

# Experiences of online hate and abuse among women in politics

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# 1. Ofcom preface

The internet is an important part of our everyday lives, allowing people to stay connected in their personal and professional lives. For those working in the public eye, including women in politics, an online presence is often a vital and unavoidable part of their job. Social media provides a space for politicians to share their message, connect with constituents, and engage with political issues. At the same time, the public profile of politicians means that they frequently face hate and abuse online and offline.

Ofcom is the UK's online safety regulator and has duties to promote and research media literacy. Ofcom has been given legal powers under the Online Safety Act 2023 ('the Act') to hold online services to account for protecting their UK users while still upholding freedom of expression. This involves making sure that online services have systems and processes in place to protect UK users from illegal harms, including hate, threats, harassment and abuse offences, as well as protecting children from content that is harmful for them. Online services must assess the risk of users encountering this kind of material and then must put in place measures to mitigate against these risks. Ofcom's [Illegal Harms Codes of Practice](#) and [Protection of Children Codes of Practice](#) set out ways service providers can comply with these duties.

However, much of the abuse people experience online, although distressing and harmful, is not illegal under UK laws. Platforms take different approaches to content that is harmful, but not illegal: some ban certain categories of harmful content in their terms and conditions; others provide users with more tools to protect and tailor their online experiences; and some may choose to do nothing. Separate duties under the Act also require services likely to be accessed by children to protect children from content that is harmful to them, including hateful and abusive content as described above.

Some of this abuse uniquely and disproportionately affects women and girls. Ofcom has published [draft Guidance for a safer life online for women and girls](#) ('draft women and girls' Guidance') that proposes ambitious and practical ways to tackle such abuse. Pile-on harassment, for example, is often targeted at women in public life and is one of the key focus areas of our draft women and girls' Guidance. This draft Guidance, which we will finalise by the end of 2025 after considering responses to our consultation, sets out nine proposed action areas where tech companies can do more to improve women and girls' online safety by taking more accountability, designing their services to prevent harm and supporting their users.

Some platforms are subject to additional duties under the Act, such as those designated as 'Category 1' service providers.<sup>1</sup> These additional duties include the user empowerment duties. Under the user empowerment duties, Category 1 service providers will need to offer adult users features that enable them to reduce the likelihood of encountering certain types of hateful and abusive content,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These are providers of user-to-user services that meet the threshold conditions specified in regulations made by the Secretary of State under Schedule 11 to the Act (known as 'Category 1 services'). Sections 15(2) and (3) of the Act set out these user empowerment duties. The type of content they apply to includes content that is abusive and targets people based on, or incites hatred against people with, particular characteristics, namely race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability or gender reassignment.

<sup>2</sup> [Section 16\(4\)](#): the user empowerment duties capture legal content that is abusive and the abuse targets race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or gender reassignment. [Section 16\(5\)](#): the user empowerment duties capture legal content that incites hatred against people: of a particular race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation; who have a disability; who have the characteristic of gender reassignment.

or to be alerted to the presence of this content on the platform. Ofcom must produce a Code of Practice setting out measures service providers can take to comply with these duties.

The user empowerment duties were, in part, influenced by the hate and abuse experienced by people in the public eye, including sportspeople and women in politics.<sup>3</sup> We previously collaborated with [Kick It Out](#), the anti-discrimination body in sport, to engage directly with sportspeople, on-screen commentators, and professionals working in sport and broadcasting who have lived experience of online hate and abuse. This [engagement](#) built on our existing understanding of online hate and abuse, and enabled us to get a specific, in-depth account from professionals working in the sports and broadcasting sectors who have actively used or have a presence on social media as part of their job.

We wanted to build on this work by understanding the experience of women in politics. Based on research and engagement with 23 currently serving and former UK Members of Parliament (MPs) who are women, including 7 deep dive interviews,<sup>4</sup> this report focuses on participants' perceptions of the online harm they have experienced and what they think platforms should be doing about it. We did not ask participants to distinguish between legal and illegal content, so they discussed their experiences of both interchangeably.<sup>5</sup>

This report reflects participants' views, and the findings should not be considered Ofcom's opinion. Where appropriate, these findings will be taken into account, alongside other evidence, in Ofcom's development of relevant Codes of Practice. However, some suggestions may not be possible where, for example, they fall outside Ofcom's powers under the Act.

Through this engagement with women in politics, we heard a perception that online hate and abuse is getting worse. We also heard about the serious impact it has on how women in politics go about doing their jobs, how safe they feel day-to-day, and on their lives more broadly. We learnt that participants felt that being on hand for constituents is part of the job, and therefore moving away from social media is not considered a viable option. Participants discussed the serious safety risks they face. As part of this, they cited the murders of Jo Cox and Sir David Amess,<sup>6</sup> who were both attacked while serving as Members of Parliament. They also spoke about the impact online hate and abuse has on them, their family, their staff, and how it can sometimes dissuade women from entering politics. Participants called for social media platforms to do more to reduce online hate and abuse, particularly content that is directed at those with certain characteristics<sup>7</sup> or aimed at their personal lives.

Through this engagement and our research into online hate and abuse in sport, we have heard directly from those impacted by these online harms and listened to the changes that they want to see. Strikingly, many of the key themes raised by women in politics echo those identified in our [previous report](#) on online hate and abuse in sport. This illustrates that people in the public eye, regardless of their profession, often face the same types of challenges. They are telling us the same

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<sup>3</sup> Gov.uk, 2022. [New plans to protect people from anonymous trolls online](#).

<sup>4</sup> We invited members of the House of Lords who are women that had formerly served as an MP, as well as some former women MPs that served between 2019 and 2024 that still had public contact addresses available.

<sup>5</sup> For examples of illegal content relating to harassment, stalking, threats and abuse, see: Ofcom 2024. [Illegal Harms Register of Risks](#).

<sup>6</sup> BBC News, 2022. [Sir David Amess was stabbed during a constituency surgery in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex on 15 October 2021](#). BBC News, 2016. [Jo Cox was shot and stabbed in Birstall, West Yorkshire, on 16 June 2016, a week before the EU referendum vote](#).

<sup>7</sup> Including those listed in [Sections 16\(4\) and \(5\)](#) of the Online Safety Act, 2023: race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, and gender reassignment.

message: online hate and abuse does not just impact their online lives but has serious consequences in the real world for their safety, for their families, and in their professional work.

We will continue to learn directly from groups with lived experience of online harm and share our findings in the months and years ahead.

We would like to thank all those who participated and shared their stories with us.

## Foreword from Baroness Morgan of Cotes

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**The Rt Hon. the Baroness Morgan of Cotes is currently a member of the House of Lords and was a participant in this research. She agreed to share her reflections on the report with us.**

*"On behalf of the women who choose to stand for public office I would like to thank Ofcom for publishing this report and for the care which they have taken over it. When I was asked to take part in their research I must admit that I hesitated - partly because revisiting the levels of abuse I encountered during my time as an MP continues to be painful but also because I worry that, by focusing on this aspect of elected life, it will put future good candidates off standing for what are fascinating roles where representatives can make a positive difference to the lives of those they represent.*

*When I encountered my first death threat on a social media platform I couldn't quite believe my eyes - shock turned to frustration when the social media platform refused to believe it was a threat or take any action. With the implementation of the Online Safety Act and Ofcom's Violence Against Women and Girls guidance, which I was delighted to lead the charge for in the House of Lords, it is time for all platforms hosting hate-driven, abusive and threatening content to do better.*

*Having a visible online presence is non-optional for candidates and elected representatives. But too often, as this report makes clear, the volume and type of abuse not only negatively affect conduct online, but set unwanted boundaries in the physical world too, which male counterparts don't have to contend with. The harmful content encountered is dealt with by our staff and seen by our families and friends too.*

*Thanks to this report, and the experiences shared within it, the problem is clear - now we need to see real change to ensure that we build a safer life online for women and girls."*



## 2. Executive summary

Ofcom conducted an online survey with 22 women currently or formerly serving as MPs in the UK Parliament, and seven individual in-depth interviews.<sup>8</sup> Participants told us that, in their experience, online hate and abuse:

- **Comes from a variety of people**, including people identifying themselves as constituents and politicians from other parties, as well as anonymous accounts.
- **Is often rooted in misogyny**. More often than not it has an underlying misogynistic and/or gendered tone to it, and regularly strayed into rape and death threats.
- **Is difficult to control**. Many participants had little awareness of current online tools, and those they did recognise were not felt to be effective.
- **Is a constant everyday experience**, often triggered by actions that are a standard part of their job role, such as being vocal about a particular issue.
- **Is getting worse over time** as it is becoming more common, more sophisticated in terms of how it targets individuals, and seemingly normalised.

Participants told us that online hate and abuse can have a serious impact on their lives. They said it lowers their self-esteem and creates fear for their safety and the safety of those around them. It impacts where and how they go about their daily lives, and limits what they say online. It also affects their feelings about their ability to do their jobs, leading to some participants, and other MPs they know, standing down. Participants told us they believe online abuse is deterring many women from wanting to get involved in politics.

Participants said that they wanted platforms to reduce online hate and abuse for all users. Specifically, they believed that they should not be seeing abuse that is directed at personal characteristics or aimed at their personal lives.

Participants told us that the tools that exist today, such as blocking or muting, do not go far enough to help protect them and their families and friends against online hate and abuse. They said that existing content moderation systems often fail to detect harmful content. Finally, they told us that online safety tools should be set up in a way that does not disrupt any legal processes. For example, participants want to be reassured that if they block an account to stop receiving the hate and abuse, they can still access the content for legal proceedings should they need to.

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<sup>8</sup> We invited all current women MPs to participate, as well as members of the House of Lords who are women that had formerly served as an MP, and some former women MPs that served between 2019 and 2024 that still had public contact addresses available.

