespoke machine learning software, trained using this specific dataset, to measure the emotion behind the messages people send to politicians. This is a far more reliable method than simply searching for keywords, such as profanities. We defined hostility as insults aimed at the person rather than the action or policy. Of course, the receiver may or may not find these intimidating. For more about the project and our research methods, please see https://lovehatepoliticsuk.wordpress.com/ .

1. **What is the nature and degree of intimidation experienced by Parliamentary candidates, in particular at the 2017 General Election?**

1.1 Directly or indirectly threatening tweets are a very small percentage of all tweets sent.

We initially intended to create a separate category of threats but found these were too rare to train the software (we require a dataset of at least 500 examples). Based on the numbers we found during manual categorising, we estimate threatening tweets at **roughly 0.1% of all tweets** sent to MPs. This is not to downplay their significance. This may still be a significant number for higher-profile MPs receiving dozens of messages a day. Also, although rare, they are likely to make a much greater impact on the MP than the hundreds of other tweets received.

1.2 There is little difference in hostility levels experienced by MPs by party, ethnicity or gender by percentage of total messages received.

After removing Jeremy Corbyn and Theresa May from the database due to the disproportionate number of tweets they receive, our data shows Jewish and white male MPs receive marginally more negativity than their female counterparts, by percentage of total messages received. Asian men receive significantly more abuse than Asian women MPs, while black women receive more than black men. However, these are small sample sizes, and these figures may be disproportionately affected by high profile MPs such as Chuka Umunna and Diane Abbott.

1.3 The higher rate of hostility faced by white men may be partly accounted for by other reasons, such as them being more likely to be higher profile, front bench, Scottish, or in a group of prominent Corbyn critics (see 1.5-1.7).

1.4 In order to provide a definitive analysis, we would need a set of MPs from each of these groups who were neither frontbench or high profile, neither strongly pro- or anti-Corbyn, active on Twitter without courting publicity and who had not made an embarrassing television appearance or an incautious tweet. There are not sufficient MPs in each group to do this. However, we can broadly say that hostility on Twitter is at similar levels across demographic and party groups.

Categorised tweets by ethnicity and gender

By single @messages, May 18 to June 12, 2017
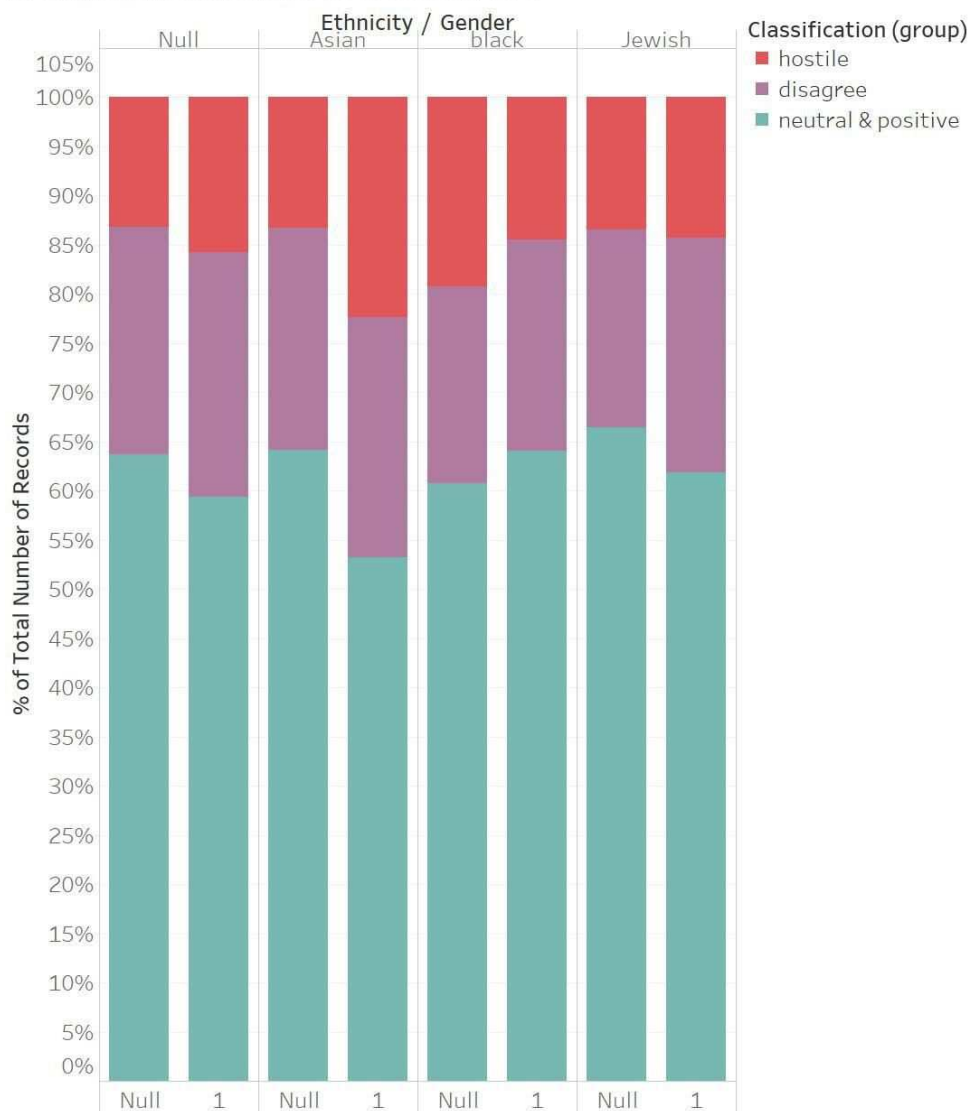
Null: male; 1: female

Classification	White		Asian		Black		Jewish	
	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male
Hostile	13%	16%	13%	22%	19%	14%	13%	14%
disagree	23%	25%	23%	24%	20%	21%	20%	24%
Others	64%	59%	64%	53%	61%	64%	66%	62%

Differences by party are:

Classification	Party			
	Con	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP
Hostile	15%	13%	18%	13%
disagree	26%	21%	28%	21%
Others	59%	66%	53%	66%

1.5 Some Scottish MPs received higher hostility levels.

Scotland's then only Conservative and only Labour MPs were consistently amongst the top ten MPs with the highest percentage of hostile tweets. Being the sole representative of their parties in Scotland has clearly made them a target for hostility. SNP MPs were also regularly near the top of the charts, particularly in the earlier part of this project from December to March (not included in this data). For example, Corri Wilson experienced a large spike in hostility on 22 April after a tweet equating SNP with Scotland.

1.6 A number of Corbyn critics have experienced high levels of hostility.

A campaign against anti-Corbyn MPs is hard to quantify due to MPs changing their views over time, but major spikes can be noted. The MP receiving the greatest proportion of hostility was Chris Leslie, mostly due to a massive spike as a result of criticising Jeremy Corbyn in a Radio Four interview after the election. Typical comments:

@ChrisLeslieMP You should be on your knees thanking Corbyn and the grass roots.. now stfu and do your job please..

@ChrisLeslieMP You are a tremendous embarrassment to the Labour party. The people of Notts East voted for JC's manifesto, not you!!!

@ChrisLeslieMP please resign and join the lib dems. Go destroy your career somewhere else

@ChrisLeslieMP so show some loyalty to the man who led you there. Disgraceful comments

@ChrisLeslieMP Get behind the party you self centred f

@ChrisLeslieMP can you just go and join the #Conservatives now? You are a pain. Get out of #Nottingham

1.7 Labour MPs Neil Coyle, Sajid Javid, Stephen Kinnock, Michael Dugher and Chuka Umunna also received major spikes of hostility after criticising Mr Corbyn. Mr Umunna received regular waves and spikes throughout the period.

1.8 Hostility levels rise and fall with major political events.

Hostility generally rose from the announcement of the General Election, with increased profanity as the date got closer. There were also spikes in the days after the election. Chris Leslie and Stephen Kinnock are mentioned above. Corri Wilson received a spike of gloating messages as she lost her seat, Hugo Swire received an angry spike after retaining his seat.
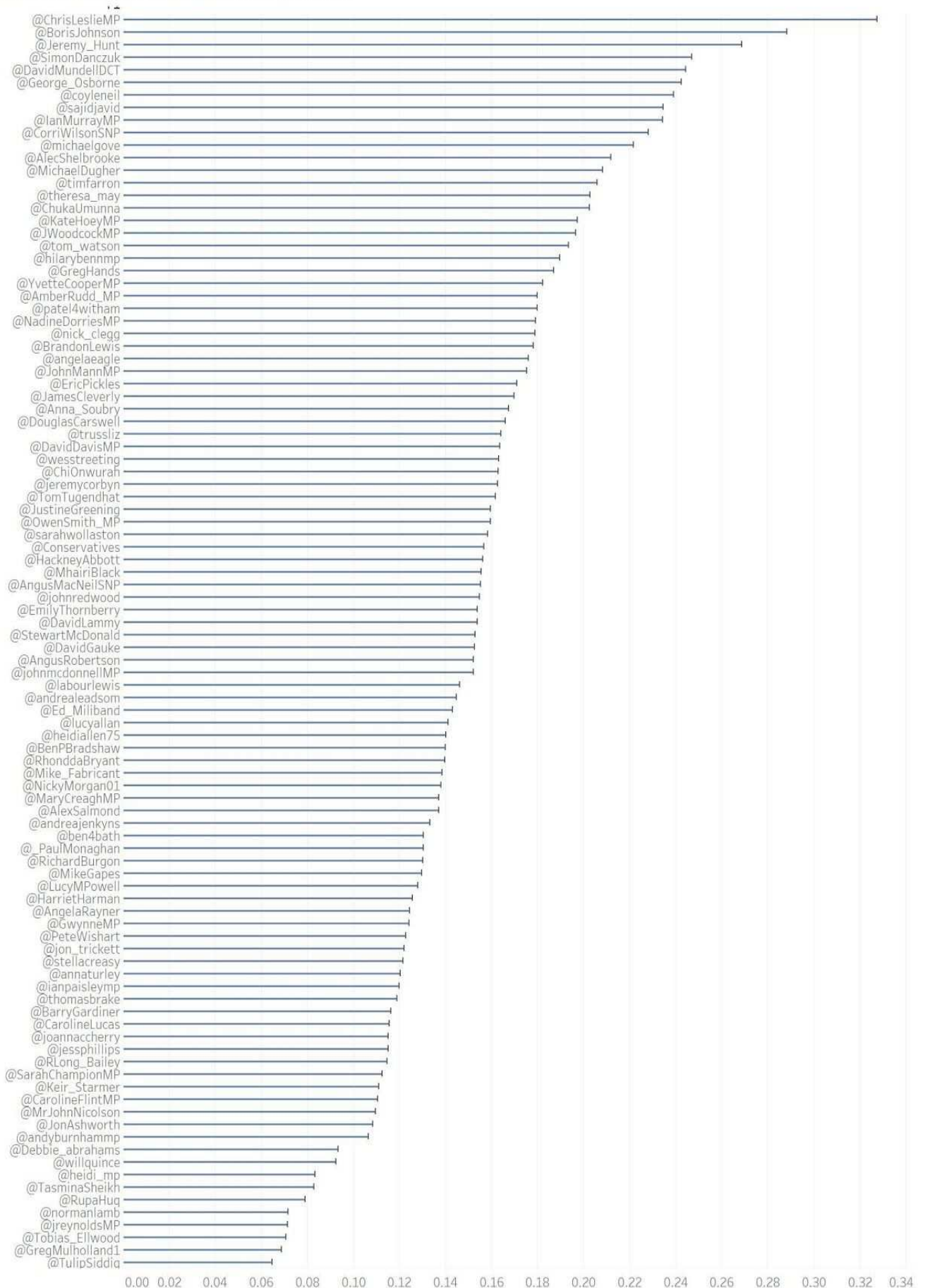
1.9 During the days around the signing of Article 50, hostility levels dropped towards the Conservatives and rose towards Labour. Significant events in Scotland, such as when Theresa May met Nicola Sturgeon, also resulted in higher levels of hostility.

1.10 Individual MPs' experiences vary, with hostility levels between seven and 33 per cent. Front bench and higher profile MPs appear to receive higher levels of hostility as a percentage of all messages, than backbench MPs, though this is harder to quantify due to reshuffles and perceptions of "high profile".

The table below shows the percentage of hostility experienced as a total of all the single @message tweets they receive, for the 100 most messaged MPs on Twitter during the period 18 March to June 11. In total, 565 MPs use Twitter, but where they receive very few messages, they can be disproportionately affected by, for example, a small group of constituents with a local problem.

Top 100 most messaged MPs by percentage hostility

Using single @messages, 18 March to 12 June, 2017

@ChrisLeslieMP	
@BorisJohnson	
@Jeremy_Hunt	
@SimonDanczuk	
@DavidMundellDCT	
@George_Osborne	
@coyleneil	
@sajidjavid	
@IanMurrayMP	
@CorriWilsonSNP	
@michaelgove	
@AlecShelbrooke	
@MichaelDugher	
@timfarron	
@theresa_may	
@ChukaUmunna	
@KateHoeyMP	
@JWoodcockMP	
@tom_watson	
@hilarybennmp	
@GregHands	
@YvetteCooperMP	
@AmberRudd_MP	
@patel4witham	
@NadineDorriesMP	
@nick_clegg	
@BrandonLewis	
@angelaeagle	
@JohnMannMP	
@EricPickles	
@JamesCleverly	
@Anna_Soubry	
@DouglasCarswell	
@trussliz	
@DavidDavisMP	
@wesstreeting	
@ChiOnwurah	
@jeremycorbyn	
@TomTugendhat	
@JustineGreening	
@OwenSmith_MP	
@sarahwollaston	
@Conservatives	
@HackneyAbbott	
@MhairiBlack	
@AngusMacNeilSNP	
@johnredwood	
@EmilyThornberry	
@DavidLammy	
@StewartMcDonald	
@DavidGauke	
@AngusRobertson	
@johnmcdonnellMP	
@labourlewis	
@andrealeadsom	
@Ed_Miliband	
@lucyallan	
@heidiallen75	
@BenPBradshaw	
@RhonddaBryant	
@Mike_Fabricant	
@NickyMorgan01	
@MaryCreaghMP	
@AlexSalmond	
@andreajenkyns	
@ben4bath	
@_PaulMonaghan	
@RichardBurgon	
@MikeGapes	
@LucyMPowell	
@HarrietHarman	
@AngelaRayner	
@GwynneMP	
@PeteWishart	
@jon_trickett	
@stellacreasy	
@annaturley	
@ianpaisleymp	
@thomasbrake	
@BarryGardiner	
@CarolineLucas	
@joannaccherry	
@jessphillips	
@RLong_Bailey	
@SarahChampionMP	
@Keir_Starmer	
@CarolineFlintMP	
@MrJohnNicolson	
@JonAshworth	
@andyburnhammp	
@Debbie_abrahams	
@willquince	
@heidi_mp	
@TasminaSheikh	
@RupaHuq	
@normanlamb	
@jreynoldsMP	
@Tobias_Ellwood	
@GregMulholland1	
@TulipSiddiq	

0.00 0.02 0.04 0.06 0.08 0.10 0.12 0.14 0.16 0.18 0.20 0.22 0.24 0.26 0.28 0.30 0.32 0.34

F3

1.11 High numbers of hostile tweets are usually part of a very busy feed.

The MPs receiving the most tweets are shown below, with the percentage of hostility shown in red. It is notable that Diane Abbott and Jess Phillips, who are known to receive a lot of hostility, are high on the graph below, but mid-table on the table above. This is because, in addition to receiving a lot of hostile tweets, they also receive a lot of positive and neutral tweets, and are generally high profile. Ms Phillips is also a heavy Twitter user and has a lot of long conversations with supporters.

Top 20 most messaged MPs
By single @messages, March 18 to June 12, 2017

Classification (group) 1.
■ hostile
■ disagree
■ neutral & positive
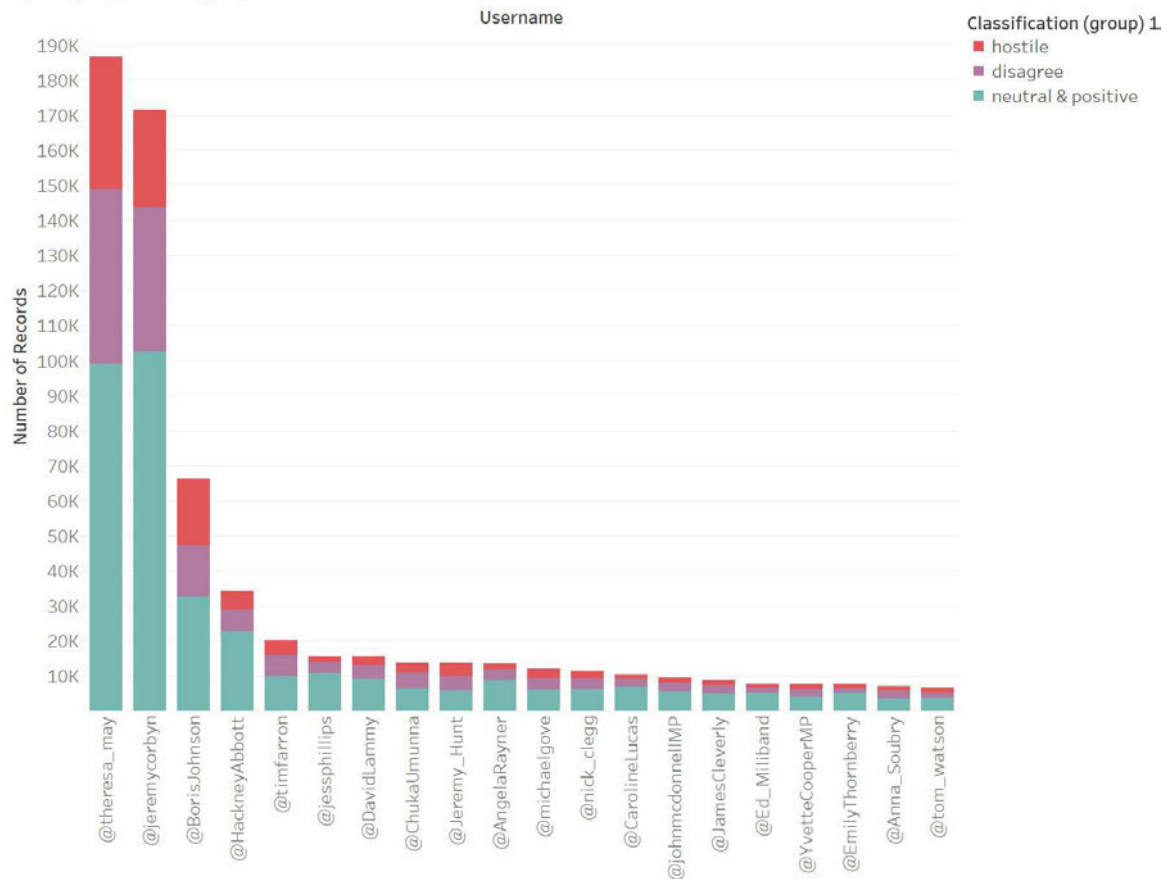
1.12 Hostility experienced by individual MPs can vary hugely over time, with sudden, extreme spikes. Spikes received by low profile MPs are usually a reaction to an incautious tweet or external event such as a TV appearance.

