Angry Birds: Twitter Harassment of Canadian Female Politicians

By

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this paper is to examine how Canadian female politicians experience harassment on Twitter, and the management strategies they have developed to deal with harassment.

Design - Applying a feminist lens, I used a qualitative/quantitative online survey to ask Canadian female politicians at the federal, provincial and territorial level and/or their staff about their experience of harassment on Twitter.

Findings - While the pool of respondents was small and would benefit from further study, the results show female politicians in Canada experience harassment on Twitter, the nature of which changes based on age, race, sexual orientation, and other demographic factors. Elected officials and their staff adopt context-specific strategies to handle the abuse, most often including actions like ignoring, muting, or blocking accounts. For 36.59% of respondents, the quantity and intensity of abuse they received online had affected their desire to run for office again. The problem of abusive content on platforms like Twitter may be draining the talent pool of women in government, a group that is already underrepresented in Canada.

Research Implications - Research on online harassment in the Canadian context is limited. This paper establishes the presence of the problem and the negative effects of online harassment on women in government. The findings will be useful to other researchers who may want to expand on this work, and to women who are contemplating a career in politics, as the strategies and experiences described in the results may help them to prepare for the apparent inevitability of receiving abuse on social media.

Keywords – Online harassment, politics, women, Twitter

Introduction

In 2015, I began volunteering with a Canadian organization that works to get more women to run for office at all levels of government. As part of that work, I spoke with dozens of women about their aspirations and concerns for entering politics. Some concerns were unique to their specific circumstances, but others were shared by virtually every person I spoke to. These included the ability to fundraise, balancing personal and professional obligations, being qualified for office, and facing ad hominem attacks and intense public scrutiny. It is generally accepted that public scrutiny and criticism are just part of the package of being a public figure, but criticism of political decisions or values was not the core concern of most of the women I spoke to. What they feared were nasty and personal attacks based on their appearance or identity and threats of violence against them or their families. Most of the women identified social media as a major source of concern in this regard, one that weighed on their minds as they debated whether to run for office.

Public opinion and academic research support what these women knew intuitively or anecdotally; there is no right way to be a woman online, especially in a field that is traditionally male-dominated. Blogger Sady Doyle (2011) outlines in her ironic blog "A Girl's Guide to Staying Safe Online" that for high-profile women, there are essentially no strategies that will keep you completely safe from sexist insults and threats (para. 27). For new politicians and their communications staff, it can be hard to know how to deal with the seemingly inevitable onslaught of attacks and insults. Best practice is not always clear - is it best to respond with hostility, empathy, or not respond at all? What content should be reported to the social media network, and what the RCMP? These can be difficult questions to navigate when you enter public life. A study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) found that 81.8% of responding

female politicians from parliaments around the world experienced psychological violence during their term, which includes harassment and threats on social media (p.3). The study found "that social media have become the number one place in which psychological violence – particularly in the form of sexist and misogynistic remarks, humiliating images, mobbing, intimidation and threats – is perpetrated against women parliamentarians" (p. 6). While the harassment of women in online spaces is well-documented in the media, research is just beginning to catch up. Academics have examined online bullying, the trend of harassment directed at female bloggers, celebrities, and other public figures, and governments have also studied the issue. But very few of these studies have examined the Canadian context or included information on the best practices for responding to online abuse.

If online abuse is a deterrent to women who might be considering running for office, then it is something we should be working to address to enhance equality and the quality of representation in our governments. With this study, I'm looking to understand the quantity and type of online abuse female politicians receive in Canada, and what strategies and mechanisms they and their communications team have developed to cope with the harassment they receive. While there is plenty of media interest paid to the topic of harassment of female politicians online (Webster, 2018; Astor, 2018), academic research has been slow to catch up to the phenomenon. Given the relative lack of research in this area, my hope for this study is to establish foundational data illustrating the extent of the problem, the effect harassment is having on women in politics, and provide some guidance for current elected officials or prospective candidates who are wondering how best to manage the harassment they already receive or anticipate receiving. I am also hopeful that this study can provide a basis for further research on

the topic of online harassment of female politicians by other researchers, as this topic is understudied.

Informed by a feminist and intersectional research perspective, I adopted a survey strategy, using the online survey tool SurveyMonkey and an email distribution list, to distribute a survey to all provincial, territorial, and federal Canadian politicians currently in office. Given Canada's geography and the busy schedules of the subjects under study, survey research is a good match for this research purpose and allowed me to gather responses from a geographically and politically diverse sample. Survey research, particularly online surveys, are limiting in the types and depth of data that can be gathered but given the lack of research on this topic – interviews could have been fertile and would have allowed for follow up with the subjects but would have constrained the research to one or two geographic areas for study. The study was conducted only in English, not in French, which represents a significant limitation for a Canadian-based study; this decision was made necessary by the resource and time restrictions of the capstone project.