# 3. Background

## Legal framework

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Ofcom is the UK's online safety regulator and has duties to promote and research media literacy. The user empowerment duties in the Online Safety Act 2023 ('the Act') require Category 1 service providers to offer features that help adult users manage the content they see.<sup>9</sup> These features should reduce the likelihood of users encountering certain categories of content or alert the user to its presence, should they choose to use them.<sup>10</sup> These duties apply to legal content that incites hatred or is abusive. It includes content targeted at the characteristics of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, and gender reassignment.<sup>11</sup>

To help service providers comply with their duties, Ofcom will publish:

- Guidance explaining which types of content fall under these rules and which do not, giving examples of each;<sup>12</sup>
- content assessment Guidance that in part explains how service providers should assess the likelihood of adult users with a certain characteristic or who are members of a certain group encountering content that could affect them;<sup>13</sup> and
- a Code of Practice setting out measures service providers can take to comply with their duties.<sup>14</sup>

The user empowerment duties were, in part, influenced by the hate and abuse experienced by people in the public eye, including women in politics.<sup>15</sup>

While this work on engaging with women in politics was designed to inform the policy development of the user empowerment Guidance and Code of Practice, the Act has other duties that will address some of the issues raised in this report. Under the illegal harms duties, which are already in force, online services must have systems and processes in place to protect UK users from illegal harms, including: hate offences; harassment stalking, threats and abuse offences; and intimate image abuse. Online services must assess the risk of users encountering this kind of material and then must put in place measures to mitigate against these risks. Ofcom's [Illegal Content Codes of Practice](#) set out ways service providers can comply with these duties.<sup>16</sup>

The Act also requires providers of services that are likely to be accessed by children to protect them from certain categories of content. Some of the categories of content that children must be

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<sup>9</sup> These are providers of user-to-user services that meet the threshold conditions specified in regulations made by the Secretary of State under Schedule 11 to the Act (known as 'Category 1 services').

<sup>10</sup> Section 15(2) and (3) of the Act.

<sup>11</sup> Section 16(4) of the Act.

<sup>12</sup> Section 53(2) of the Act.

<sup>13</sup> Section 52(1) of the Act.

<sup>14</sup> Section 41(3) and (10)(c) of the Act.

<sup>15</sup> Gov.uk, 2022. [New plans to protect people from anonymous trolls online](#).

<sup>16</sup> The Act refers to specific offences that amount to illegal forms of hate and abuse. Hate content is considered illegal if it constitutes an offence related to the stirring up of racial hatred, religious hatred or hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation. Illegal acts of online abuse include threats and harassment, which evidence shows can be committed more easily and at a large scale than 'offline' abuse. See our 2024 [Illegal Harms Statement](#) and in particular our [Illegal Content Judgements Guidance \(ICJG\)](#) for more information.

protected from are described similarly to the categories in the user empowerment duties.<sup>17</sup> Ofcom has already consulted on and published its [Statement for the protection of children online](#), which includes one volume containing examples of the categories of content that must be restricted for child users.<sup>18</sup>

Ofcom has also consulted on [draft Guidance for a safer line online for women and girls](#). Under the Online Safety Act, Ofcom is required to produce Guidance setting out how providers can take action against harmful content and activity that disproportionately affects women and girls, in recognition of the unique risks they face.<sup>19</sup> The draft women and girls' Guidance focuses on four proposed harm areas:

- **Online misogyny:** This describes the circulation – or promotion – of content that actively encourages or cements misogynistic ideas or behaviours, including through the normalisation of sexual violence.
- **Pile-ons and online harassment:** This describes cases where groups of coordinated perpetrators target a specific woman or girl, or groups of women and girls, often with abuse and threats of violence. While pile-ons can happen to any user, they often target women in public life, such as journalists and politicians.
- **Online domestic abuse:** This describes using technology for coercive and controlling behaviour in the context of an intimate relationship.
- **Image-based sexual abuse:** This refers to intimate image abuse (the non-consensual sharing of intimate images) and cyberflashing (sending explicit images to someone without their consent).

The draft women and girls' Guidance also sets out nine proposed action areas where tech companies can do more to improve women and girls' online safety by taking responsibility, designing their services to prevent harm and supporting their users.<sup>20</sup> The consultation closed on 23 May 2025 and we are currently considering consultation responses received before finalising the Guidance.

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<sup>17</sup> The Act sets out that content promoting suicide, self-harm or eating disorders as primary priority content harmful to children. It also sets out that content that is abusive or incites hatred against listed characteristics is priority content harmful to children.

<sup>18</sup> Ofcom, 2025. Protecting children from harms online - Volume 3: The causes and impacts of online harms to children. [Chapter 8.6 of our Harms Guidance: Guidance on abuse and hate content](#).

<sup>19</sup> See Section 54 of the Act.

<sup>20</sup> Ofcom, 2025. [Consultation on draft Guidance: A safer life online for women and girls](#).



## 4. Methodology and approach

This research followed a review of existing evidence about hate and abuse as well as gender-based online harms. It builds on this evidence base by bringing an understanding of the lived experiences of women in politics in a similar way to the research we conducted among people experiencing hate and abuse in sport. A summary of key evidence relevant to this topic is included in Annex A1.

We completed the research by conducting a survey with 22 current and former women members of the UK Parliament (17 current and 5 former) and 7 individual qualitative interviews (4 current and 3 former MPs). Most of these were follow-up interviews from survey participants, but 1 participant was an interviewee who had not participated in the survey. The total sample size was 23.

We offered the opportunity to participate to all currently serving women MPs and some former women MPs.<sup>21</sup> We invited them to take part in the initial survey in November and December 2024.

Our objectives for this research were to understand:

- a) the impact of online hate and abuse on women in politics;
- b) why some online hate and abuse is particularly harmful; and
- c) participants' experiences of tools designed to mitigate harm.<sup>22</sup>

Participants came from a range of backgrounds and political affiliations. Of the 22 survey respondents:

- 15 were affiliated with the Labour party, 4 with the Conservative party, 2 with the Liberal Democrat party, and 1 with the Scottish National Party.
- 18 identified as heterosexual with the others identifying as gay or lesbian, bisexual, another sexual orientation or preferred not to say.
- 1 had a form of disability or long-term health condition.<sup>23</sup>
- 18 identified as white, 4 identified as being from minority ethnic groups.<sup>24</sup>

The survey consisted of demographic questions as well as open-ended questions about experiences of online hate and abuse. Most of the women MPs surveyed, 17 out of 22 respondents, had experienced online hate or abuse. Gender and political beliefs were the most commonly targeted characteristics with regard to online hate or abuse faced by the respondents. The majority of respondents, 16 out of 17, said they had faced online hate or abuse based on their gender; and 12 out of 17 respondents said they had faced online hate or abuse due to their political beliefs. Age and socio-economic group/background were also cited by 6 respondents as reasons for the hate and abuse that they received.

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<sup>21</sup> We offered the opportunity to participate to all currently serving women MPs and some former women MPs. We invited members of the House of Lords who are women that had formerly served as an MP, as well as some former women MPs that served between 2019 and 2024 that still had public contact addresses available.

<sup>22</sup> These objectives are consistent with those in [Ofcom's research into online hate and abuse in sport](#).

<sup>23</sup> Additionally, we had one participant who did not take part in the survey but completed an interview who had a form of disability or long-term health condition.

<sup>24</sup> We have not listed the specific ethnicities that participants from minority ethnic groups identified with, in order to protect their identities.

During interviews it became clear that some participants did not always feel qualified to speak about these issues. This was because they felt some of their experiences were not as serious as some of their colleagues' experiences (such as death threats). They therefore felt that they were less impacted, possibly desensitised to their experiences. However, while discussing these in more depth during their interviews, they recognised they had been impacted more than they had initially realised.

*"When I say low level, you know, there are some people who are getting death threats... I'm very conscious that I'm a white middle class woman. And if I was a Black woman or a woman from an ethnic minority... that would be multiplied by 1000... I should think. So I'm in a very privileged position... I haven't had like serious threats... now I'm talking to you, I guess... I have had things happen. But yeah, it's just not as bad as what other people have had."*

This report does not seek to quantify the prevalence of harmful content experienced by participants; rather, it is a qualitative account of the personal experiences of some women in politics: what they have experienced, what they have sought to do to minimise the harm it causes, and what they wish could be done to stop this from happening. During interviews, we did not ask participants to differentiate between legal and illegal online content as they may have found it difficult to distinguish between them.

Individual interviews were conducted by experienced qualitative researchers working as contractors for Ofcom, and so ensuring they had a good understanding of the relevant provisions in the Act. Ofcom colleagues involved in developing policy and regulation on relevant issues were able to join interviews as observers, with the participants' consent. This approach ensured the independence of researchers (contracted by Ofcom) in this project from those working more directly on relevant Ofcom policies and regulation, while also allowing Ofcom colleagues to listen to participants' experiences directly. The interviews followed a semi-structured discussion guide and were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. The analysis and drafting of the survey and interview findings were also conducted by one of the contracted researchers.

The participants were able to choose whether they wanted to remain anonymous or be listed as a named contributor. Three of our participants wanted to be named in this report: the Rt Hon. Baroness Morgan of Cotes, Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, and Amy Callaghan. We would like to thank all those who participated and shared their stories with us.

# 5. Our findings

**Please note, this report explores experiences and the impact of online hate and abuse, including a brief discussion of body image, rape, murder and death threats.**

Building on existing evidence about experiences of online hate and abuse (set out in Annex A1), Ofcom wanted to hear first-hand about the experiences of women in politics in order to understand in greater depth how they have been impacted and to further inform our policy development. This section sets out our in-depth findings.