1.13 Significant spikes included hundreds of hostile tweets directed at Liz McInnes (Labour MP Heywood) on the day of her mother's funeral. She was doubtless upset and angry when she tweeted:

Liz McInnes ✓
@LizMcInnesMP

Theresa May, the unelected Prime Minister has just ruined the day of my poor mum's funeral. She was poor working class so not important.

4:19 p.m. · 18 Apr 17 from North West,

Replies included (I haven't cherry picked these, just cut and pasted a block):

@LizMcInnesMP Bet you wish you had kept your mouth shut   oh and why I think of it   who are You?

@LizMcInnesMP What in the   ' Very grown up, just the type of person I want running the country. Labour shambles!!!

@LizMcInnesMP Don't talk   ou attention seeking   Wasn't too upset to tweet th   te though were you? #Prat

@LizMcInnesMP To late you have committed political suicide with your   tweet.

@LizMcInnesMP Grieve ? But you can tweet? Righto. . Play that card girl

@LizMcInnesMP What a daft tweet - how can she ruin ur mums funeral? She she turn up and kick off? I

@LizMcInnesMP Can't be grieving that much if you found time to tweet.

@LizMcInnesMP What a ridiculous thing to say! Anyway you'll be handing in your CV at Morrisons in a couple of months. #wipeout

1.14 An example of an embarrassing public appearance could be Sheryll Murray (Conservative MP South Cornwall), who spoke about food banks at an election campaigning event in Cornwall. The debate became more heated, and was recorded on the phone of an audience member who released the footage online.

Tweets included (again, no attempt to cherrypick)

@sheryllmurray You should resign in disgrace for saying ""Let's ignore my constituents"". A leader is a public SERVANT, who LISTENS to voters."

@sheryllmurray Spreading more tory lies! #VoteLabour #JC4PM

@sheryllmurray Sorry Sheryll, you're a posh bird, let me rephrase, Does Archie get his Hill's from the food bank?

@sheryllmurray you're a   bsolute disgrace of a human being

@sheryllmurray your behavior is utterly shocking!

@sheryllmurray Have you seen how bloated and red your face gets when you go into one of your tirades ? now it's not just the SW that hates you

2. **Does the issue of the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates reflect a wider change in the relationship and discourse between public office holders and the public?**

2.1 See 3.3.

3. **Has the media or social media significantly changed the nature, scale, or effect of intimidation of Parliamentary candidates? If so, what measures would you suggest to help address these issues?**

3.1 Our research only goes back as far as December 2016. Hostility rose during the period of the election, but we cannot make any further conclusions in terms of data.

3.2 However, it is generally clear that the development of widely used social media, followed by the widespread adoption of smartphones, have combined to vastly increase the numbers of messages sent to public-facing organisations. Comparisons can be made with newspapers who enthusiastically introduced commenting on their stories more than ten years ago, only to find themselves overwhelmed with messages, many of them negative. Their introductions of workflow practices and moderation techniques could be a useful template for political parties.

3.3 Despite this increase in numbers of messages, the practice of mocking and insulting authority figures, particularly politicians, is not new. Though it is tempting to look back to a "golden age" of civility and deference, traditional hustings were loud and rude, hecklers were considered part of the entertainment, drunkenness and physical violence at Victorian elections were not uncommon. Authority figures are also a magnet to the less stable and unenfranchised.

3.4 It may be that increased volume reflects both an easier to use platform (compared to writing a letter) and a greater engagement and interest in the political process, also seen in the uptick in participants in elections. A percentage of hostility may be an inevitable part of this increased interest.

4. **What role should political parties play in preventing the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates and encouraging constructive debate?**

4.1 It would be possible to build software using the categorisation tools we have developed during this project to track all MPs' feeds and give an alert when a spike in hostility was detected. This would allow staff at party level to immediately offer support to the affected MP, including reporting hostility to Twitter or contacting Twitter at a higher level. This would be particularly useful for backbench MPs, who might never have experienced this before and might not have resources in their constituency office to deal with this. We would be happy to discuss this with any political party that wanted to work with us on this.

5. **What other measures might be effective in addressing the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates, and candidates for public offices more broadly?**

5.1 Software as described above could also be useful for support staff in the Houses of Parliament. Again, we would be happy to discuss this.

5.2 Other practical management techniques could include:

   - Rigorous use of the many blocking and moderation techniques supplied by social media companies. Training for staff on implementing them.

   - A return to the working practices of the pre-social media era, when secretaries discarded green ink letters. This would mean a paid member of staff being responsible for blocking and deleting problematic messages from MPs' feeds (see 4.1 above), making short holding replies on their behalf and flagging up anything that requires more attention. Managing social media could be a part of an office's working practices, rather than an MP handling it from the phone in their pocket. This would mean some loss of the immediacy which is an advantage of social media.

6. **Could the experience of intimidation by Parliamentary candidates discourage people from standing for elected or appointed public offices?**

6.1 Although hostility levels may be similar between the sexes, my research in similar fields suggests women react more strongly to online abuse, and are more likely to change their behaviour because of it. There are reasonable comparisons with journalists, who also have to maintain a public profile whilst combining professionalism with a personal response. A UCLan survey of more than 200 journalists found women were more likely to say they were frightened by online hostility, and that it often made them upset, very upset or angry. They were also more likely to say they had looked for another job, left a job or changed their behaviour in other ways.

6.2 MPs' responses to hostility online varies greatly. Some will be extremely upset, particularly light users faced with huge spikes. Others take it as par for the course. One or two seem to actively court it.

6.3 British politics is confrontational by design. Social media also lends itself to confrontation, and may have magnified and intensified this aspect of politics. Traditionally, candidates for office have accepted, perhaps even been attracted to, robust debate. More recently, all political parties have sought to attract candidates, particularly women, who do not fit this template.

6.4 Hostility online may be off-putting to candidates who are more concerned about public service than tribalism or robust debate. However, this hostility has some of its roots in the generally confrontational style of British politics. The existing political landscape of clearly defined and celebrated division is the background to the social media hostility. In other words, it may be necessary to make changes to British political practice as well as social media practice in order to retain these candidates.

Rehman Chishti MP
Member of Parliament for Gillingham and Rainham

Review of Intimidation of Parliamentary Candidates
Committee on Standards in Public Life

05 September 2017

Dear Committee,

Further to the letter sent by the Committee on Standards in Public life on 24th July 2017, I am enclosing the letter I sent to the Electoral Commission shortly after the election for their review into abuse and intimidation of Parliamentary Candidates and MPs.

As the letter states, this is my 3rd successful General Election campaign, having fought the Gillingham and Rainham seat in 2010 and 2015 before. The experience in this General Election was the worst experience I have had in all elections I have fought in.

I submit this evidence as my own. I have been the Conservative Member of Parliament for my home constituency of Gillingham and Rainham since 2010. I am submitting this evidence as someone who has personally experienced intimidation and abuse during the election campaign as a Parliamentary Candidate.

If you require further information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Rehman Chishti
Member of Parliament for Gillingham and Rainham

Electoral Commission

Re: **Feedback on the 2017 General Election Campaign**

I have received an email from the Electoral Commission to give feedback on the 2017 General Election.

I would like the Electoral Commission to make a determination on the attached leaflet, which was published by the Labour Candidate in Gillingham and Rainham in the final week of the General Election campaign, as to whether they consider the leaflet to be misleading in any way.

1. The graph published at the back of the leaflet apparently shows the votes each party candidate received in the 2015 General Election and is headlined "Want to Stop the Tories?" As the graph does not resemble a similar graph published by the BBC in relation to the 2015 General Election, can the Electoral Commission clarify which of the graphs published is an accurate reflection of the 2015 General Election, the BBC version or the Labour Party publication?

2. The same Labour Party leaflet also contains a statement in large letters in Liberal Democrat colours stating that "Even Vince Cable former Lib Dem Minister wants you to vote Labour." Underneath this is a quote "I would hope that our people around the country act in a constructive way" - Vince Cable 8th May 2017. Is this interpretation factually accurate or misleading?

3. The leaflet is produced in similar colours and layout as to how local Conservative Party literature had been previously published. Labour's leaflet shows a box under the heading in blue "the Conservative Party Candidate" with certain assertions about myself. As the leaflet, does not cite any details or sources to support the assertions, is this in line with the Electoral Commission guidance on how literature should be published with reference to other candidates?

General Observations

This being my third term being elected to Parliament, I must say that I have never encountered such negative behaviour before by candidates and or their activists: please see below examples of such negative behaviour:

1. At the local hustings at St Marks Church when I answered points as a Conservative Candidate there was jeering heckling throughout.

2. At the Count when I was giving my acceptance speech, there was jeering and heckling. As I left the stage, I was told by an individual that they had heard a Labour Party activist state that I should   . to Saudi Arabia". I am led to believe by the local media reports that the matter is being investigated by the local Police in relation to racism.

3. My constituency office was vandalised twice with anti-Conservative messages. These messages were: 1) Strong and stable my arse, 2) Enough is enough vote tactically. I reported this to the police in both instances.

4. Many Conservative party boards were taken down or damaged with anti-Conservative messages, which I also reported to Kent Police.

5. A video published on Youtube on the 6th June 2017, 2 days before the General Election showed a conversation between a third party and a Labour Councillor in Gillingham who was also a former Local Labour party Chairman in 2015. The third party asserts smashing the Conservative Candidate with what are malicious and false assertions and threats to do him harm "If I was there his feet would not touch the ground".
   The tone and nature of this conversation contains grossly offensive and malicious comments made by the third party to the Councillor and he explains how the malicious allegations could be used to undermine the Conservative Candidate. I consider the tone and nature shown in this video to be unacceptable and deeply offensive and have referred the matter to Kent Police, the Metropolitan Police and the House of Commons Security Team. Kent Police have confirmed that these threats were not reported to them by the Labour Councillor.
   Does the Commission consider that any reasonable person presented which such offensive material, and threats of violence to another would immediately report it to the police.

   I shall let the Electoral Commission draw their own conclusions with regards to the video mentioned above and referenced below.

   Link to the Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyKFsuK4bKA

I would be grateful if the Electoral Commission can take this into account as part of their feedback request to all Parliamentary Candidates standing in the 2017 General Election Campaign and in my case now having been elected MP for the third time.

Yours faithfully

Rehman Chishti MP

Making IT
good for society
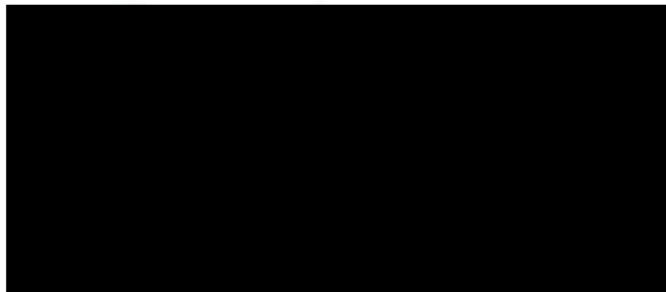
BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life call for evidence relating to the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates.

September 2017

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

BCS is a charity with a Royal Charter. Its mission is to make IT better for society. It does this through leadership on societal and professional issues, working with communities and promoting excellence.

BCS brings together industry, academics, practitioners, educators and government to share knowledge, promote new thinking, educate, shape public policy and inform the public. This is achieved through and with a network of 75,000 members across the UK and internationally. BCS is funded through membership fees, through the delivery of a range of professional development tools for practitioners and employers, and as a leading IT qualification body, through a range of widely recognised professional and end-user qualifications.

www.bcs.org

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT response to the National Infrastructure Commission call for evidence relating to the

potential application and deployment of 5G services, July 2016

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General comment

BCS very much welcomes the Committee's activities. Our view is that this issue is the greatest danger to standards in public life, and is already having profound impacts on public political discourse. We would very much support an approach based on principles for future conduct online, bringing people together with shared goals across party lines. The Committee is well placed to do that, but we are cognisant of the scale and complexities of this issue.

Questions from the Committee on Standards in Public Life

1. What is the nature and degree of intimidation experienced by Parliamentary candidates, in particular at the 2017 General Election?

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT recently commissioned think tank *Demos* to research how MPs and their constituents were interacting over social media. The resulting report, *Signal and Noise: Can technology provide a window into the new world of digital politics in the UK?*, was published in May 2017. It can be viewed [here](#).

Some of the report's key findings included:

- Over a three month period, MPs received 188,000 abusive tweets.
- Two thirds of those abusive tweets came from men.
- Over this period, an average of 1 in 20 tweets received by MPs were abusive.
- For the most abused MPs (generally the more senior or high profile figures) 1 in 10 tweets received by MPs were abusive.
- The number of tweets MPs receive varied wildly. Some MPs received an average of 10,000 messages every day, while others received fewer than five a day. This presents huge potential inconsistencies between MPs' abilities to respond to their constituents.
- The abuse peaked on the day of the EU referendum result, and the day Boris Johnson pulled out of the Conservative leadership race (the three month period analysed was 9 May – 18 August 2016).

3. Has the media or social media significantly changed the nature, scale, or effect of intimidation of Parliamentary candidates? If so, what measures would you suggest to help address these issues?

It appears from data and conversation with parties that social media is a factor in changing the nature, and the scale, and the effect of intimidation.

The nature: social media appears to support more personal and aggressive attacks. In dialogues at party conferences it was clear to us that the psychology of the abuser and the abused is different,

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT response to the National Infrastructure Commission call for evidence relating to the potential application and deployment of 5G services, July 2016

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and while there are moderating forces in offline situations there appear to be heightening / aggravating effects on social media.

The scale: clearly the data shows a vast scale that would simply not be possible without social media.

The effect: the targeting and effect disproportionately impacts women and ethnic minorities, while the abusers are disproportionately male. The impact that this will have on candidates in future being willing to stand is extremely troubling.

Excpanding on this, in our foreword to the report, BCS explained that the issue of MPs being abused online is not going away of its own accord. As communication has moved online, communications between citizens and their MPs has moved with it. But unlike general communication, there is a specific democratic and societal need for citizens to communicate effectively with their MPs, and this isn't currently working as satisfactorily as it needs to online. In their attempts to cope, some MPs try to avoid digital communications altogether. Others struggle to manage the immense volume of direct public engagement made possible by social media channels, and of course many are subject to the most horrendous abuse.

The existing social media platforms are being used to perform a specific democratic and societal function for which they were not designed. Our full thoughts are set out both in BCS's foreword to the report, and in [this accompanying blog](#).

In terms of solutions, we believe that the core of this is around social norms of behaviour online. The nature of social media platforms may lean towards different social norms, but this is not a problem primarily for the technology platforms – and certainly not one they can solve in isolation. Legislation and enforcement are important but only as part of a broader solution – and it is not clear existing laws are anything other than adequate. Instead, we believe that collaboration and consensus across all those involved in politics along with the technology companies is necessary for any meaningful solution. Collectively, we need to signal a standard of behaviour, and the technology platforms need to assist that – but cannot be the source of it.

5. What role should political parties play in preventing the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates and encouraging constructive debate?

The political parties need to enforce their own roles, but our hypothesis is that there needs to be cross-party action on standards; a physical, face-to-face hustings has rules of conduct observed by everyone, and there needs to be a similar online consensus. Key to this may not just be in passive terms (i.e. ensuring candidates are not themselves engaged in abuse), but in active steps that curb abuse across party lines.

However, in practical terms, any measures need to avoid the stifling of full-throated campaigning either by curbing dialogue or by creating administrative burdens or risk.

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT response to the National Infrastructure Commission call for evidence relating to the potential application and deployment of 5G services, July 2016

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6. What other measures might be effective in addressing the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates, and candidates for public offices more broadly?

There seems to be widespread agreement between all parties that the current situation is unsatisfactory, yet no single party (political or otherwise) can resolve the issue on their own. Rules or regulations set out by individual parties for their members would be helpful, but not sufficient to tackle the problem, which is more social in nature.

The first step must be for a dialogue between all the major stakeholders, where tangible steps towards a solution can be suggested and discussed openly.

BCS is therefore working to bring the political parties together with the social media platforms and other relevant minds, to convene a constructive and collaborative dialogue on what possible solutions could exist to improve the situation of online democratic engagement.

In our capacity as the professional body for the IT industry, we are already in dialogue with the relevant people at the social media platforms, and Twitter have confirmed they will be participating.

We have written to all the major UK political parties inviting them to be involved in a constructive discussion of possible solutions to improve the current situation, and are in active discussion with both the Conservatives and Labour parties around their involvement.