For this study, I have chosen to focus exclusively on Twitter as the platform for abuse. Twitter was selected as a platform because it is a popular site of research and inquiry in both academic and grey literature dealing with the topic of online harassment, including in Dhrodia (2018), a study of harassment of UK female politicians that informed this study. There is practically no research in the area of Twitter harassment specifically targeting female politicians, particularly in the Canadian context. Through my review of the literature, I sought to situate the problem of Twitter harassment of Canadian female politicians within a wider context by examining online harassment overall, online harassment of other high-profile women, real-world harassment of female politicians, and of course the topic of online harassment of female

politicians as well. While this topic is currently under-researched globally and in the Canadian context, I am hopeful that this study will prove useful to other researchers who may want to further explore the topic of online harassment targeting female politicians, particularly in the area of policy or regulatory changes to address the issue, a topic that is not addressed in this study. By examining how Canadian female politicians experience Twitter harassment and exploring the strategies they have developed to cope with the abuse, I aim to demonstrate the presence of the online harassment targeting elected women and illustrate the impact that abuse is having on them. Belief in the importance of diverse representation in government is central to my research approach, and through this research, I hope to demonstrate that online harassment is harming women's participation in public life, even in the highest orders of public service.

My research approach is informed by a feminist understanding of women's participation in positions of power and integrates an intersectional approach to the topics of race, religion, and sexual orientation. Informed by studies like Dhrodia (2018) and Adams et al. (2009), institutional works like the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (2016) report on "Sexism, Harassment, and Violence Against Women Parliamentarians", and grey literature on the subject, I adopted a survey strategy, using SurveyMonkey's online platform to distribute the 30-question survey to 339 elected women across Canada. This report includes a review of the relevant literature associated with the topic of online harassment, an explanation of my research design and methodology, and finally the presentation of the results of the survey and an analysis of the patterns and trends that emerged in the responses. This study is focused on understanding the experiences of women, rather than quantifying and statistically-proving the existence of Twitter harassment as an issue. But as demonstrated through the review of the literature, there is plenty of research to support the

existence of this problem and the understanding that the effects of online harassment very much translate into the real world, even if the consequences for the perpetrators often do not.

Literature Review

In this research study, I have focused on the experiences of elected women at the provincial and federal level to understand the quantity and type of harassment they feel they experience on Twitter. I also sought to understand how they cope with the specific types of Twitter-based harassment they experience, and how that harassment has impacted their desire to continue in public life. In this chapter, I will begin by outlining my literature review methodology, followed up an exploration of academic and journalistic literature dealing with women's role in government, abuse directed at politicians and other high-profile women both in the real world and online. I will also examine some of the literature that deals with explanations for harassing behaviour online, including networked misogyny and anonymity, as well as some of the government and institutional responses to this problem to date. I will also explore some of the theoretical literature that informs my critical feminist and intersectional approach to this topic of study. Through this review, I hope to demonstrate the currency of the problem of online harassment of public women in both academia and popular understanding, and provide context for the design decisions I have made in creating the research survey and analyzing the results.

Field Overview and Search Methodology

The initial inspiration for my research question came from both my previously mentioned experience speaking to candidates, and from exposure to media articles discussing the issue of harassment of female politicians in various national contexts. So I began my research by looking at selections of grey literature on the topic and dealing with the harassment of women online writ large. This was a somewhat unconventional way to begin a literature review but provided good framing context by illustrating the public conception of the issue and served as a good point of comparison to the academic literature on the topic.

After beginning with a scan of media sources and some dabbling in the academic literature on the topic, I decided to sort my research enquiries into several categories that would provide the framing context for my research question. First, I sought material that would enhance my understanding of how a feminist lens can be applied in a research context. Second, I sought materials that could affirm or disconfirm the importance and benefits of electing more women to public office. I felt this was an important foundational element to explore for this research project, as the value I place on women's participation in public life informs both my interest in this topic and research approach. Moving into research on the topic of online abuse, I applied Jankowski and Wester's (2015) theoretical triangulation approach to pull from varied disciplines and fields to affirm the gap I had identified (p.62). I adopted this strategy because there is not a great deal of research specifically examining female politicians and their experiences of online abuse. By zooming out to examine the wider problem of online harassment, looking at other subgroups who are subject to online abuse, and looking at the experiences of politicians with harassment both in the real-world and online, I was better able to understand the scope of the problem and research trends. The categories I used for this triangulation approach were: general online abuse, online abuse of women in the general population and the video game community, institutional responses to online abuse of women, online abuse of politicians, real world abuse of female politicians, understanding the motivations and consequences of abuse, and finally the subject itself, online abuse of female politicians. This approach not only provided me with an informative context in which I situated my research but also led me to studies outside of my specific topic that used similar methodologies to my planned approach.