The first stage of the research was to conduct an online survey with 22 women currently or formerly serving as MPs in the UK Parliament, followed by 7 individual follow-up interviews.<sup>25</sup> We have structured our findings from the interviews and survey responses into the following themes:

- How online hate and abuse leads to harm
- The impact of online hate and abuse on women in politics
- How online hate and abuse is changing
- Reducing harm from online hate and abuse
- Conclusions
- Ofcom afterword

## How online hate and abuse leads to harm

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### What participants are experiencing online

This section illustrates the types of harmful content that participants encountered. Every participant described online hate and abuse as a constant issue for women in politics.

*"It's just a daily part of life. It is something that happens every single day, almost without fail. And yeah, it's constant."*

While online hate and abuse is the focus of this report, participants highlighted to us that the impact of this is felt alongside receiving threatening emails, calls to office, postal correspondence and sometimes physical encounters too.

Before exploring the factors that can increase the impact of online hate and abuse, it is worth considering what types of content participants were seeing. They all made a distinction between ongoing 'low-level' hate and abuse (felt to be impactful, but less serious), and more targeted hate and abuse (felt to be more egregious, such as death threats). Participants suggested that more targeted hate and abuse was usually linked to the following perceived triggers:

- media appearances
- being vocal about a particular subject

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<sup>25</sup> We offered the opportunity to participate to all currently serving women MPs and some former women MPs. We invited members of the House of Lords who are women that had formerly served as an MP, as well as some former women MPs that served between 2019 and 2024 that still had public contact addresses available.

- being on the campaign trail
- a specific issue (examples that were mentioned included Brexit and debates around LGBTQ+ rights)
- a vote in Parliament
- incited by other political party campaigns.

We will discuss triggers in more detail in the next section of the report. Whether ongoing or linked to a trigger, the most frequently mentioned examples of hate and abuse were:

#### **Comments on appearance**

*"I also get lots of comments about my appearance, which are quite, they're upsetting, honestly, they really are, and it's, it's difficult to kind of ignore them."*

*"Particularly the comments about my appearance, it does bother me... It annoys me that it bothers me so because it shouldn't, these are faceless random people on the internet and, you know... they shouldn't be able to dictate to me how I feel about my appearance, but nonetheless, they do... I'm probably right now heavier than I've been in a while and I'm more aware of that because people talk about it on a regular basis online... it wouldn't bother me so much if people didn't talk about that online... it does change the way I act, I think, and probably has an impact on my self-confidence, particularly around my appearance. Yeah, I wish it didn't."*

#### **Sexism, misogyny and sexualisation**

*"Regularly accused of sleeping with various people to have got my job, or as a reason for not doing what the person wants."*

#### **Threats, including death threats**

*"Sometimes threats are very explicit. So I know a lot of colleagues get, you know, rape threats... threats that will mention death specifically, or have imagery associated with killing..."*

#### **Religion**

*"Regular antisemitic abuse, some targeted around current events in Israel/Palestine, some related to conspiracy theories around George Soros/illuminati/World Economic Forum, some based on historical antisemitism."*

#### **Race**

*"They don't argue politically, just respond with abusive posts questioning my Britishness."*

#### **Sexual orientation**

*"Had campaigners for other parties suggest I am making up being LGBT for votes/attention."*

#### **Ageism**

*"I get far more hate [related to age] despite the fact that I'm not a massively controversial character in terms of like, I don't really go out and shout about big controversial issues."*

## Ableism

We heard about how politicians could be spoken about using offensive language related to having a disability - for example, internet users claiming to know that the politician wasn't 'really' disabled. A participant noted that there were repeat posts from an individual on one platform that focused on their disability; in their view, the particular nature of the posts was not threatening or abusive, but they expressed concern about the repeated nature of the posts targeted at them.

*"And there's no threat there, there's no abuse there, but it's just that kind of everyday feeling like they're watching you, you know, that way... It's almost like obsessive."*

Participants emphasised that in many cases the hate and abuse experienced by women in politics had a gendered or sexist undertone. Regardless of which characteristic was being targeted, the factors that increased impact were broadly similar, and are outlined in the next section.

## The factors that affect the likelihood of harm

This section explores how several factors contribute to risk of harm. Participants discussed a range of factors that can affect the impact of online hate and abuse. There was a lot of cross-over with the findings from [Ofcom's research into online hate and abuse in sport](#). These factors can be grouped into five themes:

1. Volume / cumulative impact of online hate and abuse
2. Who online hate and abuse comes from
3. How participants receive online hate and abuse
4. The timing and triggers of online hate and abuse
5. The target or subject of online hate and abuse

Each of these factors is discussed further below.

### Volume / cumulative impact of online hate and abuse

Participants framed this in terms of the 'low-level', ongoing hate and abuse they receive regularly, often daily. Hate and abuse that had the most cumulative impact usually centred on participants' appearance, including what they were wearing, comments on their body, or their age. It generally included a gendered undertone, simultaneously calling their competence into question. Content like this being shared many times over left participants feeling as though they had no control or no possibility of controlling what was being said about them. There was also a sense that once something has been posted it will always be there.

*"I think it grows arms and legs if it's commented and shared and commented and shared and commented and shared, and before you know it, it's out there and it's hard to pull it back."*

In these scenarios, participants told us that comments which they may be able to ignore in isolation can become much more harmful. They also reported that seeing the number of likes or support that such a comment receives also adds to a perception that everybody agrees. This results in increasing insecurities and their confidence being undermined.

Linked to volume, participants also mentioned how some platforms' features increased how much hate and abuse they received. As discussed above, users' ability to comment on, like and share content was seen to lead to an increase in the volume of hateful and abusive content politicians



received. Some platforms offer users the ability to make lists,<sup>26</sup> a feature that offers a way to categorise and share the accounts individuals follow that other users can see (for example, cooking accounts); however, participants mentioned that they felt they had very little to no control over being included in these lists.<sup>27</sup> They perceived this feature being used as a way of increasing people's ability to find viewpoints or individuals they do not agree with and send abuse to their accounts. Others being able to see those lists encouraged pile-ons, as described in the below quote:

*"I think the ability to make lists on [platform], is unhelpful for female MPs, but helpful for those people that are looking to abuse folks, so they'll make a list of people that they disagree with... on trans issues, for example, and then everybody who is of those views will be able to see that list and be able to think these are people that I can feel free to attack."*

Participants also felt that the design of platforms could encourage abusive behaviour among users, by promoting more 'polarising' content in algorithmic recommendations, which was also seen to be weakly moderated.

*"I think that the very nature of the kind of algorithmic content and the fact that [platform] is trying to engage you... by either showing you stuff that you really agree with and like... or stuff that you vehemently disagree with... the algorithmic nature of it, it makes things worse... and it just polarises like, it just drags people towards extremes because [platform is] trying to show them more and more engaging things to keep them on the platform... also the kind of lack of moderation then doesn't help that."*

The volume of content can increase impact. While participants were not always sure about why the volume was so large in some scenarios, many discussed the notion that fake accounts or 'bots' were used and that the source of these may be rooted in bad intent and drove the volume of abuse they received.

*"I think that a fair number of the people that troll me regularly are fake accounts or bots..."*

Similar to findings from [Ofcom's research into online hate and abuse in sport](#), it is also important to note that participants described that a single message or post can also have a significant impact. This is particularly the case if it happens to, or intentionally, plays on a specific vulnerability of the individual, such as making reference to sensitive aspects of their personal life.

## Who online hate and abuse comes from

Answers to the question of who online hate and abuse comes from were mixed between identifiable accounts, anonymous accounts and what participants believed to be 'bots'. Some participants shared what they considered to be characteristics of individuals potentially more likely to target them, which are detailed below. It should be noted that online hate and abuse can come from a broader range of sources, but this was who participants perceived it to be coming from most of the time based on their experiences. There were some clear consistencies among participants in terms of increased impact according to who the hate and abuse was coming from, which we discuss in the next section.

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<sup>26</sup> A list is a curated collection of accounts that allows users to create a customised view of content from the accounts included in the given list. Users can create their own lists or subscribe to lists created by others.

<sup>27</sup> We are aware that some service providers do offer ways in which accounts can limit being included in lists, be notified if they are added to one, and are able to remove themselves from lists.

### **Tends to come from men**

*"Oh, I definitely, I'm convinced that it's mainly men who do it... I can't prove it, obviously, but I think, I definitely think you get more of it if you're a woman, and it's often men."*

It was noted that nevertheless, there were clear examples of hate coming from female internet users. Participants described that these took a different shape to abuse received from men.

*"There's a cohort of men that I would say kind of fall into this demographic, and then there's another cohort of like older women that would also do abuse, but it's different types of abuse... instead of saying maybe you could have considered this option, they would just be very, very vindictive and how they would speak about it, whereas the men go straight into like sexist. And like the threats and things and that's the difference."*

### **People who have not considered the consequences of their actions**

*"They don't have as good an understanding of when they say 'stupid bitch' on Facebook or 'absolute robbers, politicians are all the same, what a state'... They are the ones that don't think about the repercussions of their actions."*

Although this was something we heard about from participants, it is important to note that there were many examples of people posting hateful or abusive content who participants considered did recognise the consequences of their actions. Examples of this are discussed throughout this report.

### **Politicians from other parties**

*"The opposition..., it's [other party] councillors, mainly... who in my view, should know better."*

### **People being abusive in the context of a specific political issue**

Some participants said that specific political issues or views were sometimes referenced in hateful content. For example, they would receive a comment that was hateful towards them which was being justified based on the politician's perceived opposition to, or support of, a specific issue. Participants suggested that one driver for this kind of hate and abuse was the wider activities of those working in politics (including lobby groups as well as politicians) and how these were reported in the media. One participant shared an example of a political issue that they felt had been sensationalised by others in order to increase engagement with, and support from the public. They felt this encouraged internet users to say more hostile and hateful things about politicians who were not seen to agree with them.