This conversation must be mature and constructive, and we believe that means independent participants are key. This is partly why we believe BCS – with our Royal Charter instilling our aim of making IT good for society – is uniquely positioned to convene such a dialogue, as we come with no agenda other than the betterment of society.
Online political engagement is here to stay, and questions around how well it is serving our political process will only increase over time. We now have the chance to get ahead and give proper consideration to how the situation can be improved.

7. Could the experience of intimidation by Parliamentary candidates discourage people from standing for elected or appointed public offices?

Politicians of all parties have highlighted the negative impact this issue is have on the political process.

When BCS held fringe events to discuss this subject at the political party conferences in 2016, we heard anecdotal evidence from those in attendance on the subject of women and ethnic minorities standing as candidates. This ranged from attendees reporting that candidates had been put off, through to attendees saying they would advise women or those from ethnic minorities not to stand. While anecdotal and unverified, this is obviously a potentially very damaging situation for a free democratic society to find itself in.

8. Has the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates led to a change in the way in which public office holders interact with the public in correspondence, on social media, or at in-person events?

Various MPs have taken the decision to stop using social media, primarily because of the level of abuse they or their staff receives (including Ranil Jayawardena announcing shortly after the election that he was leaving Twitter). With some MPs being extremely active on social media, and some avoiding it altogether, there are huge potential inconsistencies between MPs' abilities to respond to their constituents. This is troubling in a democracy that relies on citizens being able to contact their elected representatives.

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT response to the National Infrastructure Commission call for evidence relating to the potential application and deployment of 5G services, July 2016

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JAMES DUDDRIDGE MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Lord Bew
Chair
Committee on Standards in Public Life

4th September 2017

Dear Lord Bew,

Further to your letter dated 24th July 2017 I am writing with my formal submission for the review into the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates.

I have stood as a Parliamentary candidate in five general elections, the 2017 election being my fifth election. I must say, that if this election were the first I had fought, I am not certain I would <u>consider</u> standing again.

As a candidate during an election there is an expectation for different political opinions to be aired, different views to be discussed on the door step, documented in leaflets and possibly debated between the different candidates at community hustings. However, what I was subjected to during this recent election, I don't think any candidate should be subjected to.

To provide context, prior to the election being called, the local hospital was just about to embark upon a consultation which was looking at the way emergency care was delivered to patients. There were three hospitals that were involved in this consultation, namely Southend, Basildon and Mid Essex Broomfield Hospital. The details of the proposals are not relevant to this enquiry, but what is relevant is how those candidates with an opposing view to mine conducted themselves during the campaign.

Initially an online petition was created urging residents not to support the proposals to close the Accident and Emergency Department at Southend Hospital. This petition, supported by the Labour, Independent and Green candidates was irresponsible and disingenuous as there weren't any plans to close any departments. However, this single action caused a great deal of unrest within the local community.

This was then followed by inaccurate articles being written in local publications, again, adding to the unrest in the community. Social media groups were formed and promoted by Momentum activists. In particular, the Facebook group gained quite a lot of traction and I started to be the centre of a lot of the posts, I was being publically condemned, abusive comments posted and personal attacks were becoming a daily occurrence.

This was shortly followed by a protest in Southend High Street, a march from one end of the High Street to the other. The labour party candidate took the opportunity to speak to the hundreds of people gathered at the end of the protest and again, caused further concern after scaremongering those present with inaccurate accounts of the proposals. My absence from the event was noted many times publically by those organising the protest.

As a result, it was decided to 'bring a protest to me'. The second protest was organised to take place outside my home. The home that I share with my wife and three young children. The event was organised on social media, protesters met at the train station a short walk from my home and they proceeded to walk along the small parade of shops to my home where they stood with megaphones and placards with the stated intention of intimidating me. I had already alerted the police to this protest and their advice was for the family not to be at home and we would be notified when we can return. So that is what we did, my family had to leave our home because of this organised protest that took place directly outside my house. The police were involved.

It didn't end there, on the night of the count, the Green Party candidate approached my Campaign Manager and was extremely threatening. The police insisted on taking me to the count and entering by the back door. Once inside, the Green Party Candidate approached me, was extremely threatening and aggressive, he threatened me with violence. Eventually was removed from the count and was not able to return, missing the declaration of result.

In my opinion and recent experience, social media has a significant part to play in the intimidation of candidates. Social media is able to reach a wide audience very quickly. Inaccurate information can be posted with no control by the subject of the content which can be uploaded with the click of a button but lengthy process to get the content removed, social media provides a forum to slander others with little immediate recourse to remove the content and public events can be arranged a circulated to thousands, again within moments.

I fear that candidates are not as well respected as they once were, I suspect that an element of this is again, as a result of social media where no respect needs to be displayed and as such, when a candidate is in public campaigning, little respect is shown.

I would be keen to see social media platforms take responsibility for overseeing the content of political posts, or if that is not viable, when content is reported as being inaccurate or slanderous that the content is removed swiftly.

The challenge, as I see it, for both the Returning Officer and also the local police do not have a single piece of legislation that would address issues presented during an election.

Whilst election law covers issues around legality of literature produced and compliance of procedures for the process of an election, threats of violence, intimidation of candidates, defacing campaign property e.g. corex boards, social media threats and abuse, are all covered by different pieces of legislation and I fear this creates a lack of clarity for those charged with upholding the law and overseeing the election process.

As I said, at the start of this submission, the 2017 election campaign was a particularly difficult campaign and not one that I would wish to re-live. I am hopeful that progress can be made to address the security of candidates and volunteers throughout the election campaign.

James Duddridge MP

INTIMIDATION OF PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES

REVIEW BY THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

EVIDENCE FROM MARTYN PENNINGTON,

CHAIR OF THE EAST KENT COAST LIBERAL DEMOCRAT PARTY AND

2017 LIBERAL DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE FOR NORTH THANET CONSTITUENCY

1. This submission is sent on a personal basis but reflects my involvement with campaigns of the local Liberal Democrat Party during the last three years, including the 2015 general election and district elections in Thanet. I also am personally motivated because I knew Jo Cox (as Jo Ledbetter) when she worked for Glenys Kinnock in the European Parliament.

2. The level of intimidation I experienced at the 2017 general election was low. However I believe that the advent of debate on social media has indeed increased significantly the risk of aggressive messages and written intimidation in the political debate. This is seen in two respects: firstly, posting on Facebook, for instance, seems to offer anonymity, and it was (for instance) difficult for me to identify individuals who posted aggressive comments on my Facebook page, in particular to know if they came from one party or another. I had aggressive posts which I assumed were from UKIP supporters but my agent told me after checking were Conservative supporters.

3. Secondly, while a concerted attack is possible, it also encourages a 'pack of wolves' mentality in which one aggressive message encourages others to follow in the same vein. Most campaign teams now have supporters whose specific role is to follow debates on social media and these can become excessively aggressive.

4. Apart from social media, we have regularly witnessed posters being defaced, and some candidates in local elections have been threatened or harassed. I am sure that this will deter some good candidates from standing for public office whether at Parliamentary or local level.

5. One reason for the growing frustration with officials in public service may be the increasing use of agencies whose staff have no discretion to apply rules flexibly. There is nevertheless no excuse for violent and aggressive behaviour towards officials who are doing their job.

6. In my view there should be some rules governing harassment which the political parties should manage jointly with the Committee, and the electoral commission. Guidelines could be drawn up and issued to all parties. After an election, cases could be submitted for review, and if a breach of the rules is identified, parties should take disciplinary action against those responsible. The Committee or the Electoral Commission should publish a review of such cases.

Conservatives

Review of Intimidation of Parliamentary Candidates
Committee on Standards in Public Life
By email: public@public-standards.gov.uk

8 September 2017

Dear Lord Bew,

CALL FOR EVIDENCE: INTIMIDATION OF PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES

I wish to respond to the Committee's call for evidence on behalf of the Conservative Party. This submission seeks to complement representations that will have been provided by Conservative Members of Parliament and candidates.

Nature and degree of intimidation

1. The Prime Minister asked the Committee to undertake a review into intimidation of election candidates after unprecedented feedback of unwarranted abuse in the run up to and during the 2017 general election. This included tangible incidents of death threats, obscenity, defamation and slander, criminal damage, homophobia, sexism, anti-Semitism and menacing abuse. Such behaviour affected candidates from across the political spectrum. Examples of such behaviour are provided in an annex. This was not just 'banter', but conduct that went beyond the legitimate exercise of freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

2. Such behaviour did not stem from the direct activities of mainstream political parties. Certainly, during any general election, political parties will robustly scrutinise, challenge and criticise their election opponents. In 2017, we believe the central parties themselves did so within the confines of reasonable debate. Neither was the abuse exercised by the traditional print media or broadcast media.

3. In a free society, critical scrutiny of politicians – and those who aspire to hold public office – is an important feature of Britain's democratic system and its independent free press. Yet, as was initially evident in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, there has been a step change in recent years in conduct that crosses the line beyond free speech, to behaviour that seeks to intimidate and abuse. Such behaviour ultimately seeks to discourage and prevent others from expressing their own political opinions.

4. We believe that this gradual change has been primarily driven by the unintended consequences of new technology – particularly of digital and social media – which has facilitated and encouraged the widespread distribution of abuse which is anonymous or made under false names. In turn, this has debased political debate, and lead to abuse that has spilled over into the physical realm as well.

5. This is not to call for special treatment for politicians. Unfortunately, public figures – from campaigners, to journalists, to anyone who may put their head above the virtual parapet, have also been subject to such abuse. Such intimidation though is particularly focused during an election or referendum campaign, as a consequence of the condensed and high-profile nature of an election event. As figureheads for a political cause, candidates (and their families) were targets for such abuse. Such unwelcome behaviour

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Conservative Campaign Headquarters, 4 Matthew Parker Street, London SW1H 9HQ | Switchboard 020 7222 9000 | conservatives.com

Promoted by Alan Mabbutt on behalf of the Conservative Party, both at 4 Matthew Parker Street, London SW1H 9HQ. Printed by St Ives plc, One Tudor Street, London EC4Y 0AH.

affected all the political parties. But there was a political dimension, given such the instigators of such abuse was particularly associated by groups and individuals linked to the hard-left and far-right.

Proposals to tackle such behaviour

6.   We outline a series of practical proposals below which we believe would help address such unacceptable behaviour in future elections.

7.   ***Extending imprint rules to electronic material***: There is a clearly established principle in election law that campaigning material from political parties or third parties should carry an imprint. Anonymity of campaigners is not recognised as a principle in election law. The imprint provides a check and balance against inappropriate content – as the publisher or promoter can be held to account publicly, and legal action can be initiated in the case of defamation or electoral offences (such as making a false statement about a candidate). Such provisions do not currently extend to electronic campaigning material (although the Electoral Commission recommends that an imprint should be added).

8.   To tackle the growth in online anonymous abuse, the Government should exercise Section 143 of the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000 to issue regulations to extend imprint rules to electronic material. This only requires secondary legislation. We do not believe that this should hinder electronic campaigning in practice; for example, a tweet itself (with limited characters) should not have to carry an imprint, but the twitter account page should. The regulations can provide for practical guidance to help define when campaigning is triggered[1] (we are not proposing that individual social media posts, in isolation, would be defined as campaigning).

9.   ***Online code of practice:*** The recently commenced Digital Economy Act 2017 requires the Secretary of State to issue a code of practice for social media providers on tackling online abuse, setting out arrangements on responding to complaints of intimidating or bullying behaviour. No further legislation is required to implement this code. We believe the code could set out specific steps and measures of redress for abuse in connection with election candidates. It could ensure there is a 'one stop shop' for candidates/agents to report election abuse and facilitate its removal. The guidance should also cover abuse against candidates' families. Such abuse is already against the existing terms and conditions of social media companies; it is not unreasonable that such firms apply and enforce those terms and conditions.

10. Of course, some third party campaigners could seek to ignore such imprint rules through anonymous content (which would constitute an offence under the proposed extension of imprint rules, over and above the legality of the content). Companies which host websites and social media content should facilitate the release of underlying registration or contact information to enable legal redress against anonymous online abuse. This principle of disclosure is already established in law through Norwich Pharmacal orders. The code of practice should practically provide for a process to facilitate such redress without having to go to court, where there has been a clear breach of the company's terms and conditions following the publication or distribution of abusive and actionable anonymous content.

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[1] The existing requirements for imprints on campaigning material are laid out in Section 110 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 and Section 143 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. Newspapers and regulated broadcasters are specifically exempt from the campaigning provisions.

11. ***Extending the restrictions on publishing candidates' home addresses across all polls***: The Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 allows Parliamentary candidates to withhold their home address from nomination papers and ballot papers. This provides a greater degree of protection for candidates and their families from physical abuse or intimidation, whilst still ensuring that the electorate are informed on whether or not a candidate is local to their constituency.

12. We believe these provisions should be extended to other elections. Such a change has recently been advocated by the Association of Electoral Administrators. Of course, all campaigning material from candidates would continue to have an imprint with their (office) address.

13. ***Clearer Crown Prosecution Service and/or College of Policing guidance***: The Crown Prosecution Service and/or the College of Policing should produce updated guidance on election abuse. There are a range of existing criminal offences which police forces could and should enforce more consistently and effectively, and such guidance could outline the range of offences. Existing criminal offences include:

    - Public Order Act 1986 offences - Section 4 (Fear or provocation of violence), Section 4A (Intentional harassment, alarm or distress) and Section 5 (Harassment, alarm or distress);
    - Protection from Harassment Act 1997 (offences of harassment; and putting people in fear of violence);
    - Malicious Communications Act 1998 (sending letter or electronic communication with intent to cause distress or anxiety; includes messages which are indecent or grossly offensive or a threat);
    - Communications Act 2003 (sending electronic message which is grossly offence, or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character);
    - Intimidation or annoyance by violence or otherwise (Section 241 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992);
    - Criminal damage (Criminal Damage Act 1971);
    - False statements about the conduct of a candidate (Representation of the People Act 1983).
    - Abuse or intimidation with a racial or religious element (for example, anti-Semitism) would be subject to further offences and be considered aggravated behaviour.

14. This guidance should be backed up with enhanced training, monitoring, data collection and public communication in relation to electoral abuse and intimidation. Again, this is not to call for special treatment for politicians – the law should be equally applied to others in the public sphere, be they campaigners, journalists or everyday members of the public. But the purpose of such guidance and training would simply recognise that those in the public eye, running for public office, are exposed to greater risk.

15. ***Tougher laws against election intimidation***: The Government has already accepted the proposal from Sir Eric Pickles' review of electoral fraud to lower the test of intimidation in connection with an election. The 2015 Tower Hamlets election court case found the legal threshold for proving intimidation was too high, such that prosecutions were not

viable, even despite clear evidence of intimidation outside polling stations.[2] This would involve an amendment to the Representation of the People Act 1983. Whilst this primarily relates to action which would prevent the free exercise of the franchise of an elector, rather than candidates, one could foresee that – left unchecked – systematic and organised abuse could easily be extended to the supporters of a candidate within a constituency.

16. *Action by political parties*: The Conservative Party already takes robust disciplinary action against any party member proved to have engaged in unacceptable behaviour, including suspension or expulsion. The Party has also in the past ruled that certain proscribed organisations are incompatible with party membership. Yet some political parties do not take such a clear stance against abusive behaviour, especially by their fringe groups. All political parties should be asked to draw up and publish a clear statement of the standards expected of members and how the party would enforce its disciplinary proceedings. Such self-regulation would complement the other proposals above.

Conclusion

17. The consequences of failing to take action against such unwelcome and growing behaviour would be to discourage people from participating in public life. Such abuse threatens to undermine legitimate free speech and public debate, and weaken Britain's reputation for free and fair elections. We hope our proposals will assist the Committee in drawing up a set of recommendations to the Prime Minister that can command cross-party and public support.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Sir Patrick McLoughlin MP
Chairman of the Conservative Party &
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

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[2] Erlam & Ors v Rahman & Anor [2015] EWHC 1215 (QB) (23 April 2015). The election judge, Richard Mawrey QC, noted: "Section 115 demands quite a serious level of violence before it will permit an election to be avoided... The court appreciates that many in Tower Hamlets will be disappointed, even horrified, that the 1983 Act does not penalise thuggish conduct at polling stations of the sort that occurred in 2014."

Annex: Examples

<u>Selected excerpts: Westminster Hall, *UK Elections: Abuse and Intimidation*, 12 July 2017</u>

- **Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire):** 'Retailers and hoteliers have felt that they cannot support a candidate publicly or make a donation to the party or candidate of their choice, because they are worried that they might be attacked on online review sites or, even worse, in person. There are elderly voters who will not put up a sign in their windows. There are volunteers who worry about handing out leaflets and having abuse hurled at them. There are colleagues whose sexuality or religion has resulted in them being spat at – not once, but regularly' (*Hansard*, 12 July 2017, Col. 153WH).

- **Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole):** 'I have had death threats for a number of years – I now have panic buttons and a restraining order against somebody. What is different about what happened at this election – in which I was subjected to anti-Semitic abuse, my staff were spat at and my boards and property were attacked – is that the abuse has been politically motivated. The elephant in the room is that it has been motivated by the language of some of our political leaders, when they accuse people of one political side of murder, and when they dehumanise them… There is something more sinister to this' (*Hansard*, 12 July 2017, Col. 155WH).

- **Nusrat Ghani (Wealden):** 'My concern is that the abuse particularly stops women entering politics. I will give the example of a candidate who stood in Ealing and was unfortunately not elected. Candidates have to declare their addresses when they stand for Parliament. She said that she started becoming nervous during the election campaign when opponents started standing outside her door, spitting in her face and following her. That is the threatening behaviour that she wants to highlight' (*Hansard*, 12 July 2017, Col. 156WH).