After exploring some sample journals from several disciplines, I began my search with a focus on political science, media studies, and women's studies journals, as I found those to be

the most fruitful sources for the topics I was focused on. The two journals I explored the most thoroughly were *New Media and Society* and *Feminist Media Studies*. I chiefly focused on journals of interest via the University of Alberta journals search system and Google Scholar, as opposed to conducting searches through specific databases, as I found this approach to be limiting and relatively less efficient as a search strategy. Some of the search terms I used were:

- Online/Twitter harassment women (five results included)
- Online abuse of women/feminists/ female politicians (four results included)
- Online disinhibition (one result included)
- Online harassment (two results included)
- Harassment female politicians (three results included)

The sources I found during this initial search phase often also relied on subject matter triangulation to locate their examination of a specific type of online abuse within the larger topic, so I found many useful academic, government, and institutional studies by exploring the citations of the early articles I looked at. Via my keyword search, I also deliberately sought out research that would debate with the research I had been exploring. I did not find this avenue to be very fruitful, though Carstensen's (2009) exploration of homophobia and gender presentation in online spaces which questioned the intersectional approach to research and activism (p.110) was one interesting source found through this approach. After this attempt to search for disconfirming studies, I returned to exploring the citations of the larger set of articles I had collected, looking for new sources in each source. Through this method, I was able to find several studies and reports that were pertinent to my research question. Eventually, after much exploration and reading, I began to find fewer and fewer studies that I had not already dissected, suggesting that I had reviewed most of the literature related to my framing topics. Two unexpected sources of useful research were legal journals and psychiatry journals, as several scholars in the legal field like Phillips (1998) and Citron (2009) have explored the regulatory questions surrounding online

abuse, and academics in psychiatry like Every-Palmer et al. (2015) have looked at both the motivations and consequences of online abuse as a growing trend.

For academic articles, I generally excluded those that were not published in peer-reviewed journals. For media pieces, I sought pieces that came from reputable journalists and established outlets. The books I included in my review are written by established academics, with strong records of publication in reputable journals and credentials as professors or researchers. The institutional reports, such as those by the United Nations or the Inter-Parliamentary Union, generally applied a feminist lens to their studies of online abuse and abuse, but I did not feel that bias, in this case, should be an exclusionary factor. At the outset of my research, I had resolved not to include materials from think-tank foundations, since they can lack objectivity. I made a few exceptions to this rule as I progressed with the review, most notably for Dhrodia's (2018) study for Amnesty International, but that work was so fundamentally aligned with my research interests I felt it merited inclusion.

I also judged items based on relevance, but given my triangulation approach, pieces that initially seemed less relevant to my specific research question proved to have useful information or ideas about the phenomenon of online bullying and abuse. I also reviewed some studies that had research design or method similarities, such a Lewis, Rowe, and Wiper's (2017) quantitative/qualitative study of the amount, type, and impact of abuse women receive online. Their study was aligned with my topic but did not provide new information about the phenomenon but is nevertheless useful to my work because of its design.

The final criteria I used to conduct my search was age. I excluded sources written before 2006 unless they were focused on issues like feminist research practice or methods. Twitter was

founded in 2006, and I wanted my sources, even those that did not focus explicitly on Twitter as a site of harassment, to at least exist within the context of an online world that included Twitter.

Review of Literature

The Benefits of Women's Representation in Government

Women's underrepresentation in Canadian politics is not new; as outlined in Trimble and Arscott's (2003) book, their research in 1997 showed a persistent "gendered leadership gap" (p. 3) in Canadian politics, one that persists today. Lore (2017) found women are still underrepresented in Canadian politics at both the federal and provincial level. At present, 92 of 334 members of parliament in the House of Commons are women, amounting to 27.2%, excluding the four seats that were vacant at the time of writing (Members of Parliament). As Lore describes, women's representation in provincial houses of government across Canada range from 39% in British Columbia to 9% in Nunavut, though it should be noted there have been several elections and by-elections in Canadian provinces and territories since Lore's work was published, so these figures may not match exactly with current representation.