### **The role of anonymity**

Hate and abuse content was created and shared both anonymously and by people who did not conceal their identity. Both were seen as having an impact on the female politician's experience.

People using their full names to send hate and abuse from their social media accounts (e.g. people within MPs' constituencies) was a common experience. This could be particularly impactful when it involved a direct threat to the woman and / or their staff or family.

*"I received death threats... had the police out to my house three times whilst I was elected because of imminent threats to my life from people living within my constituency, like real tangible threats, it wasn't like some far off distant like bot that had said something that was sort of auto generated, it was actually real things that the police perceived as being a worrying sort of credible issue. And I'm not the kind of person that made a big blow up of that because I wanted to. I wanted one to be safe, but two for my family to be safe as well."*

In the case of hate and abuse coming from anonymous accounts, participants told us that not knowing who is behind the hate and abuse caused them to speculate and second guess, as described in the quote below.

*"I think the other thing is, because of the, you know, potential anonymous accounts...you don't know who's behind it. So you don't know whether it's a campaign group with deliberate misinformation or a foreign state actor trying to be disruptive, or if it is, you know, somebody you're sitting next to on the train, who could look perfectly fine when you see them in person, but is posting the most awful things, you know, about you, or about somebody in politics, and you've no idea."*

Anonymity also leads to extra frustration because participants feel limited in what they can do in response.

*"The other thing, of course, is that, you know, with an anonymous account, it's very difficult to do much about these things other than to use the tools available, which have got a lot better, obviously, although I would argue that they sort of slightly then ruin the reason of being on social media, because you end up blocking."*

## How participants receive hate and abuse

Participants described how the way hate and abuse was received by them influenced the personal impact the content had on them.

Participants' personalised feeds were described as having unique impacts. Participants described how the tailored nature of feeds meant that they could be served more content with their own name in it, meaning this content was less visible to other people (e.g. colleagues) even if they were public posts.

*"I phoned [colleague] and I was really upset, you know, both because I've done something stupid. But also because of the abuse that I was getting as a result. And he had no idea. He hadn't seen it. He'd been on [the platform], but he hadn't seen it because he's not in my [platform] feed getting the feed that I'm getting."*

Other ways in which participants encountered hate and abuse included comment sections as well as direct messages.

## The timing and triggers of online hate and abuse

Nearly all participants felt they could predict times when they might see a higher volume of hate and abuse. This linked with times when they were in the public eye or were taking a clear stand on an issue. There were times when taking a public stand on an issue was more of a professional requirement and times when it was more of a personal choice. Both scenarios were described as part of a politician's job role that tended to result in increased hate and abuse. This creates direct implications for how effective they feel they can be when conducting their work. Triggers include:

### Media and debate appearances

*"I was doing TV a lot... there was barely a week went past that I wasn't on TV in some shape or form. And so that certainly escalated the number of comments, both because I was maybe saying things that people didn't agree with... but also because I was just better known and so my social media reach kind of increased again at that stage."*

*"[There was] a debate about [political issue] in Westminster Hall one day, and there was a huge amount of abuse followed on from that."*

### Being on the campaign trail

*"If we've been out campaigning, put a graph of where we've been, and then it would just... within 10 minutes it would start falling in and I used to just block. I just blocked them and then I wouldn't see it."*

### Voicing an opinion about a particular subject online

*"One of the things that I got the most abuse for one day was, talking about diversity... So talking about anything that's about diversity and inclusion. It feels to me like that has more of a backlash than anything else."*

### A vote taking place in Parliament

*"When there were key votes on Brexit, that was when it would usually spike for... anybody who was sort of outspoken on that as a particular issue... it appeared to be that people who were very much wanting to see Brexit delivered, would therefore target, particularly those of us, you know, women politicians who were, they felt, you know getting in the way of things or not doing what they wanted them to do."*

### Incited by other political parties or members of the same party with a differing perspective

*"I think it's more forgivable from individuals who just take things off the cuff and kick off. I really think it's less forgivable from political parties who really thought about what they were doing."*

Participants described how these triggers resulting in hate and abuse forced them to make more active decisions on whether, when and how to do things like TV appearances. This is discussed in more detail in the next section of the report.

## The target or subject of online hate and abuse

The actual content of the hate and abuse and the motivation behind it could also influence how much impact it had on the individual.

A common experience was receiving personal attacks about one's personal life, choices and / or appearance. This was described as very frequent and very impactful. Participants described having a certain level of tolerance for people making comments about their views or decisions related to politics. However, when it goes beyond that and is taken to a personal level, it was felt to be unacceptable and intolerable.

*"I think when it's a personal attack on you and your family, then that's where you draw the line. I don't mind things getting said about me taking any decisions... decisions that we've made in*

*Westminster... I can stand up for what I think's right, and I could have that conversation with you... comments like, she's just a slag... you're thinking... You've not got a right to say that to me, but they think they have."*

While participants have chosen to be in the public eye, their families have not. As such, instances where family members received hate or abuse were considered particularly harmful

*"Of course, potentially your family, if they're online, they're seeing, or family and friends are seeing this stuff as well, which is particularly difficult. My [child] was quite small, so wasn't online, but I know for other MPs with teenage children who are online on these platforms, that's really difficult as well because they know they're seeing a lot of this stuff directed at their parents."*

Even when family members are not directly targeted, it can be extremely distressing for them when they see hate and abuse directed at their loved ones online. This, in turn, increases the harm caused, because participants had to witness their loved ones being harmed by the content too.

*"I tweeted something... and someone tweeted back... like really descriptive. And my mum saw it and she read it out to me, we were on holiday at the time and she read it out to me and she was just like, how do you think this makes me feel? And she's still off like she still brings it up now, and I'm just like, this is playing [on] your mind. Like it's just really hard."*

Participants highlighted the impact of gendered, misogynistic and sexual threats and the harm they cause. Being dismissed based on being a woman, on the way you look and / or threatened with sexual violence is not something they felt their male counterparts experience. Participants made it clear they feel this is harmful not only to individuals who the content is about, but to politics as a whole. This is discussed in more detail in the next section of the report.

*"I think that for me, the really frustrating thing about it is there is obviously a gendered element to why these people target me in the nature of the points they make, they are out of sexism 101 handbook, but they don't say 'You're stupid because you're a woman, you're immoral because you're a woman'... the nature of the criticism... is so obviously gendered."*

Linked to the above was hate and abuse about a participant's age. This was experienced by both younger and older women in politics, albeit with a different tone dependent on which group you fall into. Again, this was felt to be particularly harmful because it is a personal attack on a characteristic individuals have no control over.

*"When I was younger and in politics, you would always just be looked at [as being young] and just you go and do that and, you know, so it's always been a struggle for females coming up."*



# The impact of online hate and abuse on women in politics

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## The different ways it shapes people's lives

While some participants reflected that they sometimes feel like they should not let online content affect them, they told us it is hard for it not to. Linked to this is a sense that they somehow invite it by leading a public life. Being accessible online (e.g. on social media) in order to be on hand for constituents and the electorate is viewed as part of the job, and this is largely accepted.

*"I think in terms of the... low-level abusive comments, I would imagine there is not a person in politics that doesn't get them. I think that it would be more common for women to get them more regularly, but I think all of us get levels of abuse online, whether that is about our appearance or our characteristics, or our policies."*

Avoiding social media and an online presence is not perceived to be a realistic option because they need to be visible online for work. While some women in politics do have colleagues who help to manage social media accounts, they are often still directly online themselves and seeing the hate and abuse. Even if they never post directly, they are still made aware of threatening, abusive or hateful content. They described an expectation to be online and available as a woman working in politics.

*"All three [main] parties are pushing, pushing, pushing their female their Members of Parliament, get on the web, get on the web, get on [platform] everywhere, all the rest of it."*

We heard from participants about the different ways that online hate and abuse has significantly affected women in politics.<sup>28</sup> Participants described personally experiencing both emotional and physical impacts. We also learned that the impact can also be much more broadly experienced across participants' family, friends and staff, whether they are personally targeted or not, because of their association with participants. Beyond this, participants said that society as a whole is impacted by women either stepping back from politics or being put off from working in it altogether due to the hate and abuse they witness online.

*"It's a question that pretty well, any female audience, any female audience actually I talk to, now ask me about the levels of abuse for female politicians... it changes the attractions to the job. I think, other women look at it and think. Um, well, why would I wanna do that?"*

## Impact on how people feel

In this section we explore impact through the lens of how people feel, how they behave and the impact on the profession of politics as a whole.

Participants described experiencing a range of feelings as a result of online hate and abuse:

- **Self-doubt / negative self-esteem** – for some participants, seeing content which calls into question their abilities makes them question themselves. This content could refer to certain characteristics or assumed characteristics, such as their gender, or it could be a comment on

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<sup>28</sup> Similar issues were considered and discussed in a report about the impact of online hate conducted for Ofcom in 2023: [The impact of online hate](#).

their appearance. This content sows the seeds of self-doubt and negative self-esteem, which participants said can undermine their confidence.

*"Well, I think it's a confidence thing because I think, what it does, it eats away your, your kind of your mental health because you're always, like, obviously when you're taking videos, you really must critique, when you're seeing things, you're thinking, have I done it right, if I said it right, and then, then you're getting criticised and then that makes you think more about the type of things that are getting said to you. So I think it's just more about how it affects your, your own psyche."*

*"Online targeted campaigns to make me feel inadequate or not popular, undermine confidence."*

- **Fear / anxiety** – depending on the nature of the content, some participants were concerned that online threats could result in negative real-world outcomes. While discussing this, participants frequently mentioned the murders of Jo Cox and Sir David Amess as a reference point that brings online threats into stark reality for them. They described feeling scared as they moved around their constituencies and looking at people wondering if - and in some cases, knowing that - they were someone who had said abusive or threatening things about them online.