- **David Jones (Clwyd West):** 'I have stood in six general elections and I can say that, frankly, this was by a long chalk the most unpleasant one in which I have ever participated. I have no doubt at all that much of the behaviour that [Simon Hart] outlined was co-ordinated, because the patterns of behaviour that I witnessed in my constituency have been repeated across the country and have been reported to me by a number of colleagues. One issue that I want to raise… is that of social media. Frankly, if ever there were a misnomer, "social media" is it; it is deeply antisocial media' (*Hansard*, 12 July 2017, Col. 161WH).

- **Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham):** 'When I stood up to make my acceptance speech and to thank all the electorate after a very difficult election—the culture in the election campaign was one of the most difficult that I have experienced—I had an activist say in public, '   . The matter has been referred to the Kent police. They are investigating it under public order and racism, so let them do their job. But a Labour party activist, who happens to be a former assistant to the Medway Labour group, said that in public as I made my acceptance speech' (*Hansard*, 12 July 2017, Col. 163WH).

<u>Studies into election abuse</u>

- **Research has shown male Conservative candidates faced the highest levels of abuse in their Twitter mentions.** 'Broken down by party and gender, male Conservative candidates were the group who received the highest percentage of abuse in their mentions, followed by male UKIP and Labour candidates, and female Conservative candidates… Prominent

politicians act as magnets for the vast majority of the abuse – and there are significantly more prominent male politicians than female ones. And given the UK was governed by a Conservative majority before the election, that party was fielding more high-profile candidates' (*BuzzFeed*, 23 July 2017, link).

- **Here are some examples of online abuse, found during the University of Sheffield investigation, that politicians across the political spectrum faced during the election campaign.**

12:13 PM - 4 Jun 2017
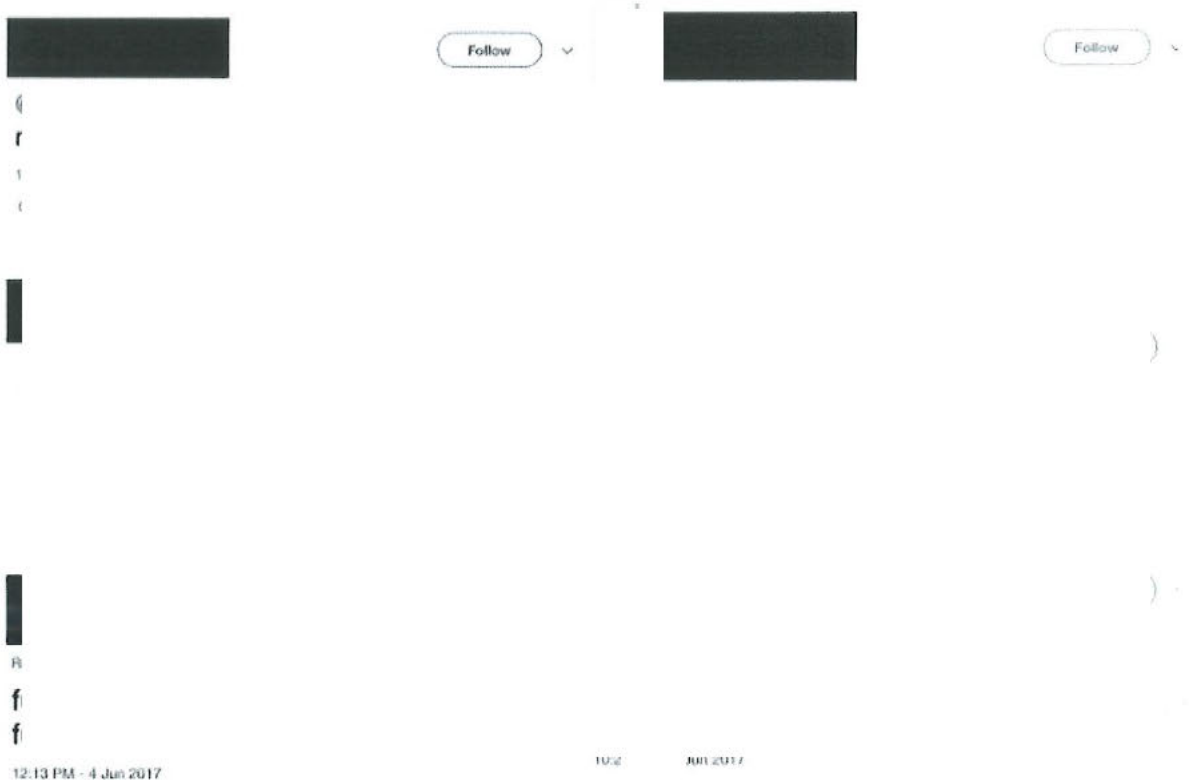
(*BuzzFeed*, 23 July 2017, link).

- **BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT, developed a 'boos and cheers' system which has highlighted the level of abuse MPs face online.** 'All tweets were categorised as either a 'boo' (a disagreement, an accusation or an insult), a 'cheer' (praise, agreement or support), or neutral (everything else, such as sharing news, quoting the MP or commenting on a wider issue). In total, 1.8 million messages containing either a boo or a cheer were sent during the period (48 percent of the total dataset). Of these, 730,000 were cheers and one million were boos. The remainder were determined to be neutral. There was a wide variance in the proportion of boos and cheers received by the parties' MPs during the collection period' (Demos, *Signal and Noise*, 25 May 2017, p.21, link).

- **BCS found, on average, one in every twenty tweets sent to MPs were abusive.** 'On average, one in 20 tweets and retweets mentioning MPs were classified as abusive (5.1 percent). However, as with boos and cheers, MPs in the UK have markedly different

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experiences. Six MPs received one abusive tweet in every ten, while 34 received none at all. Eight of the MPs receiving the most abuse were male, two were female. There was little correlation between the follower count for an MP and the abuse they received (0.31)' (Demos, *Signal and Noise*, 25 May 2017, p.27, link).

- **An All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Electoral Conduct also detailed many examples of abuse faced by candidates, such as:**

  o 'Ameet Jogia, an Indian-origin Conservative party candidate was reportedly subjected to racial abuse when the wall of a voting booth in the constituency for which he was standing was daubed with a racist message. Mr. Jogia was reportedly left disappointed that "no one did anything to take it down". The matter is being investigated by the Electoral Commission' (*All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Electoral Conduct*, July 2017, p.19, link).

  o 'Another Conservative candidate and now re-elected MP Sheryll Murray said she was "sickened" when her posters were daubed with swastikas. Her agent suggested the attackers were trying to protest Ms. Murray's support for the Jewish community. Devon and Cornwall police confirmed a report of criminal damage' (*All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Electoral Conduct*, July 2017, p.19, link).

  o 'Andrew Percy, a Minister prior to the General Election, said he was abused in front of two witnesses by someone claiming to support the leader of the Labour Party. The alleged perpetrator was said to have shouted "Zionist   at Percy and, on being informed he was Jewish, replied "Oh, I will need a wash now". The incident was referred to the police and there was no suggestion Jeremy Corbyn supported or endorsed the incident' (*All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Electoral Conduct*, July 2017, p.19, link).

- **The report concluded by calling for better collection and analysis of election abuse.** 'Better collection and analysis of election-related racism and discrimination data should be secured... Members of Parliament involved with this inquiry process, will continue to advocate for these various measures to be taken forward over the coming years. The Electoral Conduct report shone a light on a frequently overlooked area of British public policy. Hopefully, its impact has led to a change in approach which will be longstanding and effective' (*All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Electoral Conduct*, July 2017, p.29, link).

Political Studies Association
Women and Politics

SUBMISSION FROM THE POLITICAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION WOMEN AND POLITICS SPECIALIST GROUP TO THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE:

EVIDENCE REGARDING INTIMIDATION EXPERIENCED BY PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES

SEPTEMBER 2017

PSA Women and Politics Specialist Group Co-conveners:

Dr Orlanda Siow (University College London)   Dr Jennifer Thomson (University of Bath)

The following submission highlights relevant evidence from two recent publications:

Firstly, several recommendations emerging from *The Good Parliament Report*, authored by Prof. Sarah Childs (University of Bristol / Birkbeck).

Secondly, selected extracts from the response to the 2016 review of the MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses and IPSA's publication policy, provided by Prof. Rosie Campbell (Birkbeck, University of London), Prof. Sarah Childs (University of Bristol / Birkbeck), Prof. Emma Crewe (SOAS), and Prof. Georgina Waylen (University of Manchester). This text also draws on *The Good Parliament.*

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM *THE GOOD PARLIAMENT REPORT*

- Ask the Consultative Panel on Parliamentary Security to report on what more can be done to protect MPs from social media violence, and what more can be done to protect the children of MPs from media intrusion. (p.16)

- MPs' experiences of housing, travel and security are likely mediated by their gender and other identities, not least ethnicity, disability and sexuality, as well as their family situations. (p.18)

- Seek the equitable publication of costs incurred by MPs in respect of their children. That is, like the additional costs incurred for reasons of disability or additional security, these should be published at the aggregate and not individual level. (p.19-20).

- Ensure that IPSA acknowledges that MPs' experiences of security are likely affected by their identities. The issue of security is keenly felt by women MPs at Westminster,125 and felt to be afforded insufficient recognition by IPSA. This might well be true of other Members as well. The address of the family home in the constituency is often widely known, and some MPs are concerned that they are frequently alone in their constituency home with their children, and without sufficient protection. The rules permitting taxi use in the evenings are also felt to be overly restrictive, relative to public and private sector provision. The legitimate use of taxis is further limited by the perception that the media will be highly critical of MPs even when they are correctly claimed for. (p.20)
- The House urgently reviews measures to support MPs subject to cyber harassment... improving cyber-security. (p.53)

Regarding the publication of MPs' business costs and expenses:

Publication of information emphasises that the system is transparent but it is unhelpful to publish receipts. They can too easily be taken out of context. More explanation needs to be given by IPSA to explain why MPs incur very different levels of cost (e.g., distance of constituency from Westminster, number of dependents) so that comparison between MPs is fairer.

THE GOOD PARLIAMENT REPORT:
- *Seek the equitable publication of costs incurred by MPs in respect of their children. That is, like the additional costs incurred for reasons of disability or additional security, these should be published at the aggregate and not individual level*

The additional costs incurred by MPs with children are currently treated inequitably relative to the additional costs incurred by MPs with disabilities, and in relation to additional security costs.[i] This leaves MPs who make claims for legitimate children related costs being perceived as 'expensive' in the media, by political opponents, and amongst the public. This is one reason why some MPs do not claim their legitimate expenses; and it is why the least expensive MPs – often valorised by the press – are frequently older men either without children, or with grown up children. Whilst IPSA should of course confirm the legitimacy of all costs associated with MPs' children, there is no public interest in this information being linked to individual Members. All the latter does is feed critical comment of the parent MP.

- *Ensure that IPSA acknowledges that MPs' experiences of security are likely affected by their identities*

The issue of security is keenly felt by women MPs at Westminster,[ii] and felt to be afforded insufficient recognition by IPSA. This might well be true of other Members as well. The address of the family home in the constituency is often widely known, and some MPs are concerned that they are frequently alone in their constituency home with their children, and without sufficient protection. The rules permitting taxi use in the evenings are also felt to be overly restrictive, relative to public and private sector provision. The legitimate use of taxis is further limited by the perception that the media will be highly critical of MPs even when they are correctly claimed for.

- Why were the rules on taxis tightened? How comparable is this rule with other large employers? Was an equality and diversity assessment made for this decision?

In the 2015 MPs scheme publication IPSA stated, '29. No respondent provide specific evidence to us either that our existing rules were having an impact on the equality and diversity of the House of Commons, or that the changes we proposed would do so. Given the meetings held between Sarah Childs and MPs during 2015/16 we feel that this reflects more a reluctance on behalf of MPs to speak out rather than a fair account of some MPs views regarding IPSA and equality and diversity.

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[i] IPSA 2016, 23, 75.

[ii] This is the case amongst those who participated in Childs' 2016 study, and reported in the House of Commons Service (2015, 6) 'Members wondered whether IPSA had taken sufficient account of the equality issues (through an equality assessment for example) surrounding its rules around travel and taxis, including the implications for those travelling with children.

Fawcett Society Submission
Intimidation of Parliamentary Candidates
September 2017

About us

1. The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading charity campaigning for gender equality and women's rights at work, at home, and in public life. Our vision is a society in which the choices you can make and the control you have over your own life are no longer determined by your gender.

2. We publish authoritative research to educate, inform and lead the debate; we bring together politicians, academics, grassroots activists and wider civil society to develop innovative, practical policy solutions and we campaign with women and men to make change happen.

3. We have recently conducted research into the experiences of women being harassed or abused online, the response of social media platforms to this harassment or abuse, and of women in local government. We believe this research will be of value to the Committee in answering their review questions.

The experience of women being harassed or abused online

4. In order to hear from women that use social media about their experiences of online harassment and abuse, Fawcett put an open-access survey out online with support in questionnaire drafting from Reclaim the Internet (a cross-party campaign founded by Yvette Cooper MP).

5. Our respondents saw the most abuse on Facebook or Twitter. 66% of Twitter users reported experiencing abuse or harassment, almost all of them from a stranger or both strangers and people they know in real life (66% of respondents). 64% reported abuse or harassment on Facebook, where women who answered our survey were more likely to have experienced abuse from people they know (29% of Facebook users). Abuse on other platforms was rarer, with many users on Snapchat (90%), Instagram (88%), and WhatsApp (93%) receiving none, while 42% of Tumblr respondents received abuse and 51% of moderated discussion forum users did, in both cases mostly from strangers.

6. On Facebook and Twitter, sexist messages were the most common type of harassment or abuse experienced, with 64% of those receiving abuse on Facebook and 70% of those receiving abuse on Twitter saying that was the type they had seen. Around a third of women had experienced each of politically extremist hate messages, unwanted sexual messages or images, stalking, and threats of violence. Twitter users had experienced people organising abuse against them in similar proportions.

7. Five of the women responding in more depth identified that online abusers, often strangers, had either impersonated them online, or contacted people they know in the real world to attack them.

8. We asked women responding to the survey which, from a range of options provided based on some of the potential protections that have been discussed in media reports in the past, they wanted to see social media platforms do to stop online abuse and harassment. The option which was most supported was 'Add a 'panic button' if users are experiencing abuse from a number of accounts', which 85% of respondents agreed with and only 6% disagreed with, followed by 'Stop people who have been banned in the past from setting up new accounts' with 80% agreeing and 10% disagreeing.

9. The options of 'blocking abusive accounts so their posts can only be seen by their own followers', 'using an algorithm to identify accounts or profiles which are likely to be abusive', and 'covering up potentially offensive images or posts' were supported by 71% 61%, and 52% of women, but disagreed with by a larger proportion (19%, 15%, and 22%). Requiring users to use their real name or identity was more disagreed with (45%) than agreed with (42%) – suggesting that a slight plurality of the women who responded values the anonymity the internet allows over the impact they think the measure might have on reducing harassment.

10. Many women questioned the impact of automated or algorithmic moderators, which they felt often made questionable decisions, and felt platforms could afford to invest in human moderation. A number of women also questioned the quality of moderation staff, and whether they received training that reflected the intersectional identities (i.e. BME, disabled, LGBTQ+) of the people whose posts they were moderating. A number of responses felt that the definition on Facebook in particular of what was 'offensive' was defined from a white male perspective.

11. Other ideas women put forward included requiring people to give real names when signing up to sites, but enabling them to use a moniker online; and a focus on prompting better behaviour, either through messages reminding users about their responsibilities, or through plain-English terms and conditions.

12. Half of Facebook users who experienced abuse said they did not report it to the platform, and nor did 43% of Twitter users. When they did, few reported the platform taking action. 44% of women who used Facebook who had experienced abuse reported it, but saw no action taken, and only 3% said their concerns were acted on. Slightly more women said Twitter took action based on their reports (9%), but 44% said they reported it and no action was taken. Relatively few women used moderated discussion forums, but of those who had experienced harassment or abuse on them, 48% said they had reported it and action had been taken. In the further responses to this question, most women said that the social media platforms had deleted comments.

13. Few of the women who had experienced abuse on social media had reported it to the police: only 3% of Facebook users and 10% of Twitter users had done so. 4% of Twitter users said the police had taken some action following their reports, although this represents only 3 cases.

14. We also asked what action women wanted to see the government take. Net 79% agreed that "The Government should increase the penalties for people who send threatening messages online", and net 53% agreed that "The Government should increase the penalties for people who send grossly offensive messages online". There was overwhelming support of net 87% agreement that "The Government should require police forces to record misogyny as a hate crime", in line with the status of crimes against each of the other protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Non-Response of Platforms

15. Subsequent to the research outlied above, we conducted further work to look at how Twitter as a platform responds to abuse. This work found that Twitter is doing too little, too slowly to combat online abuse.[1]

16. For this work, numerous examples of abuse, threats, and hate speech on the platform were identified and reported early in the week of the 14th August - by the morning of the 21st August they were still up on the platform, and no action had been taken against the users who submitted them. The examples were subsequently deleted after the media release of these findings.

17. In particular, the following abusive tweets were targeted at public figures, with no action taken within that timeframe:

   - Racist abuse and sexist abuse of Diane Abbott – this was reported on 10th August and no action had been taken by 18th August.
   - Anti-Semitic abuse of Luciana Berger – this was reported on 10thAugust and no action had been taken by 18th August.
   - Threats against Gina Miller – this was reported on 14th August and no action had been taken by 18th August.
   - Obscene abuse against Jo Cox, responding to former EDL leader Tommy Robinson – this was reported on 9th August and no action had been taken by 18th August.

18. Taken alongside the platform's failure to act against white supremacists organizing the Charlottesville rally, to tackle coordinated 'dogpiling' such as that experienced by Mary Beard earlier last month, and to remove anti-Semitic abuse of Luciana Berger MP, there is a clear picture of Twitter not acting quickly or strongly enough.