Women's underrepresentation in Canadian politics and politics globally comes at the cost to the public that government seeks to represent. Much like social media abuse of female politicians, the impacts of women's underrepresentation in government is under-researched. In *Feminism and Politics,* Phillips (1998) makes several compelling arguments about the benefits of having more women in office. She argues representation in political office is an indicator of political participation, therefore a lack of female representatives could indicate a limitation to women's ability to participate in political activities, which represents a violation of rights (p.231). She also posits that women's equivalent participation in government is vital to ensuring representation of women's unique interests, and for the health of democracy overall. In "Ethnic

Diversity, Gender, and National Leaders", Perkins, Phillips, and Pearce (2013) use GDP data from the past 50 years to assess whether there were "some conditions in which women might be more effective leaders than their male counterparts" (p. 85). The authors establish women's underrepresentation in government on a global scale, noting that "less than 5 percent of the national leaders across the 188 countries we examined since the 1950s have been female" (p. 87). The study found that in societies with a high degree of internal ethnic diversity or with recent internal conflicts, female leaders were able to cultivate a higher Gross Domestic Product on average than their male counterparts. While there are several methodological issues with the study, the results to illustrate that women's underrepresentation in government is not just an issue of rights but could also be depriving citizens of receiving certain types of representation.

Online Abuse as a Threat to Women's Participation in Public Life

Having established the importance of women's political participation, we then turn to the question of how to increase women's participation in politics, and in public life more generally. Much of the research on online misogyny identifies it as a threat, a factor that is limiting women's desire to seek office, and in some cases, might be driving women out of office. Krook (2017) identifies political, economic, symbolic, and psychological violence, of which online threats are a part, against female politicians as "a serious threat to democracy and raise[s] questions about the progress that has been made globally toward incorporating women as full political actors" (p.74). The United Nations General Assembly report (2018) goes even further, stating, "the violence targeting women who hold public office and political decision-making positions has a chilling impact on the political ambition of young women, with intergenerational consequences for the full realization of their political rights" (p. 5). This is not just a theoretical threat – the Inter-Parliamentary Union report found that 61.5% of female politicians who had

experienced violence while in office "believed those acts had been intended primarily to dissuade them and their female colleagues from continuing in politics" (p. 6). Additionally, 38.7% of respondents said that the violence "undermined their ability to fulfill their mandates and freely express their opinions" (p.7). The impacts extend beyond the psychological to the physical - Levey (2018) explains in *Sexual Harassment Online: Shaming and Silencing Women in the Digital Age* that "[o]nline harassment is associated with headaches, drug use, social isolation, suicidal thoughts, and diminished school performance and future employment" (p.3). Fox et al. (2017) describe the after-effects of online harassment as rumination, which can lead to depression and withdrawal from social situations (p. 1295).

The chilling impact of abuse on participation is by no means limited to politicians; an Amnesty International (2018) report outlines how abuse "can chill and disrupt the online participation of women journalists, activists, human rights defenders, artists and other public figures and private persons" (p.14). Ultimately, the harassment is meant to assert control over online spaces: who gets to be in them, and how they can participate. As Berdahl (2007) outlines, "gender harassment against women is primarily targeted at those who violate gender ideals" (p. 426), meaning those who stray into traditional male-dominated spaces. The online world, then, compounds the intensity of the violation by female politicians; not only are they transgressing into politics, but they are also entering online spaces that have been traditionally conceptualized as male. Bimber (2000) explains that "some theorists argue that male values have been institutionalized in the technology through its creators, embedding a cultural association with masculine identity in the technology itself" (p.870). Female politicians, therefore, represent a double threat, which makes them a target for harassment. Berdahl explains "men are motivated to derogate women when they experience a threat to their male identity. Women threaten male

identity when they blur distinctions between men and women and thereby challenge […] the status they confer [to] men" (p. 426). In the Guardian's (2016) study of abusive behaviour in their online comments, they founded quantitative evidence suggesting "[a]rticles written by women got more blocked (ie abusive or disruptive) comments across almost all sections. But the more male-dominated [in number of authors] the section, the more blocked comments the women who wrote there got" (para. 15). This finding reaffirms the connection between women's participation in male-dominated fields and the abusive response they receive. Cole (2015) conceptualizes this assertion of control over online spaces using Foucault's theories of disciplinary rhetoric (p. 356). She also notes the important role that 'humour' plays in affirming the culture of online misogyny, stating that the humour excuse "indicates a cultural logic that is normatively biased towards and comfortable with the violent discipline of women to keep them in their perceived place" (p. 357). While common online tools like memes and GIFs can be a site for resistance against abuse (Drakett et al., 2018, p. 111), they can also be tools used for oppression and the reaffirmation of existing norms (p.112). These tools represent a form of "symbolic violence" (Lumsden & Morgan, 2018, p. 122), a language of harassment that many harassers use as a short-hand to form group identity and isolate the target of abuse.