*"I was getting a bus at the time, literally where I thought his property was... so I was... across the road from his house... because he had previously provided us with an address... so I was like, I need to get on this bus really quickly. I, I need to get out of here. I do not want to be in the vicinity of this chap's house."*

*"They start to make you feel scared in the street in your constituency once you are elected."*

- **Feelings of isolation** - Individuals targeted by hate and abuse described encountering more of this content than others, which led to feelings of isolation. They experienced hate and abuse via their personal feeds that others they spoke to were unaware of and therefore found it hard to relate to. Participants described this resulting in them feeling particularly isolated.

*"I think that kind of isolating nature of it, the fact that you're the only one that's going through exactly what you're going through at that moment, and you could be having the worst Friday in the world and nobody might know. So I think that that makes it really hard."*

- **No safe space** – participants reflected that the pervasive nature of social media meant it was 'always on'. Some described the feeling of no escape from being at the receiving end of hate and abuse, no matter where they physically are. This had huge implications and left many feeling as though they have no opportunity to escape from online abuse. This is captured clearly in the below quote:

*"The thing that's horrible about it is they can get to you even when you're in your safe space with your safe people. Like, you could be out for a meal with your family and it'll pop up on your phone or you're at home in your dressing gown, sat on the sofa with the dog, you know, cup of tea, Love Island, and yeah, here, here, you know...[Name] calling you a [abusive term removed]."*

## Impact on how people behave

In addition to impacting how people feel, online hate and abuse was also seen to impact how they behave online and offline. These impacts are wide-ranging, but broadly related to four areas:

- How they spend time online
- Unhealthy coping habits
- Security arrangements
- Tactics for staying safe in daily life

### How they spend time online

Almost all participants told us they changed how they spend time online because of the hate and abuse directed at them. For some, this meant taking a hard line with people who are not respectful, as illustrated by the quote below.

*"Well, people are now hardly ever rude to me simply because they know, look, she'll turn you off. That goes on. Look, I hope, [Name] will get rid of you. Don't say that, don't use those words."*

Some participants had staff managing their communications, including their online presence, and this helped as a coping mechanism. Not directly having to deal with online hate and abuse personally was helpful for these participants. However, they were concerned that this may have negative impacts on staff members. They also felt it meant they were less aware of threats, which they felt could compromise their own safety. It is worth noting that there were many participants still actively posting and using their social media accounts without colleagues supporting them.

*"Like staff seeing stuff is obviously challenging at the time, yeah, that's obviously difficult...having them like routinely monitor my social media for abuse was obviously something that had to happen but isn't pleasant and took its toll. So that was something we were obviously monitoring as a sort of tight knit team."*

Others did not post as much or took longer to put content out to ensure they had given it due consideration first. This was often in anticipation of a backlash.

*"It actually puts you off posting...you are your own worst critic, and other people criticising you for things... that might be something that you've got a hang up about...It's not good for people's confidence or just their well-being. Yeah, definitely."*

Some participants chose to disengage. They told us they stopped using specific platforms and that, in the most severe cases, they had heard of women politicians coming off social media entirely or reducing their online presence by not actively posting content.

*"I've largely stopped using [platform], as a result of the abuse I receive."*

It should be noted that this was not always a viable option, particularly for those MPs who are currently serving. For those who come off social media entirely, there is a recognition that this could have negative consequences for their career.

## Security arrangements

Many of the women interviewed described having to make use of security personnel, particularly when running MP surgeries for constituents since they had to advertise where they would be beforehand in these instances. Participants reflected that in the past these may have been possible without security, however, since the murders of Jo Cox and Sir David Amess it no longer feels safe.

*“And stuff that has escalated to the level of physical threats or going through a court process that has.... a big impact on my team, my staff team... They do worry, they worry about their safety, they worry about the office, and we've changed the way that we work in terms of well and partly because of Jo Cox rather than because of actual abuse. But you know, we will never have the office open to the public because there's only one person. And so we've taken decisions like that, because we're aware that it's just not safe... we have security at surgeries, for example and things like that.”*

Beyond security in public events, we also heard about the security measures women in politics have felt it necessary to implement at home. Having received threats online, many have installed CCTV and other security features, as described below:

*“Now with the CCTV and just all the kind of safety stuff that's put in place that I'm more aware that it's not just me that lives in that house. My [child's] there as well, so I need to make sure that it's safe for [them] because you just don't know. You don't know if anybody that's writing some of these comments, finds out where you live because well, I just read the other day... that some of the female MPs have had their addresses put online by another political party and the home addresses.”*

As highlighted above, responsibility for protecting family members was something we heard a lot about. Beyond immediate family, participants also felt a lot of extra responsibility for keeping their staff safe. Putting in extra measures like paying for cabs or making sure staff can work from home if there has been a threat made towards the office were just some examples of measures participants are taking.

*“It really worries my staff... so I've got people that work for me that are not in this arena. They're not big political people. That's why I hired them because they can do things that I can't do. And on a semi-regular basis, I have to reset the team meetings and reassure them.”*

Participants also discussed approaching the police with requests for protection when online hate and abuse was perceived to potentially lead to physical violence. This is discussed in more detail in the final section of this report.

## Tactics for staying safe in daily life

Participants told us they were more conscious of where they go and how. This was often described as a direct result of being threatened online. We heard from our participants that both themselves

and other women in politics they know are usually very careful about how they conduct themselves when out, often abiding by a clear set of procedures:

#### **Never posting about where they will be beforehand**

*"I would never put online where I'm going to be. I would never say I'm going to be doing a, you know, when I was an MP I would never say I'm going to be doing a surgery at Sainsbury's tomorrow morning, or I'm going to be opening this school, I'm gonna do this, that and the other... I always would post retrospectively because I never wanted to tell anybody where I was going to be."*

#### **Being intentional about exactly how they will get to places in advance: mode of transportation, route, who they travel with**

*"Have changed my travel arrangements, and now don't go to events by myself."*

*"Things like having to think very carefully about, you know, how you're travelling and, you know, what's going on around you, being very hyper, hyper vigilant and everything else."*

#### **Being open to changing plans at the last minute if necessary**

*"So I've recently had an event cancelled because of one of these people sending me hate and trying to incite people to come and using really inflammatory language to an event I was going to... our police contact was like, I can't guarantee the safety of you or the people in that event. So I think you should reschedule, and that's what I find uncomfortable. I don't want to change what I'm doing because there's haters and I want to keep my staff safe and I want to keep myself safe so that I can keep doing the work I'm doing and I don't want to, like, ruin someone's events because I haven't taken proper safety precautions, but I feel deeply uncomfortable with the idea of taking safety precautions."*

We heard how taking all the above into consideration adds a huge amount of time and planning to women politicians' everyday lives. It also disrupts their ability to do their job in the way they want to. This demonstrates the significant impact online hate and abuse is having on women politicians.

## **Impact on politics as a profession**

Something we heard consistently across all interviews and through the survey was the negative impact online hate and abuse is having on politics as a profession. Put simply, we heard that online hate and abuse is putting women off politics as a career.

*"I'm very troubled... and I think this is probably stopping at least some good individuals from deciding to put their names forward."*

Participants described that the impact of this could be huge and long-lasting, with the country potentially missing out on talented women taking up public life. Beyond the risk of missing out on future potential, we also heard how some participants have decided to step back from public life, either stepping away from social media or even their role as a politician, because of the hate and abuse they encountered.



*"I left the House of Commons, I mean there were, there were a number of reasons, but one was the levels of abuse."*

In some cases, this was not a decision they made by themselves, but linked to pressure from worried friends and family, as the quote below describes:

*"When I was talking about standing in the election, my [family] were just like, could you please not do that?... They just knew the impact that it had on like me and them, and I just don't think they wanted that for, like, our family again... which is just really hard because trying to explain why like women need to be in the room when just like big, big decisions are made. It's so important, but equally, you need to respect what's right for your family as well."*

The participants we spoke to were deeply concerned about what this might mean for the future of politics, democracy and the country as a whole.

*"It does have a real-world impact on the politicians and people like that but also, I think the people around them... it's not just confined to the online world. I think it has an impact on democracy and ultimately, probably that just sort of blocking or mute, all the things you just talked about, ultimately, the people doing the abuse mostly want to be seen by other people, and therefore actually, in terms of tackling a source, it's got to be about how do you make sure that that sort of content, you know, is muted for everybody, perhaps is a better way of putting it."*

## How online hate and abuse is changing

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As in the work with high profile sports people and broadcasters, the concerted view among those we spoke to is that the online hate and abuse they see is getting worse. They described an increase in both the quantity of this type of content, and how far it would go with regards to pushing boundaries.

*"I think it's getting more intense in the sense of I think it's just more of it, you know... the coverage of it, you know, talking about it and people sharing their experiences appears to have absolutely no impact at all, on stopping people, people doing it... talking to MPs who are there now, it appears to be, you know, just as bad, if not worse and, constant... I think probably it's more threatening... people say things, particularly rape threats, without even thinking now."*

Similar to findings from [Ofcom's research into online hate and abuse in sport](#), there was one platform mentioned by participants in every interview as having higher levels of hate and abuse than other platforms. This was attributed to a mixture of lack of consequences for people posting hate and abuse, features and functionalities specific to the platform, and the general culture of hate and abuse being normalised on that particular platform.