Women in Local Government

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[1] https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/News/twitter-failing-women-experiencing-online-threats-harassment

19. For over a year up to July 2017 Fawcett's Local Government Commission, in partnership with the Local Government Information Unit, looked into the extent and reasons for women's underrepresentation on local councils. Women make up just a third of councillors, a figure which has flatlined over the last two decades, and with worse representation at the leadership level. We found that abuse and harassment, including on social media, impacts on women's decisions to run for local office.[2]

20. All people who run for elected office face scrutiny from their electorate and the media, and the demands of a higher public profile. For many women who do so, however, that scrutiny is compounded by misogyny, and comes with an additional and founded fear of violence. Our survey data found that when standing as a councillor, there is a gender difference between councillors identifying 'fear of violence' (13% of women; 8% of men), or 'harassment or abuse from the electorate' (46% of women; 35% of men) as barriers to engagement.

21. This finding was echoed throughout our evidence session and consultation sessions. A number of women pointed to constant abuse on social media as a key factor in preventing women from running for selection or election – especially when threats were directed at family members. At our evidence session in Wales a key concern raised was around the lack of support that women candidates in particular receive, as the abuse often begins when they first run for office

22. The Commission recommended that local police and councils need to work with all future council candidates to ensure that the full force of the law is brought to bear when candidates are targeted with illegal abuse or harassment.

23. The harassment and abuse of women parliamentary candidates and MPs is unacceptable and must be tackled. We would urge the committee to note and address the experiences of women in local government too.

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[2] https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/does-local-government-work-for-women-final-report-of-the-local-government-commission

ipsa
Independent Parliamentary
Standards Authority

John Sills
Director of Regulation

Lord Bew
Chairman
Committee on Standards in Public Life

8 September 2017

Dear Lord Bew,

Thank you for inviting IPSA to make a contribution towards the Committee on Standards in Public Life's review of the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates.

IPSA's response to this review, which I attach with this letter, considers the matter from the position of IPSA's remit to ensure that MPs receive appropriate financial support to enable them to carry out their parliamentary duties whilst also ensuring that public money is handled responsibly, transparently and in line with the rules set out in the MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses.

Yours sincerely,

John Sills

Response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's call for evidence on abuse and intimidation of parliamentary candidates

Introduction

1.   The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) is the independent statutory regulator of MPs' business costs and expenses. Our remit includes ensuring that MPs receive appropriate and adequate financial support to carry out their parliamentary functions; as well as ensuring that public money provided to MPs is spent properly, transparently and in accordance with the scheme of rules.

2.   We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence, and have primarily addressed aspects of questions 3 and 6, within our remit:

- Has the media or social media significantly changed the nature, scale or effect of intimidation of Parliamentary candidates? If so, what measures would you suggest to help address these issues?

- What other measures might be effective in addressing the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates, and candidates for public offices more broadly?

3.   The sections below provide further information on IPSA's role in minimising the security risk to MPs through what we withhold from published claims; in funding security measures for MPs and their staff; and in providing advice and context to the media regarding MPs' business costs and expenses.

4.   We note that this call for evidence refers to parliamentary candidates. IPSA treats individuals standing for re-election as MPs whilst Parliament is dissolved – since they continue to carry out some parliamentary functions such as ongoing case work – and therefore we continue to regulate and support them during this period. However, our remit does not extend to other parliamentary candidates that have not yet been elected.

Publication of MPs' business costs and expenses

5.   IPSA's founding legislation, the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, requires publication of information (such that IPSA considers appropriate) about the claims made by MPs. Beyond this legal obligation, we believe that the public has the right to know how taxpayers' money is being spent. We have established a publication policy which covers our approach to publication, including what information about a claim we will publish and the frequency of publication.

6.   Our starting point has always been transparency, but we recognise that in some cases, the public interest is not served by the disclosure of certain information. We also have responsibilities under the Data Protection Act 1998 to protect people's personal information. Our publication policy sets out the information we withhold from publication; this includes anything that would pose a security risk to an MP or any other individual (such as a member of staff or a family member) if disclosed.

7. For example, we do not publish individual travel claims made by Northern Ireland MPs, due to security concerns. Instead, we publish total figures for each MP broken down by expense type and journey type (e.g. journeys between London and the constituency). Additionally, since 2016 we have stopped publishing the names of hotels that MPs stay in, so that it is not possible to identify where an MP regularly stays by looking at their claims.

8. In response to more recent concerns about MPs' security following the Westminster Bridge attack in March 2017, we decided to stop publishing the start and end points and other details of all MPs' mileage claims so that there could be no risk of pinpointing an MP's residence or regular journey pattern. We have also stopped publishing the names of MPs' landlords to ensure that it is not possible to identify the addresses of MPs' rented accommodation.

Funding for security measures

9. IPSA provides funding for security measures at MPs' homes, rented accommodation and constituency offices based on identified risks. Routine security measures, such as door and window locks, can be claimed from IPSA's office costs or accommodation budgets. For more specific security needs, funding is available from a centrally held Security Assistance Fund, so that MPs do not need to use their individually allocated budgets.

10. A 'standard' package of security measures for MPs has been recommended by the National Police Chiefs' Council and developed by the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO) and Secured by Design. We have an arrangement in place with the House of Commons' approved contractor to pay directly for these standard security measures to be installed at an MP's home and/or office.

11. Beyond these standard measures, we fund additional security measures for MPs who have enhanced security requirements, where they have been recommended by the Parliamentary Police Liaison and Investigation Team in the House of Commons or by the police, on a case-by-case basis and following an agreed process. We rely on police advice to identify appropriate additional security measures, so that they reflect the actual assessed risk to individual MPs.

12. In line with our publication policy, we publish the total costs paid from the Security Assistance Fund as an aggregate figure across all MPs, rather than publish sums spent on security by any individual MP. In this way, we balance our duty to be transparent with the imperative to safeguard MPs' security.

Relationship with the media

13. Social media, in particular Twitter, has enabled the public to contact politicians much more quickly than ever before. Clearly this can be advantageous to both parties: MPs can learn what their constituents think about an issue, and constituents have a direct method to make their opinions known.

14. It is apparent, however, that many politicians receive abusive communications via social media. One complaint that has been made to IPSA is about the use of 'memes' about expenses claims which are circulated widely at certain times, if for example a politician is appearing on television. IPSA has reviewed a number of these and they usually involve expenses claims made prior to the establishment of IPSA in 2010. Under the pre-2010 rules, a wider range of items could be legitimately claimed by MPs, some of which would not be eligible today. Since

the introduction of IPSA's independent regulation and greater transparency, we believe the opportunity for using MPs' claims as the basis for online abuse has declined. Many of the claims that form the basis of social media criticism would have been allowable at the time they were claimed; however there is little opportunity for this to be contextualised in the limited characters available on some social media platforms.

15. We view it as our responsibility to ensure that the public's and the media's view of MPs' business costs and expenses is fair and accurate. We endeavour, through the information published on our website, to provide context to the data about MPs' claims. For example, we have highlighted that around 80% of all the 'expenses' claims made by MPs are actually to pay the salaries of staff members. Additionally, since 2016 MPs have had the opportunity to submit an 'annual commentary' which accompanies their published claims information on our website and allows them to explain to their constituents and other members of the public how they have used public funds to support them in their role as an MP.

16. Additionally, IPSA's press team is contacted on a regular basis by journalists with queries about aspects of MPs' business costs and expenses, or about an individual MP's published claims. We provide advice and clarification to journalists about the legitimacy of claims or what is and isn't allowed to be claimed, as well as the process for doing so, or any factual context that may help to provide further background as to why certain things have been paid for to support MPs in their parliamentary work. This often results in journalists choosing not to run a story about an MP's claims on the basis that the claim is legitimate and within the rules of our Scheme.

Conclusion

17. In the ways outlined above, we aim to fulfil our statutory remit to support MPs and provide them with appropriate security, with our duty to be transparent about the way public money is spent. Given the changed circumstances since the murder of Jo Cox and the increased abuse of MPs, we have taken steps to amend our publication policy to take account of greater perceived risks, while still publishing information about MPs' expenditure in the public interest. We would be happy to provide the CSPL any additional information about how we take forward our responsibilities, and to discuss further whether the Committee thinks that we have got this balance right.

Lola McEvoy⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛ 8 September 2017 at 14:42

I was a 2017 Labour candidate and have been an organiser for the party for three years in the lead up to the 2015 General election.

Submission:

1) I have been the victim of abuse and harassment as a result of having to disclose my home address on multiple public documents used for official purposes like attending election counts and being selected as a candidate - I think this should change.

2) I was harassed on three separate occasions by a UKIP staffer whilst I was the organiser in Thurrock because I live in Islington. Jukes made intimidating jibes about my home address repeatedly as I had to legally disclose it on a counting document and I was once on a train and he got on to my carriage with friends who were clearly drunk. I decided to move seats as he began making jibes about me and where I live. The group then followed me all the way to the last carriage to continue harassing me for the duration of the journey.

3) I was so scared as I was a lone woman late and night and my phone battery had died that I reported it to the police who said it was 'harassment with intent', they told me I was a victim of a crime and they encouraged me to press charges. My main concern was that if I pressed charges I would have to go to court and it would be a story that would distract from our campaign. After much deliberation I decided to press charges having been encouraged to do so and convinced that I was the victim of a crime. Despite there being CCTV evidence the police decided not to press charges on the grounds there was no evidence.

 I was genuinely concerned for our volunteers and went to great lengths to ensure they weren't harassed as I was.

4) As a Labour candidate in 2017 I again received jibes about my home address this time online, because I refused to lie and say I lived in my parents house which would of been much less of an issue as she lives in Darlington which is very close.

Its horrible and invasive and intimidating that I have to disclose my home address, or even constituency, especially since Jo Cox's murder. I strongly advocate for this to be removed as part of the process for being selected or for attending counts of any kind.

This intimidation certainly discourages women from being involved in politics.

Thanks and I hope this helps.

Intimidation of Parliamentary Candidates
Committee on Standards in Public Life Review

Submission from Jackie Doyle-Price MP

1.   I very much welcome this inquiry into abuse of MPs and Parliamentary candidates. I have been a Parliamentary candidate or Member of Parliament for the last ten years and have witnessed during this time a marked increase in abuse. My primary concern is that the hostility and negativity towards Members of Parliament is diminishing our ability to effectively represent our constituents as well as acting as a barrier to encouraging people to become involved in the political process.

2.   Freedom of speech is an important cornerstone of our individual liberties, but so is tolerance for other views and freedom from intimidation. This is especially the case where politicians have a mandate by virtue of their election to speak up on behalf of their constituents. Sometimes that means taking a position which is controversial. No Member of Parliament should be intimidated when speaking up for their constituents. It is profoundly un-British to show a lack of tolerance for alternative points of view.

3.   It is also a fact that during this period, Members of Parliament have become more accessible to their constituents through use of social media tools. Whilst we use it to engage and inform, it is being used by many members of the public as a channel for abuse. This has become so embedded that it has become socially acceptable for anyone to abuse their Member of Parliament. In the past individuals would have had to take the time to write a letter to give challenge to their Member of Parliament. Now they can simply pick up their smartphone and post a comment for all to see. Such behaviour is now spilling out beyond the online world into the real world. As a Member who lives in my constituency, I have never felt threatened about using the local shops by myself. However publicly advertised appearances can attract hostility, some of which can be highly organised and very aggressive.

4.   People feel they can say anything. They routinely allege corruption. Such comments are of course actionable, but in practice no action can be taken. Legal challenge apart from being time-consuming and expensive would simply draw more attention to the allegations. That would be self-defeating. So libellous comments go unchallenged and more people are encouraged to make unsubstantiated allegations.

5.   Tolerance of alternative beliefs is a fundamental British value. As an old established democracy, it is a well established principle that we settle issues by debate, not by intimidation and abuse. Unless we check this very unwelcome development we will sacrifice our democracy to populism and the herd mentality. The referendum on EU membership saw this at its very worst. It was the worst of British politics with both sides of the argument relying on artificial propaganda

and hyperbole. In politics we should inspire not fight on fear. All political parties should take a dim view of those who harass and abuse. No political party should use it as a tool.

6. As public figures who are very accessible, MPs have long been the subject of fixations by their constituents. Most of these are harmless and easily managed. Others are more sinister. While ever the routine abuse of Members of Parliament is tolerated the more dangerous individuals will be less visible. And while ever political parties view harassment and abuse as legitimate tools they will give free reign to others to behave accordingly. As Member of Parliament, you are in the position of power. You do not want the force of law to come down on anyone if there is no risk of harm. But how can you judge. At what point does accountability give way to obsessive and intimidatory behaviour.

7. Politics in Thurrock has always been gritty. It has always had a high degree of support for nationalist parties, indeed when I was first selected in 2007, the BNP had won 25% of the vote in local elections. It remains the strongest power base for UKIP. As a marginal seat in both Parliamentary elections and in local elections it has seen very vigorous electoral contests. By 2014 Thurrock was the focus of aggressive three way politics, which at times has become unneccessarily personal, not just for me, but for my family.

8. Twitter and Facebook are publishers and should take more responsibility for what is published on their platforms. Twitter has a patchy response. It does suspend accounts on occasion, but generally the advice is to block or mute. Facebook is far poorer. In January 2014 I was campaigning to tackle the issue of illegal car-cruising in my constituency. That campaign yielded many thousands of deeply unpleasant and violently sexist content. The Police took action against a death threat which was made, but we ought to be able to expect these publishers to establish appropriately high standards. Free speech is abused when offensive content is simply accepted. I think the Police are spending too much time prosecuting people for this when appropriate would deal with the problem in the first place. I have appended two images of Facebook posts that I complained about. The first complaint was rejected and the post was allowed to remain. The second was removed.

9. During the last two General Election campaigns my posters were the subject of organised vandalism. This is criminal damage. In my case, the vandalism was nationalistic and misogynist. I append pictures of some of the vandalism from the recent election. My posters were vandalised with racist and misogynist graffiti. Given that these particular posters were on farmer's fields and protected by a ditch, this was a very deliberate act of sabotage, not opportunistic vandalism.

10. For a long time our society has been characterised by deference and respect, as over time that has diminished, by 2009, the expenses scandal killed any residual deference for the role of Member of Parliament. This has fed a perception that MPs

are all on the make, when the reality is far from the case. In truth two thirds of the current membership of the House of Commons have been elected since the changes made to the expense regime and do not deserve the accusations that continue to be thrown at them in respect of expenses. As MPs we are required to speak up for some of the most vulnerable people and for those who have been victims of injustice at the hands of the State. Our voices are diminished on their behalf while ever MPs are viewed with such contempt. It should be seen as unacceptable

11. My surgeries are now held by appointment only. I am now much more careful about public meetings and hustings. I will only do one hustings at a General election with the churches. Civic organisations need to mindful about giving platforms for abuse. At a public meeting organised by Thurrock Borough council my constituents were horrified to be told when they came in that everyone was to jeer and turn their backs whenever I spoke. This made for an ugly and unedifying spectacle and alienated those members of the public who had come to genuinely engage. What has been encouraging is just how many people have expressed their horror at what took place. That is all well and good, but if it continues, the quiet majority of decent rational people will be slowly alienated from politics and democratic participation. I found that profoundly worrying. Similarly the noise which is generated on social media is not reflective of public opinion. The quiet majority of the British public remain rational and polite. It is not fair to them that the nature of debate has become so unpleasant and divisive.
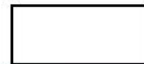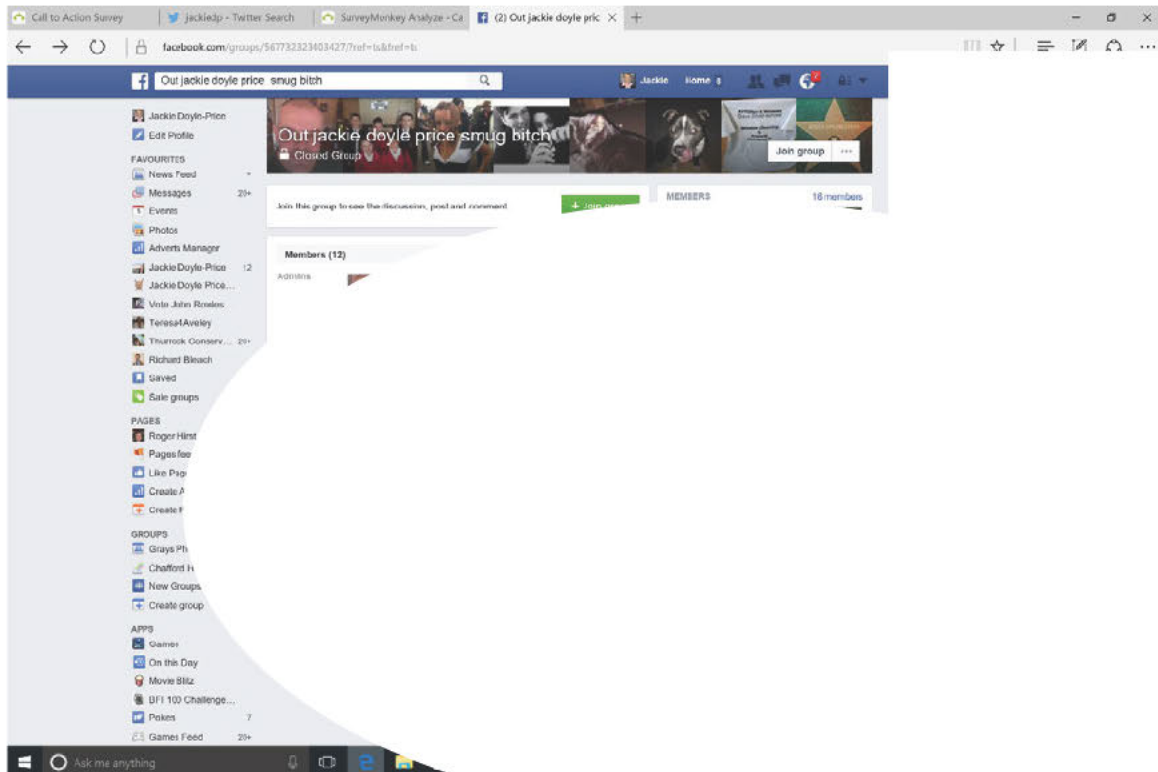
Labour Party response
Intimidation of Parliamentary Candidates
Committee on Standards in Public Life Review

The Labour Party Response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life Inquiry into intimidation experienced by Parliamentary Candidates

    i.   This submission is made by Jeremy Corbyn MP, the Leader of the Labour Party and the Leader of the Opposition; Ian Lavery MP, the Chair of the Labour Party; and Cat Smith MP, the Shadow Minister for Voter Engagement and Youth Affairs on behalf of the Labour Party.

    ii.   The Labour Party fielded 631 candidates in the General Election on 8th June 2017, with the 262 Labour MPs returned to the House of Commons forming the official Opposition.

    iii.   All political parties will welcome that the recent General Election delivered the most diverse House of Commons in history with a record number of women, LGBT and ethnic minority MPs elected. Although there is more work to do, this is a positive step in making Parliament more representative. We also witnessed increased participation, with half a million more people added to the electoral register, making it the largest electorate for a UK-wide poll.

    iv.   Despite this progress, parliamentary candidates from all political parties have voiced concerns about the unacceptable levels of intimidation they have experienced during election campaigns. Over time, the line between political debate and abuse has blurred and candidates are forced to tolerate abuse from members of the public and in some cases party members. This must be addressed to protect the safety of candidates standing for future elections.

    v.   The Labour Party welcomes this review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. Intimidation, including death threats, criminal damage, sexism, racism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism has no place in our democracy or our party. We condemn any action that undermines the integrity of our electoral process and look forward to working with other parties to address this cross-party issue.

    vi.   To inform our response, we invited Labour Members of Parliament and unsuccessful candidates in the 2017 General Election to submit evidence.