There have been steps taken to counteract the deterring impact of online abuse; Astor (2018) noted that political organizing events for women are beginning to include safety sessions that provide a sense of control and validation (para.17). But this type of solution may not be adequate. As Krook (2017) notes, our current conception of violence and threats as a fact of life for politicians "validates an unfair status quo; places the onus on victims, not structures, to change; and perpetuates inequalities" (p.81). These seminars, while well-intentioned, put the responsibility for dealing with the abuse onto the victim rather than advocating for structural

change. It is common to hear suggestions that women who are concerned with abuse should just log off, thereby avoiding the abuse. But just because the target does not witness threats of violence or sexual assault does not mean there is no reason for concern. Furthermore, women who 'log-off' could be losing opportunities through their diminished ability to participate in public discourse, "cutting themselves off from the information medium" (Megarry, 2014, p. 46). The sign-off solution does nothing to address the problem at the source, and in fact, may deny victims access to tools to address the harassment.

Intersectionality

Much of the literature on the topic of online harassment of women addresses the question of intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw to describe the alienation of women of colour from social movements (Carbado et al., 2014, p. 302). Today, the term is commonly used to refer to the way which holding multiple identities that deviate from the hegemonic norm, like gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or ability, affect the way a person interacts with the world. When it comes to online harassment, holding multiple 'non-normative' identities enhances the frequency and intensity of the abuse. Amnesty International's (2018) report on online harassment found that "[i]n the case of online violence and abuse, women of colour, religious or ethnic minority women, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex women, women with disabilities, or non-binary individuals…will often experience abuse that targets them in [a] unique or compounded way" (p. 19-20). Specific examples of abuse directed at women of colour and those with non-heterosexual sexual orientations abound in the media. In Dunscombe (2018), congressional candidate Cori Bush noted how she was harassed based on her body type and noted that she felt the harassment was different than that experienced by white candidates (para. 36). Webster (2018) interviewed female politicians in the UK, including Scottish Conservative Party Leader Ruth Davidson, who

noted: “particularly when I started there was a lot of homophobic abuse” (para. 10). The compounding effects also plays out in the data. In Dhrodia (2018), she found that Diane Abbott, the first black woman MP in British Parliament, received 45% of all abusive tweets against women MPs included in the study (para. 6). No study of the gendered dimension of online harassment would be complete without considering the unique ways in which other identifying features can influence that abuse, so I attempted to apply an intersectional perspective on questions within my survey, to inquire about how participants feel their background and identity influences the type and quantity of harassment they receive on Twitter.

Networked Misogyny

Many of the sources on online harassment discussed the threat of harassment campaigns, wherein harassers coordinate their efforts to attack an individual or a group, sometimes distributing their personal information. These campaigns are frequently found in the gaming community and are commonly associated with the high-profile ‘Gamergate’ incident in 2014. Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) refer to the phenomenon of coordinated attacks as “networked misogyny” (p. 171) as they sought to explain the complex web of connections and loopholes in legal and regulatory frameworks that allows this type of harassing behaviour to continue with virtually no official resistance. Condis (2018) describes a similar phenomenon in *Gaming Masculinity: Trolls, Fake Geeks, and a Gendered Battle for Online Culture.* While Condis’ work focuses specifically on the behaviour of trolls targeting high-profile women in the video games community, the organizing techniques she describes are like those described by Banet-Weiser and Miltner (p. 97). Women in the video gaming community have adopted a range of strategies to deal with the abuse they experience, some of which mirror some of the options available to female politicians that I will be investigating. Cote (2017) describes the strategies as “leaving

online gaming, avoiding playing with strangers, camouflaging their gender, deploying their skill and experience, or adopting an aggressive persona "(p. 137). The options available to politicians are not dissimilar; including leaving the social network, refusing to interact with anonymous or harassing accounts, attempting to educate or empathize with the abuser, or responding aggressively to the harassment, as well as reporting the abuse to law enforcement or the social network.