## Reducing harm from online hate and abuse

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Participants felt that to have a successful career in politics, being online, including being aware of what is being said and being available to contact online, is part of the job. As such, they did not feel able to stop their use of online platforms, particularly if they were still serving as an MP. It was considered more of an option for those not currently serving, albeit still coming with a price to pay in terms of limiting their ability to be involved in politics and public life.

Therefore, after discussing the impact of online hate and abuse and the factors that could lead to harm, the interviews then moved onto the subject of the tools which could be used to reduce the risk of harm on the platforms they use.

This discussion was intentionally wide-ranging, and covered everything that participants would like to see. As such, some of the platforms' tools discussed are outside the scope of the user empowerment duties imposed on Category 1 service providers by the Act.

Participants were asked broadly about what measures and tools they would like to see on the platforms they use and what they thought would help mitigate online hate and abuse. This chapter sets out their thoughts in full, including points which might not be directly applicable to the user empowerment duties.

## Participants' experiences of different tools

### Views on tools

When asked about the role of online safety tools in general, at first, participants were not sure that there were any or many tools available to them. The only relevant features they identified were reporting and blocking. However, participants did have some knowledge about other tools that are available on most of the social media platforms they discussed when these were explained individually by the interviewers. Participants' attitudes towards different tools, based on varying levels of familiarity, were as follows:

- **Reporting to platforms.** While familiar as a tool, participants described this as ineffective. We heard many stories of what they felt to be obvious hate, abuse and threats being reported, and those reports not leading to content being visibly removed. In these cases, participants felt that the full context or implicit meaning of the content had not been sufficiently considered. Ultimately, participants feel that often nothing happens as a result of reporting. There was also the perception that if reporting was effective, there would be less abuse/hate in the first place.

*"I previously reported to [platform] an explicit death threat, and it was very explicit, and it was very clear what he meant... and [the platform] said no, this doesn't break our policies and I just thought there's no point in interacting with [the platform] about things like this because they don't take anything down."*

- **Blocking.** This tool was one of the most frequently known, mentioned and used by participants. However, views on how useful it is varied. On the one hand being able to simply block people to stop the hate and abuse is a helpful tool in the moment, but there were questions about whether it actually made sense when thinking about personal safety. As shown by the quote below, some people felt safer knowing when people were making threats, as they could take precautions.

*"I didn't block anyone and then I blocked somebody who was a constituent because they said something kind of paedophilic, and I thought, no, you are, I am not going anywhere near you... but I kind of want to be able to see it... I understand the logic behind all of it, but in terms of my personal safety, is it better that I'm aware of death threats, or is it better that I'm not aware of death threats? I think it's better that I'm aware of them."*

- **Muting** was felt to be a useful tool for those who were aware of it. Mute enables participants to reduce the 'noise' of more minor online disagreements, without taking the more extreme measure of blocking. This was felt to be helpful in managing relationships such as those with colleagues as described below:

*"I've actually used the mute one for like people that... like for colleagues that I've like maybe had like a slight disagreement with or whatever who have been like bothering me and I'm like, oh God, don't want to see like the nonsense where we differed on like policy issues and I'm like I don't want to see your nonsense anymore so I'll mute them because if I blocked them then they would make a big stir about it it'll end up in the papers... blocks for the actual abuse and mute for like this kind of nature of the people that are I'm having this sort of minor disagreements with."*

- **Sensitivity screens / overlays.** These can be applied to hide potentially harmful pieces of content. They provide users with additional information, so they know what to expect from the content, and give users the option to view the content. Most participants needed to see a description of this tool in the interviews, and even then, were not clear on what it did. One participant noted that they can be limited in use, dependent on the quality of classification, as described below:

*"I think you know, particularly if content can be triggering for some, I think it's good... but they're only as good as the categorisation of them, right? And if they are kind of violent or graphic content, they need to be categorised as such either by the person that puts it up or by the platform itself in order for the sensitivity screen to kick in... There was a post recently I saw on a Facebook group and this picture comment had been hidden, and it was literally just a picture of somebody's dining table and everybody was like, why, why is this graphic content? What?... I would probably prefer to see more stuff hidden than not hidden and then you can make the choice."*

- **Hidden words (muting words/blocked word lists).** Again, familiarity with this tool was low. Some participants had used it and found it to be fairly helpful in reducing how much content they saw on certain issues. This was useful in circumstances when there was either a very contentious live political issue, or something that had become a big news story involving politicians, which triggered an increase in hate and abuse content. However, there were reservations around missing important content by muting words, as well as potentially missing evidence of hate and abuse that may be useful for reporting at a later date.

*"Maybe getting rid of stuff around my appearance would be helpful, but, you know, what even do you put in as the terms for that? Like if you ban, if you mute all content that uses the word fat, and then you're gonna mute a lot of stuff that you maybe want to see. So yeah, I'm aware of some of the tools... I use some of the tools, but I do have reservations because I am worried that people will say things that I need to see because I need to report it to the police."*

- **Limiting interaction** was something several participants did. However, there was a feeling that this contradicted the point of social media and limited their uses for it. For some, this could impact negatively on how they did their jobs.

*"I done that... it does the job, but what it drives a coach and horses through, I suppose, is the whole point of having these... platforms in the first place, which is meant to be about interaction. But I guess if you think that actually the platforms are basically just about sort of, you know,*

*communicating what you're doing as a constituency MP or as a minister or whatever and not being that interested in the interactions, then that definitely works."*

- **Turning off comments.** Some participants had tried this and said it could be useful in some situations but was not a viable long-term solution. As a woman in politics, they and / or their team believe that seeing what people think about what you say is crucial, so turning off comments was considered a poor career move. If it was possible to filter out comments that were centred on hate and abuse, participants thought this would be more helpful.

*"I know you can basically pick your audience... or not allow comments on your site, but I don't know whether if that's so productive as you would want it to be, because a lot of times you want to see what folks' thoughts are, not on you personally, but on what your decisions have been. So I know you can do that, but I, I don't know whether that would work against you... I just think when it comes to that personal thing. That personal space... and as sexualised... it's that type of comments that have been made, I think there should be something that could stop that. And I don't know how we do that."*

As can be seen through the above examples, it became clear there was a reluctance to use some tools because participants felt it necessary to be available to the public and their constituents. For this reason, a number of the current tools available were not felt to be fit for purpose for women in politics.

## What participants wanted to see

### Simpler, more effective reporting tools

As highlighted above, and in line with the approach taken in [Ofcom's research into online hate and abuse in sport](#), discussion with participants was intentionally wide-ranging, and covered everything they would like to see platforms do. With this in mind, some of the potential tools participants told us they would like to see, and which are discussed in this section of the report, are outside the scope of the user empowerment duties imposed on Category 1 regulated services by the Act.

Participants considered effective reporting to have the potential to be one of the most powerful tools to stop hate and abuse. In reality, however, they felt that reporting often does not work. They described content they flagged to platforms not being recognised as hate and abuse, and thought this was often down to systems not recognising the contextual aspects of content that made it abusive.

Due to the perceived issues with classification of content, participants found that even if they reported content, it would not necessarily be removed.

Participants discussed different reporting options available to them:

- **Reporting to service provider personally, as a user:** In line with findings from [Ofcom's research into online hate and abuse in sport](#), in theory participants viewed this as a good tool. In almost all cases however, participants perceived this not to be as quick, simple or effective as they would like in practice. Participants described getting an immediate or very quick response that they suspected was automated that said no rules had been broken. Often this content may not use language that would be picked up as typically threatening, but in fact was, in the given context. One example of content not being flagged as a threat (also shared earlier in the report), was a message telling a woman she would be 'Jo Coxed'.

This was referring to an MP who had been murdered, but this was not obvious to the automated system as a threat. Regardless, we heard that participants usually would report such content, even if just to ensure there was a record of what had happened.

*“To be honest, I've never really found it a hugely worthwhile process, but I always find it something useful to do just to show that I was doing something to make sure that there was a lock off... just so I could see that I'd flagged it to an authority, you know, like just so that there was an action from a kind of disgusting action being done... I just felt I would always report it, take a screenshot of that just in case I had to escalate something to police or the parliamentary authorities.”*

- **Reporting to service provider senior staff, as a politician:** One advantage of being a woman in politics highlighted by participants was the ability to reach senior staff within social media companies. While recognised as a route only open to them due to their professional position, this was often a more efficient route to content being dealt with in what participants felt to be a more appropriate way. Once they were able to speak to a human and explain the context of hate and abuse, content that had previously been marked as ‘no breach’ through official reporting routes was dealt with as a breach of terms of use.

*“So one of the challenges I think with all of this... for the people trying to deal with all this, the female politicians, is reporting it in and finding ways to report to, to real people who are going to appreciate that something might not actually come across as a specific threat, but it is threatening, and people have thought clearly about how to express themselves. So in that particular incident, I think I reported it... and they wouldn't accept it as being a threat. And eventually I got through to their [senior staff member]. And of course, that's one of the things that, as female politicians, we can do often is get to a slightly senior level of an organisation to make a complaint. And he then understood the nature of what it was and everything else... And so was able to, you know, to look into it.”*

- **Reporting to parliamentary authorities:** Many participants discussed the support available through parliamentary authorities, parliamentary police, and within their own political parties. While useful to have an extra layer of support, this was not always of practical help in reporting to authorities, since participants may need to report to their local constituency police as well. The security training provided by Parliament was referenced as useful and most had put measures they learned from this in place.

*“I think that the parliamentary authorities were beginning to offer to monitor social media for various, you know MPs as well... and that was better than about blocking, because you think, well, somebody is still looking to see... what's going on online.”*

- **Reporting to the police:** Many participants had reported online threats, hate, and abuse to the police with mixed results. Most participants said that police had been supportive when they reported online hate and abuse, but that there were some limitations; namely:
  - Some felt that male police officers may struggle to understand less obvious examples of hate and abuse with a gendered tone.