1. Nature of the problem

    vii.   Unfortunately candidates and public office holders are vulnerable to abuse. The tragic murder of Jo Cox in 2016 and stabbing of Stephen Timms MP in 2010 remind us of the serious threats they face and the longevity of this issue. However, the degree of intimidation experienced varies significantly amongst candidates.

> *"People who displayed Labour window posters or signs were targeted (with) hate mail."* (2017 General Election)

> *"Bullying and intimidation became the norm… including misogyny, "Hijab Shaming", death threats, regular abuse on social media (and) racial and islamophobic attacks."* (2017 General Election)

> *"In previous campaigns we have noted the Tories packing hustings with "growlers" in the front few rows. They were notable by their absence in this campaign."* (2017 General Election).

> *"I experienced an anti-Semitic attack in the run up to the 2015 General Election campaign by… an organiser for the BNP in the area. It left me shocked and shaken."*

Growth of social media

viii.   The exponential growth of social media has caused the level of abuse to rise in recent years. Social media platforms have created unprecedented levels of transparency in political discourse and reduced the perceived barrier between the electorate and politicians.

ix.   However, greater opportunity to communicate online and the application of anonymity has offered new channels for offensive behaviour. In May 2017, The Chartered Institute for IT and Demos published a report which found that over a three month period, MPs received 188,000 abusive tweets.[1] This parallels wider trends. According to Assistant Chief Constable Mark Hamilton, online hate crime has increased significantly over the last 24 to 36 months.[2]

x.   Social media platforms like Twitter state "it doesn't tolerate behaviour that harasses, intimidates or uses fear to silence another person's voice". However, this is exactly what is happening to many candidates using their platform.

> *"Social media bleeds into your 24 hours home life, at night the tweets come in when you're cooking your kids' tea or going to bed. There is little place to hide."*

Targeted abuse

xi.   Candidates are often targeted because of their gender, sexuality and or ethnicity. This represents a wider context of discrimination that targets individuals on the basis of their different identities.

> *"As a transgender person I have suffered social media abuse and death threats since 2005. This election actually had less abuse, perhaps because the trolls had more targets."*

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[1] Alex Krasodomski-Jones, A., *Signal and Noise. Can technology provide a window into the new world of digital politics in the UK?* p.27 (2017). https://www.demos.co.uk/project/signal-and-noise/
[2] House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (HC) *Hate crime: abuse, hate and extremism online Fourteenth Report of Session 2016–17*
https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/609/60904.htm#_idTextAnchor006

xii.   We have particularly concerned about the scale of abuse experienced of women MPs, particularly women who experience multiple forms of oppression. Amnesty International research shows Diane Abbott, the first black woman politician in the UK, received half of all threatening tweets sent to women MPs from January 1st to June 8th this year. The report also found that online abuse cuts across party lines, affecting women from all UK political parties.[3]

xiii.   Abuse causes significant psychological and emotional harm to its victims. Abuse can also pose as a barrier to participation in public life. A BBC Radio Five Live investigation found that a third of female MPs have considered giving up their job as a result. We cannot allow abuse to prevent women and people from minority groups from entering politics and reverse the progress made in making politics more representative.

A toxic political agenda at home and abroad

xiv.   This does not happen in a vacuum. The decisions taken by the tabloid press and media to target some politicians fans the flames of hate and validates members of the public to target candidates with intimidation.

> *"In my office we always see, at the very least, a spike in abuse after there has been a lot of negative stuff in the media."*

xv.   During the General Election, the Conservatives' ran a nasty campaign, propagating personal attacks, smears and untruths, particularly aimed at one of the most prominent women MPs, Diane Abbott. The Conservatives perpetrated this on an industrial scale, spending more than a million pounds to post highly personalised attack adverts on voters' Facebook timelines without their permission. This is not an isolated incident. Last year Zac Goldsmith MP ran an extremely divisive and racially discriminatory campaign against Sadiq Khan. It was described by Sayeeda Warsi, the former Conservative Party Co-Chairperson, as "appalling".

xvi.   In contrast, Labour fought a positive campaign based on policies to transform Britain for the many not the few. We insist that all Labour MPs run positive campaigns based on our policies and the Conservative Party's record, rather than peddling personal attacks on individuals.

xvii.   The toxic political culture surrounding President Donald Trump has done little for British politics, with far-right US websites helping to drive abuse against members of parliament. We have a responsibility to oppose sexism, racism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism in the strongest terms at home and abroad. While the Labour Party immediately condemned the President's reckless and irresponsible rhetoric, Theresa May's record was that of a slow and timid nature.

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[3] http://www.newstatesman.com/2017/09/we-tracked-25688-abusive-tweets-sent-women-mps-half-were-directed-diane-abbott

Rising security concerns

xviii.   To some extent the way public office holders interact with the public has changed due to rising security concerns. Some MPs refrain from using social media to communicate with the public to avoid an onslaught of abusive messages. MPs are taking additional safety precautions when holding constituency surgeries and attending in-person events. The availability of parliamentary security packages, like 'lone worker' devices, and the recent creation of The Member Security Support Service team in Parliament are welcome measures.

> *"I would never now attend an 'in-person' event on my own because of my experience at the 2015 election when I genuinely believed that I could have been subject to a physical assault."*

xix.   We must also address the low levels of public trust towards public office holders, which could partly explain the scale of abuse that candidates face. Evidence from The Hansard Society found that overall satisfaction with the way Parliament works now stands at 30 per cent, six points lower than in 2004.[4]

> *"The public start from the premise that you are a liar and (are) not to be trusted — this seems to give (the public) licence to behave in a way they would not do so to people they respect."*

Complex legislative framework

xx.   Existing legislation, such as Section 127 of the Communications Act and the the Malicious Communications Act, can be used to deal with internet trolls, cyber-stalking and harassment. However, the law is often underused or misunderstood due to its complex legislative framework,[5] in particular the undue influence offence which is poorly expressed in legislation.[6]

xxi.   The law is failing to protect candidates from becoming victims of stalking. Unlike parliamentary candidates, those standing for local elections are required to disclose their home or office addresses on ballot papers.

> *"I have been the victim of harassment as a result of having to disclose my home address on multiple public documents…. It's horrible and invasive and intimidating… especially since Jo Cox's murder."*

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[4] Hansard Society, *Audit of Political Engagement 14 The 2017 Report*, https://assets.contentful.com/xkbace0jm9pp/1vNBTsOEiYciKEAqWAmEKi/c9cc36b98f60328c0327e313ab37ae0c/Audit_of_political_Engagement_14__2017_.pdf
[5] The All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism, *All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry Into Electoral Conduct Final Update*, July 2017 London https://files.graph.cool/cj3e6rg8y906h0104uh8bojao/cj4sjq5ig01ii0111biq3f3ft
[6] Law Commission, Electoral Law An Interim Report, 4 February 2016, p.162 http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/app/uploads/2016/02/electoral_law_interim_report.pdf

Lack of resources

xxii.   After reporting online abuse to their local police, many candidates found investigations were cut short due to limited resources. We cannot ignore the growing crisis the police face. This Government has cut over 20,000 police officers and cuts have consequences. Police forces are over-stretched and this leads to pressure to downgrade crimes, or not fully investigate them.

Lack of data

xxiii. The Government does not hold specific data relating to electoral campaigns, despite candidates facing abuse over many years. The police record hate crimes, monitor community tensions and communicate electoral data. However, monitoring and reporting racism during elections on a national scale has fallen to the third sector.[7]

2. Responsibility to take action

Social media

xxiv.   Social media platforms have a responsibility to respect human rights, ensure that candidates using the platform are able to express themselves freely and without fear, and act faster to prevent and remove abuse online.

xxv.   Twitter must enforce its own policies on hateful conduct and invest more resources to enforce reporting mechanisms for users. Instagram has started to crack down on trolls who post sexist and racist abuse by automatically blocking abusive comments before they are seen by other users.[8] We urge other platforms to follow this example and pursue other proactive measures.

Government

xxvi.   Government has an obligation to protect candidates from abuse. To understand this problem, it is vital that Government collects and analyses election-related racism and discrimination data.

xxvii. To prevent targeted abuse from taking place, changes to electoral law are necessary to allow candidates standing in local elections to choose whether or not their home address appears on the ballot paper.

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[7] The All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism, *All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry Into Electoral Conduct Final Update*, July 2017 London, p.12.
https://files.graph.cool/cj3e6rg8y906h0104uh8bojao/cj4sjq5ig01ii0111biq3f3ft
[8] The Telegraph, *Instagram cracks down on trolls by hiding abusive comments from users*, 29 June 2017
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2017/06/29/instagram-cracks-trolls-hiding-sexist-comments-users/

xxviii.   To enable the police to tackle intimidation during election campaigns, we urge the the government to stop cutting core police budgets and give the police the resources they need.

xxix.   It is also vital that we have robust legislation in place. The Labour Party supports the recommendation put forward by the Law Commission that electoral offences be redrafted, believing that simpler, more modern provisions would secure greater compliance among campaigners, the public, the police, and prosecution services. We also support the Law Commission's proposal to review the law on 'undue influence', making the offence more readily understood and enforced.[9]

Political parties

xxx.   The Labour Party is built on equality, social justice and compassion. Parties have a responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect, including those with whom we strongly disagree. We stand against all forms of abuse and will take action against those who commit it.

xxxi.   Our Governance and Legal Unit take complaints about our members and abusive behaviour towards others with the utmost seriousness. To ensure that Labour members comply with the high standards expected by our party, our internal procedures for dealing with abuse and intimidation were reviewed and improved following the Shami Chakrabarti report into anti-Semitism.

xxxii.   In September 2016 The NEC passed a Social Media Policy (see Appendix) which outlines the expectation of all our members to treat people with dignity and respect. The Labour Party have a close relationship with Facebook and Twitter and escalates abuse directly to them. Training is also provided for MPs in social media best practise, which includes community management and best practise on how to deal with abuse and trolling.

xxxiii.   Parties must take responsibility for their actions and commit to ensure such vitriolic abuse is never repeated. The Labour Party therefore supports the proposal put forward by the All-Party parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism for political parties and their leaders to agree a joint code of conduct with a framework for reporting, assessing, and disciplining discrimination, racism and other forms of electoral abuse.

Conclusion

xxxiv.   The Labour condemns all acts of intimidation towards candidates. This is an issue experienced by all political parties and must be address to protect individual safety and the integrity of our election process. We

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[9] Law Commission, Electoral Law An Interim Report, 4 February 2016, p.165
http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/app/uploads/2016/02/electoral_law_interim_report.pdf

cannot let the actions of a small number of individuals, however violent and extreme they are, drive a wedge between MPs and their constituents and reverse the progress made in making Parliament more representative.

xxxv.   The growth of social media has caused the level of abuse towards candidates to rise in recent years. Platforms must act faster to prevent and remove abusive behaviour online. However political parties and the mainstream media must treat others with dignity and respect. We look forward to working with others to address this cross-party issue.

Jeremy Corbyn MP
Leader of the Labour Party and Leader of the Opposition

Ian Lavery MP
Chair of the Labour Party

Cat Smith MP
Shadow Minister for Voter Engagement and Youth Affairs

Appendix

1. Labour Party Member's Pledge

I pledge to act within the spirit and rules of the Labour Party in my conduct both on and offline, with members and non-members and I stand against all forms of abuse.
I understand that if found to be in breach of the Labour Party policy on online and offline abuse, I will be subject to the rules and procedures of the Labour Party.

2. Labour Party Social Media Policy

Social Media Policy – National Executive Committee Statement

A starting point for all our actions as members of a party and a movement is to treat all people with dignity and respect. This applies to all our dealings with people, offline and online.

Everyone should feel able to take part in discussion about our party, country and world. We want to maximise this debate, including critical discussion, as long as it does not result in the exclusion of others.

Abusing someone online is just as serious as doing so face to face. We stand against all forms of abuse and will take action against those who commit it.

Harassment, intimidation, hateful language and bullying are never acceptable, nor is any form of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability.

Any member found in breach of the above policies will be dealt with according to the rules and procedures of the Labour Party.

We wish to build a diverse movement that reflects the whole of society, so should always consider how our actions and words may limit the confidence or otherwise exclude either those less knowledgeable than ourselves or those already under-represented in politics.

Those with privilege, whether due to their volume of experience, party position or status in society should have regard to how their actions may be felt by those in different circumstances to themselves.

It is perfectly possible to have vehement disagreements without descending into personal abuse, shaming people or exhibiting bullying behaviour. Forcefully made points and criticisms of the political views of others are totally legitimate, personal attacks are not.

Debates amongst party members should be comradely, acknowledging that whatever our diverse views, we are one party with shared goals. Derogatory descriptions of the positions of others should be avoided.

Anonymous accounts or otherwise hiding ones identity for the purpose of abusing others is never permissible.

The use of sexualised language or imagery, and unwelcome sexual attention or advances are not acceptable, nor is the publishing of others' private information without their explicit permission.

We should not give voice to those who persistently engage in abuse and should avoid sharing their content, even when the item in question is unproblematic. Those who consistently abuse other or spread hate should be shunned and not engaged with in a way that ignores this behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to challenge abuse and to stand in solidarity with victims of it. We should attempt to educate and discourage abusers rather than responding in kind.

We encourage the reporting of abusive behaviour to the Labour Party, administrators of the relevant website or social media platform, and where appropriate, to the police. This is a collective responsibility and should not be limited to those who have been subjected to abuse.

Trolling, or otherwise disrupting the ability of others to debate is not acceptable, nor is consistently mentioning or making contact with others when this is unwelcome.

Principles for the Labour Party's use of Social Media

1. We are direct, confident and proud in what we have to say – we speak boldly and with clear intention.
2. We are clear about our position and our policies, and will give our members and supporters the language and tools to disseminate these.
3. Collectivism is at the heart of what we do. Our members and supporters are crucial to all our achievements and their contributions, from door-knocking to online activism, are valued and acknowledged.
4. We seek to break down the wall that creates 'us' and 'them'. When we say 'we' that means the whole movement and those who share our values, not an exclusive group.
5. We want debate and discussion to flourish on our channels and will encourage feedback wherever appropriate.
6. We make legitimate criticisms based on policy and political actions, never making personal attacks.
7. We use accessible language and avoid jargon that could exclude or alienate.
8. We put the stories and experiences of the public first. We prioritise the issues that affect people in their everyday lives, rather than providing news for insiders.
9. We are inventive and innovative with our digital strategy and that means experimentation. We need people to be open-minded to change and encourage

us to offer the best digital experience possible — even when that means trial and error.

10.   We know that not everyone will agree with us. Constructive criticism is welcome, but we want to create a welcoming space for our supporters, so if comments become abusive we will report them.

Office of Rt Hon Cat Smith MP,

10 August 2017

Dear

███████ this to address the concerns being addressed by the Parliamentary Committee on Standards in Public Life. These are outlined below.

1. Since 2008, there have been wide ranging changes to the conduct of political debate largely created by Social Media, the growth of the extreme right in the growth of UKIP/Right of centre conservatism, and the control of the Tabloid press by powerful individuals ie. Paul Daker etc.

While in my experience the majority of loyal Labour Party members, activists and/or candidates under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, always mobilise (using social media etc.) and politically organise to oppose these and provide a popular and valid alternative for the public, serious chinks are appearing in the system that Candidates, Regional offices, Canvassers and indeed Voters rely upon to get their message across and make their voices heard due to these changes.

2. As a holder of Public Office, I expect criticism, occasional opposition to delegated decisions, planning etc. as a normal part of democracy. It is normal to expect voters to question, scrutinise, to challenge and complain. Also far from being a complacent office holder, I expect to be able to scrutinise the decisions or policies of opposition politicians, if necessary in the public domain. I would also suggest that it is now normal to expect 'trolls' on social media, if the Candidate has legitimately employed social media, blogs or Instagram. There is a problem of intergenerational learning within the Party on this, by the way, where despite the efforts of Momentum, many Coalbelt, former industrial heartlands, Welsh and Scottish election campaigns by sitting Members and PPC's have not mobilised social media well, or at all.