Analysis of Literature

Legal and Government Responses

While individual politicians may be able to take steps to address the abuse they receive on Twitter on a day to day basis, the issue of online harassment, particularly targeting women, is widespread, and structural or regulatory changes will likely be required to fully address the issue. Several legal scholars have considered what role the law should play in addressing online harassment, either through regulations for social networks or enhanced accountability for perpetrators of harassment. Citron's (2009) "Cyber Civil Rights" is perhaps the most thorough examination of the legal responsibilities at issue. She makes note of an important point, that regulating the online space inevitably "clashes with libertarian ideology that pervades online communities" (p.66). The defence of online harassment as free speech that should receive priority as a legal right is certainly common. In "Law's Expressive Value in Combating Cyber Gender Harassment", Citron (2009) draws compelling comparisons between the slow response of lawmakers to issues like domestic violence and workplace sexual harassment, and the current reluctance to legislate on issues of speech online (p. 376). She compares the prioritization of free speech over women's safety to the arguments supporting a man's right to govern his own home made in response to charges of domestic violence (p. 394). Her examples provide powerful

evidence suggesting that the reluctance to address cyber-harassment has less to do with free speech and more to do with the trivialization of women's concerns and rights.

Citron is not alone in framing of online abuse and threats of violence as a violation of rights; a recent UN Human Rights Council report (2018) establishes the ability to participate in online activities free from harassment and fear as a key part of gender equality (p. 5). However, there are encouraging signs that governments are beginning to take the issue seriously. The Home Affairs Committee (2017) report on online hate crime offers a scathing review of the failure of the large social media networks to address the issues of harassment, extremism, and hate speech on their platforms (para. 4). The responses from the major social media networks contained within the report show an inability to acknowledge the scope of the problem and a great reluctance to make improvements to address harassment and other toxic online behaviours.

Mental Health Issues and Harassment

One interesting trend in the research on the topic of online harassment was psychiatric research exploring the issue of harassment of politicians coming from those with mental health issues. Every-Palmer, Barry-Walsh, and Pathé (2015) explored the risk posed to New Zealand politicians by "fixated individuals" (p. 635). Their survey findings showed that 60% of New Zealand politicians reported receiving "inappropriate social media contact" (p. 636), and 50% of surveyed Members of Parliament "believed that those responsible for the most memorable harassment had a mental illness" (p. 638). In the Canadian context, the findings of Adams et al. (2009) showed 87% of Canadian politicians believed their harassers were struggling with mental health issues (p. 801), though the Adams et al. study did not include social media harassment. Their methodology for surveying politicians, along with that of Every-Palmer et al. (2015) also closely mirrored my planned approach to survey design and sampling. The question of potential

mental illnesses is an interesting one to consider when contemplating strategies to address online abuse on a case-by-case basis. Both Adams et al. and Every-Palmer asked politicians to report on the mental state of their harassers, which is an imperfect mechanism to collect information. But I feel it may be worth including similar questions in my survey to understand how much of the abuse received politicians attribute to those with mental illnesses, and how the perceived mental health of the harasser may influence a politician's response to the abuse.

Anonymity

One issue with online harassment that recurred in the research was the problem of anonymity in social media harassment. Fox et al. (2015) describe the negative outcomes of anonymity as "toxic disinhibition, which includes negative behaviours such as flaming, trolling, and cyberbullying" and note that toxic disinhibition is a major contributory element to online misogyny writ large (p. 437). Their findings were echoed in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) report on violence against female parliamentarians, where they found "[i]t is easy, if one maintains distance and anonymity, to widely disseminate photographs doctored to carry sexual, defamatory or humiliating connotations" (p.4). The problem of anonymity also makes it difficult for politicians, their staff, or law enforcement to respond effectively to threats and abuse.

Research Gaps

The most glaring gap in the research on gendered online harassment is solutions. The lack of government response to the growing trend of digital abuse means little testing or assessment has been done on the efficacy of different management approaches. On a more micro level, I was not able to find studies illustrating the effectiveness of different responses by victims to the abuse they were receiving. Researchers like Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) have

inquired about the different techniques women use to respond to abuse, but they did not delve into the comparative effectiveness of those strategies. Understanding the strategies that politicians and their communications team use to address abuse is a significant component of my study, so I will have to proceed with little guidance from the literature, but hopefully, my results will be useful in beginning to address this gap in the scholarship.

The other gap not addressed in my review of the literature was more specific. While the Dhrodia (2018) study assessed the quantity of abuse received by a group of UK female politicians, I did not find a quantitative study on online abuse of female politicians in the Canadian context. As was mentioned, the topic has been explicated in the media and public discourse, but as far as I can tell, this study will be the first to quantify the problem in the Canadian context, though my study is largely framed around experiential knowledge rather than quantitative proof.