*“My contact in the local police force is brilliant and really arguably probably more cautious than I am.... In all cases would I say that... I would always anticipate that a male police officer who's never experienced the sort of microaggressions that women might have done, would pick that up as a genuine threat. Mm. Maybe not.”*



- When accounts are anonymous, police are limited in the action they can take.

*"It was one that I had reported to police, the police weren't able to take any action because it was an unidentified person and, you know, they couldn't kind of do anything about it, basically, they didn't know who it was so I generally try my best to avoid using [the platform] if at all possible, because the backlash that I get is incredible."*

- Providing evidence of online hate and abuse can be very time consuming. Even when participants have details such as names and addresses, it can take longer than they would like for the police to be able to act.

*"I've got an agreement with the police because I've been in touch with them so much that I can give statements in the police station... not having the police come in here and have a conversation with me, with the kids in the house... so I went up to the police station and gave a statement. I was there for hours because I had to give up, give the police all of the different bits of information and they had to record everything. And it was a very, very long session at the police station... said, thanks very much, we'll go and pick him up and have a conversation with them... so they spoke to me the next day and they hadn't managed to get hold of them... I was like, this is his address. How can you not get like, where is he if he's not in his address... they did eventually manage to get hold of him, um, and they took him in".*

- We heard instances of police pushback on reports based on the responses of social media companies.

*"It didn't actually say 'I want to kill the Member of Parliament for [area]'. So... [platform] were like 'we don't really understand what the problem is here'... it's not a direct threat to a Member of Parliament. And I was like, but that's a Member of Parliament's [platform] account... There's no loophole here... and then when [platform] started saying that the police [said], oh maybe that could be an avenue actually, maybe we should have thought of that, and I was like, don't you dare... You can't let this slip and this is all just because the Online Safety Act hasn't passed yet. Because there's no protections for... people against social media giants... so it's just it's really, really challenging unless like your full name is actually in a threat. You're kind of, you're vulnerable."*

## Content removal – personal attacks

A message that came through strongly across all interviews was that participants believe the best way to deal with online hate and abuse is to remove content that features personal attacks. This could be by either removing the account responsible for the content, or the content on its own.

*"I think when it's read as offensive or racist or sexist or in that kind of manner towards a person, then you shouldn't be seeing it."*

*"If there's [content] that's threatening and abusive that you could actually get it removed, that would be really helpful...that would be really useful because there's things that I'm like, I need that removed urgently and I've had no support in getting that done."*

There was a recognition that this may not be a realistic expectation. They referenced this particularly in light of recent changes in policy on content moderation at some social media companies.

## Ensure safety tools do not interrupt or disrupt legal processes

One concern when discussing online safety tools was that they should not be set up in a way that could disrupt any legal processes. For example, women want to be reassured that if they block an account to stop receiving the hate and abuse, they can still access the content at a later date should they need to.

*"I think that whatever is put in place needs to make sure that it doesn't interrupt any legal processes... If we're told to kind of block people or whatever, then if that then means that I can't report to the police because I can't see their content to report it, that's a problem."*

## Screen time blocks within platforms

A suggestion we heard from some participants was to create an option on social media platforms for self-imposed controls to help them regulate when they can look at content.

*"If the platforms were able to implement like screen time rules, you know, you can do that on your phone or whatever, but, it would be very helpful if I never looked at [platform] after 9 p.m., because I would be more likely to sleep, you know, things like that, I think would be, would be helpful."*

## Conclusions

In conclusion, participants said they experienced online hate and abuse consistently, often with a direct undertone of misogyny, and regularly including threats. This was either as a result of something they had done as a part of their role in politics - such as advocating a particular policy - or simply for sharing an opinion or appearing in the media.

As documented throughout this report, the impact of this is wide-ranging and differs according to individual circumstances. However, throughout the interviews participants consistently reported that online hate and abuse resulted in them feeling unsafe, isolated, questioning their own abilities, and feeling as though they have no safe space to escape it. When it comes to their daily lives, participants felt they must adopt specific tactics to stay safe, including implementing security arrangements, and must constantly consider how they spend time online.

When asked in interviews what they would like Ofcom to do about online hate and abuse, participants often did not have a good understanding of existing online safety tools. Even when they did, they ultimately wanted online hate and abuse to be removed altogether, and for platforms to take more accountability for protecting their users.

The table below presents findings relating to the nature of online hate and abuse and the experiences of using tools to navigate this content. This is consistent with the approach taken in [Ofcom's report on online hate and abuse in sport](#). It sets out the factors that participants perceived to exacerbate harm, and the tools they were aware of that could mitigate the harm. This table is based on current awareness and does not necessarily reflect the full range of tools that might be available now or in the future.

Given the wide number of factors and impacts, participants felt that none of the tools mentioned are likely to be sufficient alone.

**Figure 2: Factors and tools**

Factor	Tools
<b>Volume / cumulative impact</b>	Turning off comments and restricting messaging can help reduce volume but was not a viable long-term solution. Seeing what people think about what they say was described as crucial for women in politics. If it was possible to filter out comments that were centred on hate and abuse, it would be more helpful. Participants did not describe any current tools that could mitigate against cumulative impact.
<b>Who it comes from</b>	Blocking or muting users were both discussed by participants as potential tools, but there were questions about whether they actually made sense when thinking about personal safety. Participants expressed concern that if they could not see the content, they may miss threats made against them and that this could put their safety at risk because they would be less alert to, and able to take precautions against threats.
<b>Timing / trigger</b>	<p>Participants expressed interest in the potential of tools to support them to take a break, or to only view content at suitable times, though they did not know whether this existed currently.</p> <p>They told us that completely stepping back from social media at times where hate and abuse were likely to be particularly bad was one option to consider. Another was turning off comments entirely. However, this was not always seen as viable for women in politics.</p>
<b>The target / subject of hate and abuse</b>	Participants considered that filtering and sensitivity screens/overlays could potentially help but that this would be dependent on effective categorisation of content on services in order to work as intended.

## Ofcom afterword

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This report reflects participants' views following engagement with them on these issues. We will take these findings into account, as appropriate, alongside the wider evidence in this space in developing relevant Codes of Practice and Guidance, including those we must produce to help Category 1 service providers comply with the user empowerment duties.

Pile-on harassment, particularly that which is targeted at women in public life, is one of the proposed key focus areas of Ofcom's [draft Guidance for a safer life online for women and girls](#). We have therefore also considered how these findings relate to these proposals, identifying some to be particularly pertinent to the experiences of women in politics. Report tracking, reporting off-service behaviour, dedicated reporting channels, and actions to address serial perpetrators appear particularly relevant in this regard.<sup>29</sup> We will be taking these findings into account as we consider responses to our consultation and work towards publishing our final Guidance.

This research was a deep dive into the experiences of a particular group of people on online hate and abuse. It adds to Ofcom's evidence base on this topic. Other relevant publications include:

- Ofcom, 2025. [Online hate and abuse in sport: a report by Ofcom in partnership with Kick it Out](#).
- Ofcom, 2025. [Children's Register of Risks](#). See Section 5.
- Ofcom, 2025. [Draft Guidance: a safer life online for women and girls](#).
- Ofcom 2024. [Illegal Harms Register of Risks](#). See Sections 3 and 4.
- Ofcom, 2024. [Media literacy by design: best-practice principles for on-platform interventions to promote media literacy](#).
- Ofcom, 2023. [The impact of online hate](#).

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<sup>29</sup> Ofcom, 2022. [Consultation on draft Guidance: A safer life online for women and girls](#). Pages 35-38.

# A1. Annex: existing evidence on abuse and hate

As an evidence-based regulator, Ofcom relies heavily on research to inform the development of our codes of practice. As such, we have an array of existing evidence about online hate and abuse, including research we have commissioned or conducted ourselves, as well as research and data from third parties.

The findings detailed earlier in this report to a large extent validate what we already know from this wider evidence and build on this by providing unique details about how online abuse and hate is experienced for female politicians, as well as illustrating the human stories that lie behind hard facts and statistics.

We've summarised these key relevant points of our existing research below in order to highlight the links between our new findings with previous research.

More evidence about the risk of harm from online hateful and abusive content can be found in Ofcom's [Illegal Harms](#) and [Protection of Children Registers of Risks](#). In addition, detailed evidence about online gender-based harms can be found in Ofcom's consultation on the [draft Guidance for a safer line online for women and girls](#).

## Experiences of hate, abuse and gender-based harms online among people in the UK

**A quarter of teenage and adult internet users have encountered hateful content online.** Ofcom research found that in the four weeks immediately preceding the research 26% of UK internet users aged 13+ had seen hateful content and 23% had encountered misogynistic content online.<sup>30</sup> Of these users, 61% and 53% respectively found the content extremely offensive or said it really bothered them. The majority encountered this content on social media (83% and 75% respectively), with over half seeing it on their recommended feeds (54% and 54%) and around 4 in 10 seeing it in comments or replies to posts (45% and 40%).<sup>31</sup>

**Some people experience intersectional discrimination.** This is abuse or hate which targets an individual on the basis of their different identities, such as their race and sex. Research by Glitch highlights the role that intersectionality can play here in finding that Black women are more likely to be targeted with hate and abuse due to their ethnic and gender characteristics.<sup>32</sup>

**Women and girls face unique risks online, as the targets of online misogyny and other gender-based harms.** A high proportion of women and girls encounter misogynistic content, harassment, domestic abuse and image-based sexual abuse.<sup>33</sup> Ofcom research found that in the four weeks immediately preceding the research, 26% of female UK internet users aged 13+ had seen misogynistic content online, compared to 19% of male users.<sup>34</sup> Evidence suggests the proportion of

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<sup>30</sup> Ofcom, 2024. [Online Experiences Tracker – Wave 7](#).