3. I have never encountered harassment, intimidation, defamation or assault as a Candidate. However, the problem lies when the 'trolling' of PPC's or sitting MP's, often Women, becomes 'legitimised' on these platforms by unwitting voters or members of the public who are following campaigns, local issues, deciding how to vote or even legitimately scrutinising a voting record in Parliament (admittedly, these are few and far between). Gladly, I have only had two online trolls, who were both known to my CLP and their strategies exposed at a CLP meeting -by me- before the short campaign began, so not affecting the campaign or polling day result. (They have since harassed the Campaign co-ordinator and two local members on other matters).

Guidance for candidates, office holders, and briefings on social media use are of excellent quality, second to none. However, these are not available to, or known of by the public or ordinary voters. We live in a democracy, and we need to uphold freedom of expression and wider engagement with politics but there are genuine abuses. There is a genuine mismatch developing between intimidation online, trolling etc. and the legitimate application of the law on harassment and offenses against the person. All too often the perpetrators of abuse on social media and Instagram will have a negative view or experience of authority and little knowledge of the frequent changes to the law, especially those still to come as the Great repeal act takes effect, with its new interpretation of ECHR law.

I look forward to the results of this review, when available to the public, in due course.

Sincerely,

Catherine Tite   (Labour PPC Gainsborough Constituency)

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███████ **Derbyshire District Council,**

Evidence Paper

Enquiry of The Committee on Standards in Public Life i to the
I timidation of Parliamentary Candidates
September 8, 2017

By
Sandra Pepera
Director
Gender, Women and Democracy
National Democratic Institute for International Affairs NDI)
Washington, DC

1.   This submission is presented on behalf of the **National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)**. NDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that supports the development of democracy and governance globally, including promoting and strengthening inclusive political processes, state-civil society engagement, open and responsive governance institutions, and commitment to international frameworks. NDI's work focuses on creating resilient democratic systems with the capacity to manage diverse and complex social, economic and political demands effectively. Democratic resilience requires that systems and processes take account of all populations, including women.

2.   NDI is a leading organization in the field of advancing women's political participation around the world, empowering them to participate, compete and lead as equal and active partners in democratic change. Mobilizing its global networks and drawing on three decades of experience in 132 countries, NDI supports women's aspirations for gender equality, and for inclusive and responsive government. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.

Violence Against Women in Politics

3.   NDI's evidence paper for the Committee on Standards in Public Life's review of the intimidation of parliamentary candidates, focuses specifically on communicating the Institute's assessment of the issue of **violence against women in politics**. The Institute has an international mandate, and while we focus our work in transitional and consolidating democracies, we understand from the women that we engage with - including British parliamentarians - that the lessons we have learned about the issue of violence against women in politics have universal resonance.

4.   The scope of the Institute's engagement with this issue is broader than parliamentary women, it encompasses community activists and advocates, voters, elected and appointed officials at all levels. NDI views the violence that politically active women face as an abuse of human rights, and infringement on the civil and political rights of women, and - through its ability to discourage women from participating in the public decision making that affects their lives - as fundamentally undermining the quality and integrity of democratic practices and governance.

5.   NDI has found that assessing the nature and degree of intimidation experienced by Parliamentary candidates around the world faces an immediate challenge - years of systematic silence on and denial of the issue. Acknowledgment of the problem of violence against women in politics has been hampered by three things: first, the conventional wisdom that, unless there is a physical manifestation, it is not violence; the perception that there are no specific gender dimensions to violence in politics; and the fact that the vast majority of women who have experienced attacks are likely to remain silent about them. All three have contributed to the hidden nature of the problem. Victims may not even recognize what has happened to them as a form of violence, or may deny the problem altogether in an effort to deflect charges that they are "hysterical" or "not coping" with the demands of the job. Many are afraid of being viewed as victims or accused of "playing the victim" for fear of justifying claims that women do not belong in political life.

The Problem

6.   Violence against women in politics is one of the most serious barriers facing politically active women. Our understanding of the issue of violence against women in politics is that its various manifestations are experienced by and impact on the vast majority of women who are active in politics. Historically, this violence has been a largely hidden phenomenon. Too often, women who experience abuse, harassment and even assault have been dismissed and told that these acts are merely "the cost of doing politics." But in fact, violence *costs* the benefits of the sustainable and democratic governance that an inclusive political space can create. A growing number of reports from around the world indicate that as women step forward to claim their right to participate in politics, they are met by a backlash in terms of violence that encompasses a range of harms including persistent harassment and discrimination, psychological abuse - in person and increasingly online - and physical or sexual assault.

7.   Therefore, NDI's answer to the question of **whether the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates reflects a wider change in the relationship and discourse between public office holders and the public**, is to say that in relation to women it does not. Evidence suggests that the intensity and universality of the issue as it affects women candidates has both heightened with the increasing number of women in politics, and while still under-recorded it is no longer an invisible issue. The way in which the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates could reflect a wider change in the relationship and discourse between women public office holders and the public, is if in response to the intimidation that they face, women withdraw from politics or self-censor the terms of their engagement in political discourse

8.   Violence against women is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, which cuts across social classes, ages and regions and is experienced in private and public spaces. The definition of violence against women in politics fits within existing frameworks and standards defending human rights and defining gender-based harms developed by the United Nations, regional organizations and national jurisdictions. Specifically, it is defined as various forms of psychological, physical and sexual violence, intimidation and coercion that specifically target women as women, either pressuring them to leave politics or to resign as candidates or political officials, to withdraw from their membership in political parties or other political institutions, or to otherwise remain silent on the political issues they care about.[1]

9.   Although violence in politics can be experienced by anyone, regardless of their gender, traditional definitions of 'political violence' have not captured the additional acts and threats perpetrated against politically-active women because of their gender. Gender norms shape *how* and *why* women are subject to violence in politics, as well as what types of acts are used against them. This kind of violence is not a new phenomenon but has for decades gone unreported and unrecorded. In Bolivia, for example, which ranks second in the world for levels of women in its parliament,[2] "harassment and violence against women involved in politics" have been identified as "the main barrier against women's political participation,"[3] and led to the introduction of legislation to criminalise such violence.

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[1] Bardall, "Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence," 2011.

[2] Dr. Mona Lena Krook is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University.

[3] IPU, Women in National Parliaments.

10.   NDI's analysis is that violence against women in politics has three distinct characteristics: it targets women *because of* their gender; can be gendered in its very *form* (as exemplified by sexist threats and sexual violence); and its impact is to discourage *women in particular* from being or becoming politically active. Further, the Institute's experience in supporting women's ambition to be politically active indicates that even violence that is not motivated by gender, can still have a disproportionately high impact on women, due to their subordinate status in society and their increased vulnerability. Additionally, when compared to the experience of men in politics, women are more likely to experience familial or social intimidation in the private sphere, and/or violence from within their own political party - which we have described as 'protected public spaces.'

11.   Acts of violence against women in politics — whether directed at women as voters, civic leaders, political party members, candidates, elected representatives or appointed officials — have an intent beyond their specific target: to frighten women who are already politically active, to deter women who might consider engaging in politics, and to communicate to society that women should not participate in public life in any capacity. Therefore, the *motive* behind the violence is as important as the intended target. Therefore, in answer to the Committee's question **whether the experience of intimidation by Parliamentary candidates could discourage people from standing for elected or appointed public offices**, we would say that evidence suggests in unambiguous terms that women in politics around the world have experienced such violence and that their experiences have implications for their ability and willingness to participate actively in public life. The chilling effect that violence has on the ambitions of young women   and   new   entrants   to   politics   is   of   particular   concern.

12.   **With regard to whether the media or social media has significantly changed the nature, scale, or effect of intimidation of Parliamentary candidates, our experience is that this is an area where an old problem has been given new and more toxic life.** Violence against women in politics extends beyond bodily harm. In some cases, perpetrators of this violence may focus on women's bodies or traditional social roles to deny or undercut their suitability or competence in the political sphere. Because motive is a defining element, using gendered imagery or stereotypes to attack female opponents is in some regions of the world included within the scope of violence against women in politics, as the message communicated through these tropes is that women do not belong in the political realm.

13.   The anti-democratic impact of psychological abuse and other forms of violence through digital technology and digital media outlets, including social media can all significantly change the nature, scale and effect of the intimidation of women in politics, including Parliamentary candidates. Attacks against politically-active women are often channeled online,[4] where harassment can be anonymized, developed by a mob dynamic—sometimes transnationally— while undermining a woman's sense of personal security in ways not experienced by men.[5] In this way, online abuse, intimidation and harassment leads to women's self-censorship and withdrawal from public discourse and correspondence, and represents a direct barrier to *women's*

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[4] Inter Parliamentary Union. 2016, "Issues Brief: Sexism, Harassment, and Violence against Women Parliamentarians." http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/issuesbrief-e.pdf.

[5] Pew Research Center. 2014, "Online Harassment." http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/.

free speech, undermining democracy in all its key elements: participation (down), representation (constrained), transparency (circumvented) and accountability (denied, some would say refused).

14.   **The Committee asks what role political parties should play in preventing the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates and encouraging constructive debate**. NDI is currently examining the violence that women party members face within their organizations. NDI views political parties as a cornerstone of democracy, providing critical pathways for citizens' political participation and engagement. They are instrumental in mobilising citizens behind ideologies and policies, select candidates for representative posts, lead electoral campaigns, form legislative blocs in parliaments and, if elected, implement a program of government. Their role in defining key political institutions - policy formation, elections and parliaments - mean they are an important gateway through which women can enter and participate in the political process. However, because of history, tradition and gender norms, political parties tend to be 'protected' public spaces, allowing and enabling violence against women within their ranks to take place.

15.   At the same time, experiences that both men and women candidates have that are often dismissed as "the cost of doing politics," have different dynamics according to gender, present new opportunities for micro and macro aggressions, and further damage democratic practice and culture. For example, the exchange of material goods for positions of power within parties or elected bodies is often commonly accepted, even though it is corrupt behavior. However, for women, unlike the vast majority of men, the predominant currency of these demands is sex or sexual favors, a practice labelled 'sextortion' which clearly falls into the category of violence against women. Importantly, this type of extortion further pollutes a system's democratic culture: women learn that only by providing such "favors" can they move up the political ladder, and citizens' perceptions of women in politics are colored by the belief that any woman who advances must have performed such favors.

16.   With this understanding, NDI is piloting new methodologies to explore the causes, nature and impact of violence against women within political parties, and identify strategies to address it. The first pilot country report from Honduras, was launched in Tegucigalpa on 8th September 2017.[6] Parties have a number of ways in which they can address the inequality that allow women's vulnerability to be exploited. Steps to be taken might include: the introduction of internal codes of ethics with zero-tolerance for sexual violence; strengthening of internal dispute resolution mechanisms with enforced sanctions for perpetrators; developing mechanisms for greater transparency about the allocation of resources to candidates; a review of party meeting times and locations; ensuring that candidate selection events and processes are conducted on the basis of policy debate not gender issues; consistent monitoring of party social media accounts for abusive or hate speech; attention being paid to the privacy and security of members' databases.

Opportunities for Action
17.   With respect to the Committee's enquiry **about other measures which might be effective in addressing the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates, and candidates for**

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[6] National Democratic Institute. 2017, "Violencia contra las mujeres en la política: Investigación en partidos políticos de Honduras." https://www.ndi.org/node/24741.

public offices more broadly, NDI has begun to collect examples of "Opportunities for Action" to stop violence against women in politics. These opportunities for action are generally targeted at specific institutions or sectors of society, and may be used singly, joined in varying combinations or modified to fit each particular political situation, institution or context. A varied host of different actors can and should be engaged in pursuing actions to stop violence against women in politics. As the different forms of violence are often overlapping in nature, single strategies are likely to have only a partial impact. Instead, multidimensional approaches applied and monitored over time, appear to be necessary to address and reverse ongoing resistance to women's equal political inclusion. Some actions can and should be taken by the full range of political actors - individuals, organizations, institutions - and at all levels. These include:

> • Develop and disseminate the concept of "violence against women in politics" to give a name to these acts and raise awareness at the global, national and local levels. Emphasize that these behaviors should not be "the cost of doing politics," but that they actively seek to prevent women's political participation as women. This constitutes a serious violation of international norms and national laws regarding democracy, human rights and gender equality.
>
> • Raise awareness of the global nature of these debates to emphasize that violence against women in politics is not a phenomenon restricted to one area of the world. Although specific acts of violence may take different forms across countries and world regions, they are the same in terms of their intentions to restrict and control women's political participation.
>
> • Develop indicators and collect data on the prevalence, form and impact of violence against women in politics. The lack of data contributes to the denial of this problem, but statistics and qualitative case studies can support efforts to combat this phenomenon—as well as illustrate its broader meanings for women, politics and society. One approach would be to incorporate data on political violence within existing international studies and databases of violence against women. Those working at a regional, national or local level may add indicators on the issue to existing regional indicators or surveys. Measured over time, these data will permit evaluation of strategies to see where progress has been made and what further interventions may be needed.
>
> • Support networking among female politicians and civil society organizations interested in tackling this issue, whether on a formal or informal basis, by providing opportunities to connect during organizational or regional gatherings—or to connect virtually through organization platforms. Regardless of the platform or forum, care should be taken to ensure that the women participating are protected from any backlash or breach of confidentiality.
>
> • Provide training programs for women on how to respond to and mitigate acts of violence against women in politics, including how to decrease vulnerability and respond effectively to both in-person and online attacks. Provide training for men as well to raise awareness about the roles they can play in stopping or responding to violence.

18.   NDI and many of its partners in countries around the world have been working to implement and evaluate more specific solutions. For example, in 2016, NDI launched its "Votes Without Violence" program to tackle the issue of elections-related violence against women (i.e. voters, candidates, party agents, electoral officials). The focus of this initiative was to provide NDI's global network of citizen observer group partners with support to monitor, mitigate and

raise awareness of the issue.[7] This we did through the development of a comprehensive manual and toolkit. Data collected from a number of observations have been visualized and are available on a unique dedicated website. We continue to collect case study examples of actions tried by political actors around the world, and to develop new generic tools and responses which can be tailored for different political contexts.

NDI's #NotTheCost Campaign
19.   In 2016, NDI launched the #NotTheCost campaign - a global call to action to raise awareness to stop violence against women in politics. The campaign was designed to bring together the stakeholders, networks and advocates involved in currently segmented discussions about the problem, to define the issue clearly, improve data collection for better advocacy, and present "opportunities for action" that each of them could take. We were privileged to have Jess Phillips MP, join us to deliver - alongside other politically active women - her testimony to the violence that she has faced in her political career.[8]

20.   Under the broad umbrella of this campaign and working with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (SRVAW), Dr. Dubravka Šimonović, NDI developed an Incident Form for reporting violence against women in politics, allowing people worldwide to report incidents against politically active women safely.[9] Submissions will be examined by the Special Rapporteur as inputs to a thematic report on the issue of violence against women in politics to be delivered to the United Nations General Assembly in October, 2018. This is a direct response to the call made by NDI's Chair, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, for the UN to monitor and report on this violence at the global level. NDI will also use the incident reports submitted to build a repository of case studies to raise awareness, demonstrate opportunities for action against this violence, and increase the accountability of perpetrators. [10]

Conclusion
21.   In conclusion, from the viewpoint of its international expertise and specific focus on the violence that politically active women face, NDI is pleased to be able to contribute to the Committee's consideration of the important issue of the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates. We look forward to reviewing the Committee's report, and exploring the application of any solutions that are developed to our work in support of strengthening democratic practice and resilience around the world.

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National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
Washington DC, USA
8th September 2017

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[7] National Democratic Institute. 2016, "Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections." http://www.voteswithoutviolence.org/sites/voteswithoutviolence.demcloud.org/files/Votes-Without-Violence-Toolkit.pdf. Please also see the Votes Without Violence Website: http://www.voteswithoutviolence.org/.
[8] National Democratic Institute. 2016, "Testimonies of Violence." (See Appendix 1).
[9] National Democratic Institute. 2017, "Incident Report Form." http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/issuesbrief-e.pdf.
[10] National Democratic Institute. 2017, "Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics: Program Guidance." https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/not-the-cost-program-guidance-final.pdf.

Appendix 1:

#NotTheCost

Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics

TESTIMONIES OF VIOLENCE

Submitted to
H.E. Dr. Dubravka Šimonović,
UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women

by
The National Democratic Institute (NDI)

[Susana Villaran](#)

Former Mayor of Lima; current Vice Presidential candidate, Peru
[@SusanaVillaran](#)

I am Susana Villarán, from Lima, Perú. A teacher and journalist with social studies, and I have been involved in politics since I was 17 years old. I am former Minister for Women's Affairs and Human Development in the transitional government to democracy in Perú. More recently, I was the first woman elected as Mayor of Lima from 2011 to 2014. A position that in terms of voting, is second only to the presidency of the Republic.

I am here living a paradox, a powerful woman, well-known and recognize all around Perú and at the same time I am here to speak my testimony as a victim. As a Mayor I have been President of RENAMA, which is a national network of elected women authorities, 3,074 women. In our research, as well as in a recent study from the National Jury of Elections, two out of every five women have suffered political harassment or violence in every form in Peru.

The harassment against me started with my campaign for mayor itself, and it last for five years. Five years of attacks, five years of brutal and permanent attacks and threats. The active actors of the harassment or violence were political adversaries, mafias opposed to the changes and reforms of the cities and, particularly, the media outlets controlled by very powerful and conservative groups. The pattern is always the same, as it is depicted. As a woman you are lazy and incompetent, (*incapaz, vaga* in Spanish). As a progressive politician, I am a terrorist in Peru and they say I was *abortist*, pro-abortion and so on. The political objective of the harassment campaign was to diminish my image, to make it clear that it was not the place for a woman like me to try and disrupt the masculine world of politics, of power. They wanted to discipline me, as well to other women, who dare to enter in this world. They tried to prevent my administration from being successful, but they did not succeed. They wanted to dissuade me to remain in politics, to politically kill a leftist, liberal female leader, with no links at all with corruption and mafia.