Survey Design

In addition to reviewing the literature on online harassment and related topics, I also delved into methods literature around survey design to ensure my survey instrument would meet contemporary best practice requirements, and that the choice of a digitally distributed survey was the most appropriate approach to answer my research question. Denscombe's (2010) description of the purposes best aligned with survey research strategies including research that seeks to "measure some aspect of a social phenomenon or trend [and] gather facts in order to test a theory" (p.5). These purposes align closely with my research intention, to understand the prevalence of online harassment for Canadian female politicians and to understand their experiences of the issue from a firsthand perspective. Online survey research also has the benefit of meeting two of Denscombe's feasibility criteria for research approaches, those of access to

data sources and meeting time constraints, as female elected officials are all accessible over email, and the online survey mechanism allows the respondents to complete the survey at their convenience rather than being tied to the schedule of the researcher (p. 6). As described in Bradburn et al. (2004), the downfall of this type of research is that "these types of surveys are not considered scientific, [but] some broad generalizations can be made about them" (p. 303).

In terms of the design of the survey itself, Van Selm and Jankowski (2006) suggest that in designing survey questions, "a number of principles, such as simplicity, cultural independence, completeness, relevance and neutrality" (p. 441) should be considered by the researcher in designing the questions. In terms of the physical layout of the survey itself, Peytchev et al.'s (2006) study of paging versus scrolling as a survey design feature found that there was no significant difference in survey completion rates based on the physical structure of the survey (p. 599) and that there was not a significant difference in the amount of time respondents took to complete a survey between paging and scrolling formats (p.604). However, they did find that scrolling fatigue was more noticeable in the responses to the scrolling survey, as respondents put less effort into each subsequent question over the course of the survey (p.602). This suggests that a balance of paging and scrolling in survey design would be appropriate, with a slight emphasis on separating questions into different pages to give respondents a sense of progress and satisfaction as they work through their survey. I attempted to mirror this guidance in the design of my survey by dividing the questions into multiple sections, and sub-dividing within some sections based on skip logic questions.

Summary of Literature

To understand the issue of online harassment of female politicians, I adopted a triangulation strategy as recommended in Jankowski and Wester (2015, p.62), examining

different facets of the issue of online harassment to contextualize my research within that space. While I also looked for research that challenged my supposition about online harassment and its impact, I intentionally sought out research that was informed by a feminist and intersectional perspective, as this theoretical mindset is fundamental to my research approach and beliefs. By examining online abuse overall, online harassment targeting women in general and specifically in video game communities, institutional responses to online harassment, online abuse of politicians, real world abuse of female politicians, and the motivations for and consequences of online abuse, I have developed a framework in which to situate my research of online harassment targeting Canadian female politicians. The literature review demonstrates that online harassment is a real and persistent issue, one that is fueled by features that are somewhat unique to the online space, including anonymity, capacity for quick and effective mobbing behaviour, unaddressed mental health challenges and relatively weak government and regulatory frameworks to address the problem. In reviewing the literature on online harassment and particularly harassment targeting women in high-profile positions, it's clear more research is needed to understand the problem within the Canadian context and with the specific population of female elected officials. This is the research gap that I hope to have begun to address through this study by using an online survey to experience about female politician's experiences of harassment on Twitter and the strategies they have adopted to cope with harassment they may be receiving. By utilizing a survey strategy, I aimed to gather responses from a demographically and geographically diverse group of female Canadian politicians.

Research Design and Methodology

Psychological abuse through social media is an emerging form of violence being used to suppress women in the public sphere, particularly in politics. While international studies and journalists are beginning to observe the phenomenon (Astor, 2018; Dhrodia, 2018; Dunscombe, 2018; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016), there is limited research examining Twitter harassment of elected women in the Canadian context. Little is known about how women in public positions choose to deal with the harassment, the quantity of abuse they receive, or whether it impacts their ability to perform or willingness to continue in public office. This study sought to understand how Canadian female politicians experience Twitter harassment, and what strategies they have developed to cope with the abuse. Using an online questionnaire, I surveyed all federal, provincial and territorial female politicians within Canada, including both quantitative and qualitative questions about their experience of harassment on Twitter. Informed by a feminist and intersectional research perspective, I also sought to gather information about how women of colour and members of the LGTBQ community may experience Twitter abuse differently from their colleagues. In this chapter, I will explain the design of the study, its participants, the details of the questionnaire instrument, my study procedures, and finally my analysis of the data.