<sup>31</sup> Ofcom, 2025. [Online Experiences Tracker – Wave 7](#).

<sup>32</sup> Glitch, 2023. [The Digital Misogynoir Report: Ending the dehumanising of Black women on social media](#).

<sup>33</sup> Further detail about online gender-based harms can be found in: Ofcom, 2025. [A Safer Life Online for Women and Girls: Practical Guidance for Tech Companies](#).

<sup>34</sup> Ofcom, 2024. [Online Experiences Tracker – Wave 7](#).

young women and girls who have received ‘sexist comments’ online has almost tripled in ten years (from 20% in 2013 to 57% in 2023),<sup>35</sup> and that over half (58%) have experienced gender-based harassment on social media.<sup>36</sup> Gender-based pile-ons and harassment can involve sexualisation, threats, descriptions of rape, or intimate image abuse, including the creation and sharing of deepfakes.<sup>37</sup>

**Impacts of encountering online abuse and hate can be severe.** Encountering online hate and abuse creates emotional harm and can damage self-esteem and discourage online expression. Evidence suggests there can be associations between encountering hate and abuse and acts of violence or self-harm.<sup>38</sup>

**Harmful online content that targets women risks affecting their mental health and physical safety.** Amnesty International found that more than half of UK women (55%) who experienced abuse or harassment online experienced stress, anxiety or panic attacks following the abuse, while 36% of women said it made them feel that their physical safety was threatened.<sup>39</sup> Women are at disproportionate risk of cyberstalking,<sup>40</sup> an act which is common in cases of domestic abuse and a contributing factor for physical violence against women, including murder.<sup>41</sup>

**There are unique impacts of hate and abuse among people whose professional life involves having a more accessible online presence than others.** Well-known individuals and public figures are often targeted on online services. A study of women journalists found that those facing abuse and harassment reported making themselves less visible (38%), missing work (11%), leaving their jobs (4%), with some deciding to abandon journalism altogether (2%).<sup>42</sup> [Previous Ofcom research](#) into the experiences of sportspeople, on-screen commentators, and professionals working in sport and broadcasting found that online hate and abuse led to similar impacts to those described above in terms of mental health and physical safety, but also led to their family members receiving targeted abuse. Many said these experiences were affecting their careers and professional decision-making, choosing not to take on work due to the risk of being abused online.<sup>43</sup>

## Experiences of hate, abuse, and gender-based harms online among women politicians

**Many politicians, and in particular women politicians, have spoken publicly about the fact they regularly experience hate and abuse online.**<sup>44</sup> In the 2024 general election, evidence suggests

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<sup>35</sup> Girlguiding, 2023. [Girls’ Attitudes Survey 2023: Girls’ lives over 15 years](#).

<sup>36</sup> Plan International, 2020. [Free to be online? Girls’ and young women’s experiences of online harassment](#).

<sup>37</sup> Demos (Judson, E.), 2021. [Silence, Woman: An investigation into gendered attacks online](#).

<sup>38</sup> Ofcom, 2025. [Children’s Register of Risks](#); Ofcom, 2023. [The impact of online hate](#).

<sup>39</sup> Amnesty International, 2017. [Social media can be a dangerous place for UK women](#).

<sup>40</sup> Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 2021. [Unmasking Stalking: A Changing Landscape](#).

<sup>41</sup> In a study of intimate partner homicides found that in 85% of attempted homicides and 76% of completed homicides, the victims were stalked. Source: McFarlane, J., Campbell, J.C., Wilt, S., Ulrich, Y., & Xu, X. 1999. [Stalking and Intimate Partner Femicide](#). *Homicide Studies*, 3(4), 300-316.

<sup>42</sup> UNESCO (Posetti, J., Aboulez, N., Bontcheva, K., Harrison, J. and Waisbord, S.), 2020. [Online Violence Against Women Journalists](#).

<sup>43</sup> Ofcom, 2025. [Online hate and abuse in sport: a report by Ofcom in partnership with Kick it Out](#).

<sup>44</sup> Many women MPs across all political parties have shared their experiences of online hate and abuse. Examples include: Jo Cox Foundation, 2024. [No place in politics: tackling abuse and intimidation](#); UK Parliament, 2021. [Parliamentary debate: Online Anonymity and Anonymous Abuse, 24 March 2021](#). Barker, K. and Jurasz, O., 2021. [Text-based \(Sexual\) Abuse and Online Violence Against Women: Toward Law Reform?](#);

female political candidates were more likely than male candidates to experience serious abuse, and harassment, intimidation and threats were more likely to be experienced online than while out canvassing.<sup>45</sup>

**Some women MPs experience a disproportionate amount of hate and abuse online, with those minority ethnic backgrounds targeted more than their white colleagues.** In the run up to the 2017 UK General Election, Amnesty International UK found that the 20 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women MPs received almost half (41%) of the abusive tweets on Twitter (now renamed to X), despite there being almost eight times as many white MPs in the study. Despite representing only 8.8% of women MPs in Westminster at the time, Asian women MPs were found to receive the most abusive tweets per MP, 30% higher than white women MPs.<sup>46</sup> Diane Abbott was the target of almost a third (31.61%) of all of the abusive tweets analysed in the run up to the 2017 General Election. The former Labour MP and the first Black woman elected to Parliament received even more abuse in the six weeks leading up to the election, when nearly half (45.14%) of abusive tweets analysed were aimed at her. Amnesty found that the type of online abuse she receives often focuses on her gender and race and includes threats of sexual violence.<sup>47</sup>

**The impact of hate and abuse online can drive some women politicians off social media services, impacting their ability to participate freely online.** Research in 2023 from Fawcett Society, the campaigning group for women's rights, found that 93% of the women MPs surveyed said that online abuse and harassment has a negative impact on them, compared with 76% of men. The report concluded this abuse is highly gendered and misogynistic in nature, with many women MPs – particularly Black and minoritised women MPs – reflecting on the emotional toll it takes on them, their families, and staff. The survey found that 73% of women MPs said they 'do not use social media to speak on certain issues because of the abusive environment online', compared to 51% of men.<sup>48</sup> Amnesty International UK described the impact of online hate and abuse on women MPs as: *"Online violence can be just as severe as experiences of violence offline. It may affect women's human rights to safety, freedom of expression, participation in public life, and may also cause severe psychological harm, among other things."*<sup>49</sup>

**The impact of hate and abuse can drive some away from politics altogether.** A 2024 survey of exiting MPs by 50:50 Parliament, a UK charity that empowers women to progress in politics, found

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Barker, K. and Jurasz, O., 2024. [#MeToo, Sport, and Women: Foul, Own Goal, or Touchdown? Online Abuse of Women in Sport as a Contemporary Issue](#); Park, C. S., Liu, Q. and Kaye, B. K., 2021. [Analysis of Ageism, Sexism, and Ableism in User Comments on YouTube Videos About Climate Activist Greta Thunberg](#), *Social Media and Society*, 7 (3); The Guardian, 2023. [‘It could be your next-door neighbour’: how female MPs cope with misogynistic abuse](#); The BBC, 2024. [Women in politics describe threats and abuse](#); The BBC, 2022. [Scale of abuse of politicians on Twitter revealed](#).

<sup>45</sup> The Electoral Commission, 2024. [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#).

<sup>46</sup> Using a social listening tool, Amnesty collected a sample of all tweets mentioning the 177 women MPs at the time in the study between 1 January and 8 June 2017, which they then labelled as abusive or non-abusive. Source: Amnesty International UK, 2017. [Black and Asian women MPs abused more online](#); Amnesty Global Insights, 2017. [Unsocial media: Tracking Twitter abuse against women MPs](#); 50:50 Parliament, 2024. [Reset: A blueprint for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Parliament](#).

<sup>47</sup> Amnesty International UK, 2017. [Black and Asian women MPs abused more online](#); Amnesty Global Insights, 2017. [Unsocial media: Tracking Twitter abuse against women MPs](#).

<sup>48</sup> The research comprised 20 one-to-one in-depth interviews with former and current MPs, and an anonymous online survey of 100 current MPs. Source: Fawcett Society, 2023. [A House for Everyone: A case for modernising Parliament](#); The Guardian, 2023. [‘It could be your next-door neighbour’: how female MPs cope with misogynistic abuse](#).

<sup>49</sup> Amnesty International UK, 2017. [Black and Asian women MPs abused more online](#).



that one in three exiting MPs said that the levels of abuse they received as an MP had been a factor in deciding to resign. One participant said, “I have seen female MPs put under even greater pressure from misogynistic conduct on social media”. Eight in ten (83%) of the exiting women MPs surveyed said that their gender had influenced their experience of being an MP, with reasoning including *“suffering more abuse, online and in person”*.<sup>50</sup> These findings are echoed in a 2025 parliamentary report on the safety of MPs which found that half of MPs who participated said abuse and intimidation has made them feel anxious or depressed (49%) and a similar proportion unsafe (52%). It found that one in three participating MPs (29%) said they have considered not standing for re-election, and one in six have considered resigning from public office.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> An invitation to complete an Exit Survey was sent to all Members of Parliament who, by March 2024, had announced that they would not be re-standing for election. Twenty-four MPs took part in the survey. Source: 50:50 Parliament, 2024. [Reset: A blueprint for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Parliament](#).

<sup>51</sup> The Speaker’s Conference surveyed 224 MPs and 346 MPs’ staff between 26 February and 14 March 2025. Source: The Speaker’s Conference, 2025. [Speaker’s Conference on the security of MPs, candidates and elections](#).