No one who was closed to me was spared. Not my closest collaborators, not my family, especially not my daughter and grandchildren. In 2013, for the first time in the history of Lima, the first woman elected as Mayor of Lima, was subject to an impeachment without reason. An impeachment process, an event that had been publicly announced and prepared from the day I swore as Lima's Mayor. We won, but the cost was very high. Fortunately, we have a strong organization at the national level, RENAMA, through this organization we launched a large campaign.

I want to finish the testimony with this: We need to fully enjoy our political rights. We need that and the right to a life without violence. We need to stop this, because it is too painful and keeps us out of the public functions. We need to make it visible, we need to build the system to prevent, sanction and eradicate the political violence against us. We can do it. But we can do it if we work together, if we work at a large scale and in coalitions.

I thank you NDI and other institutions for given me the possibility to give my testimony to you. We are sisters and brothers in this struggle.

Mimoza Kusari-Lila
Mayor of Gjakova, Kosovo
@mimozakusari

My name is Mimoza Kusari-Lila. I am the Mayor of the municipality of Gjakova in Kosovo. I am the first and only woman Mayor ever to be elected in Kosovo. I don't come from a political background. I actually have a MBA degree from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at the time when I was a recipient of the Ron Brown scholarship from the State Department in the United States. Upon the completion of my MBA I returned home immediately in 2001 and worked for different government agencies.

In 2009, I decided to join politics for one reason. I've seen that my municipality was not going in the right direction. The people who were ruling it were coming mostly from the war-winning parties and did not have a development agenda on their mind. I announced my candidacy and I started a campaign, to realize what a terrible reality for women in politics is. I was threatened, I was tempted to withdrawn, but even having gunmen in my office saying that you should step down, who are you to challenge the people who fought for the freedom of this country.

Nothing better was on the Election Day in 2009, when there was a massive steal of votes. Even with all the massive steal of votes I lost for a small percentage. Yet not giving up and I participated in the Parliament Elections in 2010, when my party the Liberal Democratic Party came 5th and I was the most voted woman in the Parliament of Kosovo. When my party signed a coalition agreement, I was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade and Industry.

Then, you encounter another form of direct harassment toward women who want to fight corruption. Paid media and people who want you to work for their interest groups, they keep launching different stories about you. However, the Ministry that I was running was the raising star in the government, by actually making a huge progress for Kosovo in the WB, in its doing business index.

In 2013, when local elections were announced again I realized that I had an unfinished job in my municipality. After almost three years of being Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade and Industry I resigned both positions and went back home to run again. Again facing the same

reality, the same people, the same threat. This time they were more vocal. They were fearful, because they wanted to cover up for the lack of development in Gjakova.

Gjakova municipality is the most devastated town during the war in Kosovo. It has in absolute terms, the highest number of people being killed and missing, it had a lot of infrastructure problems. They were aiming for two things: 1) to have me not running again and 2) to cover up for the lack of action that they had. Still, with a lot of international presence and the media that was covering Gjakova in 2013, I won to be the first women elected Mayor. To get a municipality with a lot of problems, financial difficulties and high corruption rate, I started working immediately and the progress was there.

On the second year of my ruling, last year in 2015, I received another news; they paid 2 people from Albania to execute me. One of the two people who were paid did not want to get involved in political murder, he escaped to Albania and surrendered himself to the Albanian police. Of course, more protection was assigned to me and they would continue with the investigation to find out who ordered, not only the middleman was arrested, the case is on trial.

All of these efforts and problems, and intimidation that took place only made me stronger. I know that I might have frightened a lot of young men and women to enter politics, but I keep saying to them that this is a path we have to go. This is a path that, aside from winning the war we have to win the peace. The stones that were thrown to me I tell to my opponents, you keep throwing stones to me and I keep paving roads. Because this is the path where we are going.

We are endlessly thankful to Secretary Albright for the work and engagement in Kosovo, for all the effort that she put in with the political administration at that time. I am here to say that we are happy to take over where they left off, because Kosovo needs progress and yes, we cannot surrender to any kind of intimidation and threats. No one is entitled to hold our future, so not a cost of any violence against women, we are here strongly to appeal to all women and men with progressive ideas to make a change.

Nyo Nyo Thinn
Former independent MP and founder, Akayar, Burma
@nyonyomp

My name is Nyo Nyo Thinn from Myanmar. I am former member of the parliament from the Yangon region. During my term I seriously fought against corruption, so I gained so much popularity.

I am very much honored to see all of you today, especially in the middle of very intelligent women around the world and I am very much pleased to share my experience in my last election.

Recently, we had a historic election, following the first civilian President in 54 years of my country. But I must admit that our political culture is quite different from the US. In our culture,

people judge women politicians according to religion, her personal life and her conservation to religion, rather than her performance, her policies and her progressiveness.

Last time, we had election in 2015, I must say that majority in Myanmar has limited understanding of women's rights, civil rights and human rights in general. Unfortunately, my counterparts are all male I had 6 counterparts. My counterparts are from other progressive group [*portion here inaudible*], attacked and harassed verbally, physically to defeat my political image, but no one can take action. In social media, there are groups committing cyber bullying, but no one action. Very much known leader of democracy you all know in my country, she publicly said not to vote independent candidates, including me, that is totally against the elections law, but no one can stop them. Last, but not least, my counterpart campaign distributed a book like this, defeating my personal life, my religion and my political image, but no one can stop it.

I came to realize that, even though I am a law professor, even though I am a popular woman politician from opposition group, I am a victim of cyber bullying and harassment; I am a victim of personal attacks and cultural assassination. When I came to realize this, it was too late, it really affect the potential of women politicians in my country. Different levels of our election commission, including our political leaders, cannot address the situation in Myanmar, but I do believe that you all can address the violence against women in Myanmar.

Angele Makombo
Leader of the League of Congolese Democrats (LIDEC)
@AngeleMakombo

My name is Angèle MAKOMBO, and I am the leader of an opposition political party in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), called the League of Congolese Democrats. I am also the Chair of a coalition of a dozen of opposition political parties at home. I was a candidate in the presidential elections in 2011 in my country the DRC. I had resigned, earlier the same year, from the United Nations where I was working as a Senior Political Officer, to run for president of the DRC.

In my country, the Congo, located in the heart of Africa, often described as the worst place in the world to be a woman, also labeled "the world capital of rape" because of massive rapes being committed against women and girls for over a decade, especially in the eastern regions of the country, we are too much familiar with all kinds of violence against women.

I am sure that Mme Madeleine Albright, who visited my country as a Secretary of State, knows what Congolese women have been going through. But today, thanks to NDI, we are gathered here to talk about Violence against Women in Politics (VAWIP) and how to stop this scourge.

VAWIP is rampant and increases as political tension rises during elections time. Running for office for a woman in the DRC can be risky, even for her life. I personally experienced VAWIP

first hand for the first time in July 2011. At close of business around 5pm one day, I was about to leave my office at our political party headquarters in Kinshasa. I got into my car but could not exit the gate because some secret service officers from our National Information Agency, in a black SUV car, were blocking the exit. I had to get back inside my office and wait until late at night when they finally left. The following days, for about two weeks, there were then secret service agents in three SUV cars, not blocking our gate but parked by our fence along our street. Why? Because, as a presidential candidate, I had written an article criticizing the incumbent president's poor policies.

After that incident, I was asked by friends and family, are you sure, you still want to do this? "We are still with you but do you think that tu vas tenir???" These incidents did not deter me from continuing. For two nights, some security forces also even encircled the house of the Secretary-General of our party. Harassment did not come only from the ruling party, but even within the opposition where I belong.

I am a native of the southern province of Eastern Kasai. Some people from my ethnic group blamed me for running while there was a male candidate from the opposition and the same province as me. "How could you dare run for president and risk jeopardizing his chances?" I started receiving threats through my staff to warn me against running.

In September-October 2013, at national talks convened by our head of State President Joseph Kabila, I made a short presentation before an audience composed of former and current government officials, MPs and civil society, highlighting our Government's failure to fight corruption, impunity, and to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Congolese people. While I was going back to my seat, one of our former Prime Minister spoke to me and said: "Madam, you speak with too much confidence, we do not like it here"! I said "Excellency, what do you mean?" He replied "You got me, I'm sure".

I've been lucky not to experience physical violence, but know some Congolese women who have been less fortunate, for example, Ngalula, Tshala and Gaby who were running for parliament in 2011 in the Kasai Province. Ngalula is a beautiful woman with very large breasts. Because she was from the ruling party and not supporting a prominent opposition candidate, two local traditional chiefs ordered some young men to go after Ngalula, who was campaigning in a small town, get her, cut her breast and bring the "trophy" to them!

I have noticed that VAWIP does not discriminate in the sense that if affects women regardless of their political affiliation (ruling party and its allies or opposition). We are in the same boat!
There is no "discrimination" among perpetrators of VAWIP either: they belong to the ruling party and its allies or the opposition. Intimidation, pressure, insults do not come only from men, but also from other women. They still see politics as a men's world. "So you wanted to be part of that men's game, what do you expect? bear the consequences, do not complain". In Kasai province, women entering politics are often called "prostitutes"!

When it comes to VAWIP, there's not specific law protecting women in the DRC, because VAWIP is not acknowledged. It is worth noting that before the election season, Congolese

political leaders signed "le Code de Bonne Conduite", sort of agreement to respect one and another rights to campaign, and not to resort to violence.

NDI's #NotTheCost Conference comes at a critical time. We hope its conclusions and recommendations will help us stop this not so much talked about phenomenon. When I mentioned to many friends that I was invited to this Conference, several male friends told me "what are talking about, men too experience violence in politics!"

Ave Maria Semakafu
Sextortion Coalition, Tanzania
@SemakafuAve

My name is Ave Maria Semakafu, from Tanzania. I am a national coordinator for Tanzania Women Cross-party Platform, an organization that was established by women association of fully registered political parties in Tanzania, with the objective of addressing issues that of interest of women in politics, but it tries to enhance visibility of women in political leadership. The issue that really made women come together and establish the platform was mostly related to issues of sextortion.

When we were launching the platform in 2010, we were talking about violence against women, about constructing democracy and things like that. Once we say we are talking about violence against women that is general because you fight it in the office, you fight it at home, it has a cultural history. But now we have decided to be open and to talk about what really affects women in politics. I am not a politician myself, I am an academic but I am an activist working on women rights issues since 1996.

From 2004, I started working with women in politics. During the 2010 elections, women candidates' complaint about sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sometimes demanding to offer sex to political party leaders. Women complained and that is the evidence and this is really a problem that many women politician have. Especially in a country like Tanzania, where issues around sex are considered very private and if you as a woman complain about harassment, then you add another level on yourself and you will lose everything. How are we going to address this issue? Going to the politics, in Tanzania is well-known that when you ask about women's participation, especially in the parliament, it is about 36% (?) of the total parliament, but most of these women who are participating in the parliament enter through special seats.

Now the politics around getting nominated into special seats is the one, which really raises a lot of concern and made us to come forward to start talking about the issue of sextortion. Because, men who are political party leaders, in Tanzania we have 22 fully registered political parties and only one has the so-called chairperson who is a woman. I say so-called because after the elected happens they give the position to the elder of the party. This chairperson is a figure, but the really decision maker is the elder of the party. We have two party secretary-generals, but again they are coming from two small political parties and they don't have mandate, they have to follow what the chair or the leaders decide.

This is the situation that women face in Tanzania when we are talking about political leadership, which means we are talking about men. During the elections, when a woman wants to contest, normally they tell her, go and wait for a special seat. But the arrangement of getting this special seat, which is kind of institutionalized is what we call sextortion, sexual corruption or even false rape. Because sometimes if women don't value themselves and they really aspire to go for political leadership, they have been told that they are supposed to talk nicely to me (she refers political party leader), when they refer to talking nicely, they mean to offer sexual favors to the political party leader.

During the last elections we have seen this happening, because now we are monitoring it officially and I am very thankful to UN WOMEN and NDI, because NDI gave us technical support to train our monitors on issues on violence against women in elections. But again we had our subtopic, we said we were going to monitor specifically the issue of sextortion. When we are talking about sextortion, we are talking about when the environment is arranged in such a way, that whether you like it or not, the shortest way to political leadership is by offering yourself sexually to a political party leader or anyone with the power. In fact, during the last elections, we wanted to raise awareness with the candidates, we found some cases where women candidates came forward and reported evidence. Some of them took initiative to report the matter inside the party or to the police, for other political parties they said, you can forgive them and leave it like that. But for other political parties they decided to reprimand those who did that, however, they did not take the matter to the court, despite the fact that it was attempted rape. So this is something that we think we need to come together, because for young girls, they are afraid to join politics, they say that if you go there then you have to prostitute, at least the prostitute is getting paid, for you it means that every political party leader when they touch your shoulder, then you have to offer your body to them.

This is the problem we are having and also, it not only leaves the candidates who aspire to be political leaders, but sometimes even women voters during campaign, when they want to participate in the campaign meetings they are being threatened "if you come to the campaign meetings, we are going to rape you." You find many women who prefer to remain at home and not participating in the campaign because they are afraid of these threats. I think it is time now that the official bodies regulate the political parties, the political system during the elections and they should come forward and address the issue of sextortion. I really thank you for being here and I thank NDI for giving me this opportunity to present the situation that Tanzanian women face in politics.

Jess Phillips, MP
Member of Parliament, UK
@jessphillips

I am Jess Phillips and I am a member of the UK parliament, elected last May. Before I was a member of parliament worked with victims of sexual violence and international human trafficking, so when I entered parliament this was something I was always going to talk about,

always going to stand up against. I found out very quickly that as soon as you speak from a feminist perspective, there are people who wish to silence you and there is a huge network of people who are threatened of any power that any women takes.

I spoke on a number of occasions in the House of Commons in different committees about the rights of women. To which I suffered daily attacks on Twitter, on my email system or endless online article written about how people wished to see me raped, they wished to me come find my sons hanging from a tree because I don't care about men, I couldn't possibly care about men, so it will be better if was punished myself by seeing my children hanging. I had had death threats. I suffered rape threats every day, or comments online saying,

was the alternative you get from the online community, which is really supportive, not sure which one I prefer.

The worst thing about it for me, I have spent my career seeing violent perpetrators and these people will not silence me, it is the trouble that when other young women speak to me, or any woman who speaks to me online, the internet creates an enormous network of inspiration for young women and young boys all over the world, and when these young people speak to me, they too have to face the viral attacks. Any journalist who writes about me will have his or her timeline full of messages from men's rights activists. It is the constant silencing and discrediting of the things that women say when they speak from a feminist perspective, which is so pernicious in our society. I find myself every day having to push through and say do say it even if it is controversial, do say it even if it is a bot feminist, because it is just so tiring to speak from a feminist perspective and every day have to be told that I am a man hater, that I wish to see men dead, that somehow it is a zero sum game, where wanting the rights of women means that you also have to take something from men.

I don't only love one of my children, I love them both, I don't have to pick. Being a feminist and being a politician who stands on a feminist platform should be something that we all celebrate in the world, but instead it is something that we are constantly criticized for. Thank you very much.

Gale Rigobert MP
Leader of the Opposition; Deputy Political Leader of the United Workers Party; St. Lucia
@Drgalerigobert

The last time we discussed this topic, I think it was in Washington, DC, at that time we had a conversation that spans the whole spectrum of violence, direct violence, indirect violence and cultural violence. At that conference I offered the opinion that perhaps, one of the most damaging forms of violence is the violence of silence. That there are so many of us, who would look on at the horror of violence being perpetrated against women and will say or do nothing. On this occasion, having had the wonderful opportunity to survive yet another year in politics I have come to realize that violence can take several forms.

More recently I have reasons to think of violence through literary means, literary violence, whether through art, song or dance and you will come to realize that more recently politics have hit a new low, what I call phallic politics and it's as if one's political prowess is measured in terms of one's sexual prowess, sexuality or in our case femininity. There are very direct and sometimes not so direct references to a woman's sexuality or her femininity, which can cause her particular unease. Which to my mind is yet another way of barring women of entering political office, it is yet another method to marginalize and to minimize our participation.

A couple of weeks ago at a convention held by the other political party in my country someone offered a song the punch line was effectively in Creole translated: "In which tongue is Gale speaking". Because of the syntax of the language anyone listening on will hear that it is really that I am having a clitoral conversation. Not many women would survive this.

For some men in politics it may be bold to speak of the size of one's hand, for a woman in politics, reference your femininity and sexual parts can be very embarrassing. But I urge you do not allow these men or other persons, because unfortunately there are women who partner with these men and their agenda and that is part of the challenge that we face, to convert your femininity crown into a cloak of shame. Embrace your femininity, embrace your sexuality, lift you head, raise your chest, swing those hips and allow your intellect and your actions to do the talking.

Too very often we allow ourselves to fall prey to all the machination devices to silence us. A female politician wanting to assert herself, descending into what I call the phallic conversation and said that her balls were bigger than that of the male politicians because she worn them on her chest. But in effect you are inadvertently becoming part of the phallic conversation, when you descend into that kind pedestrian politics. Our politics as women, is a politic that should focus on protecting the interest of girls and women, advance in their cause, defending their rights, because not doing that means that in effect you are denying more than half of the world's population full, free, fair and open participation in the political process, which incidentally is critical to realize in any notion of sustainable development.

So this conversation is critical not just to the act or business of politics itself, but to realize that sustainable development that we all speak of because half of the world's population is part of this conversation. Why in the House of Parliament sometimes when you are making a point on the floor, they speak to you and say you are a politician with breasts? Why the need to differentiate the female politician from a male politician? Sometimes when they are making a point they speak in a squeaky tone in which you speak. All these are psychological measures to silence women. But I say to you, do not be silenced, do not be marginalized, do not allow yourself to be minimized, because that means that they would have won.

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