Design and Setting

This study used a survey strategy to inquire about the subjects' experiences of harassment on Twitter and gather data to establish the existence of Twitter harassment among this subject population. Through the survey, I aimed to quantify the volume of various types of abuse female politicians receive, understand their management and coping approaches to dealing with the abuse, and inquire whether certain features of their identity may make them more vulnerable. I used SurveyMonkey, a subscription-based online survey management tool. Participants received

an email with a link to the questionnaire, which took them to the questionnaire page hosted on the SurveyMonkey site to complete the questionnaire. The program collected responses to the forced-order questionnaire through the SurveyMonkey results tool.

A survey strategy was a good match for this study because it allowed me to reach out to every member of the sample group to understand their experiences. The online survey instrument itself was also useful for this specific sample population, who are spread over a large area and have scheduling constraints that could make interviews or focus group studies unmanageable; as Denscombe points out, surveys are appropriate "when used with *large numbers* of respondents in many locations...[and] when the respondents can be expected to be *able to read and understand* the questions" (2010, p. 156). Given the relative lack of research with this subject group, my study largely focused on gathering basic data about the experiences of female politicians. A focus group environment could certainly yield interesting results, but as Acocella notes, "the heuristic value of [focus groups] lies in the kind of interaction that emerges during the debate" (2012, p. 1126), rather than providing more basic quantitative data. Similarly, interviews or case studies would have yielded valuable information and would have allowed a depth of follow up that the survey instrument will not attain. But given the diversity and geographical distribution of this research population, and the lack of foundational quantitative research about online harassment with this population, the survey remained the best strategy for establishing foundational data in this area, data which I hope can prove useful to future researchers who may want to delve further into this fertile and relatively untapped area of study.

Participants

The target subjects for the study are all female-identifying politicians holding office at the federal, provincial, or territorial level across Canada. There were 339 women who fit this

requirement at the date of distribution for the survey. I identified the women in the sample frame using government web pages that provide complete listings of all the elected officials in each legislature, house of assembly and in parliament, and I also drew their contact emails from those pages. The reference sites are listed in Appendix 3. Municipal elected officials were not included in the survey sample. While I am certain many municipal politicians would have interesting insights on this topic, I chose to exclude municipal elected officials for three central reasons. First, feasibility – based on Kemper et al.'s (2003) description of the characteristics of good sampling techniques, the feasibility of a sampling plan should be a central consideration (p. 276). I did not feel it would be feasible for me as a research to identify all municipal elected officials, maintain an updated database of their information, and manage what could have amounted to many hundreds of possible responses. Second, building on the issue of feasibility, I was unsure how I would approach determining eligibility criteria for municipal elected officials, such as considering major metropolitan centers or including rural municipalities. Municipal politicians in different locations have radically different public interest and exposure on social media – a reeve in small-town Saskatchewan may have an experience that is not at all comparable to that of a city Councillor in Toronto. I felt surveying women at the provincial, territorial, and federal level was a fairer and more comparable standard, for while the respondents may face different levels of public scrutiny, they are comparable by holding relatively similar positions and representing roughly comparable populations in terms of number of constituents. Lastly, I felt that the 339-member sample frame of female elected officials at provincial, territorial, and federal levels could be enough to generate a significant enough quantity of respondents to allow for comparison and study based on the responses. By oversampling and including municipal politicians, I could have increased the number of responses to the survey and the statistical

significance of the findings, but some methods literature (Bartlett et al, 2001) recommends against oversampling for the sake of data collection, particularly when it could create challenges to the validity of the data (p.46).

In advance of distributing the questionnaire, I monitored any resignations or elections on the provincial, territorial, or federal level to ensure the participants are current officeholders. An election took place during the survey period in Newfoundland and Labrador. In that case, I included any questionnaire responses received from any former office-holder up until the closing of the collection period. While female office-holders were the intended respondents, I am also sympathetic to the time constraints these subjects experience. My anecdotal experience working in the political field is that many politicians are either not directly managing the day-to-day of their own social media accounts or are co-managing those accounts with communications staff. As such, communications staff may be more well-placed to respond to the questionnaire than the politicians themselves, as they may have a clearer idea of how much abuse is being received and the techniques they are using to manage the abuse on an on-going basis. I made clear in the distributed information letter that either the politician or their communication staff may respond, so long as those staff are involved in the day-to-day operation of the politician's Twitter account. All participants needed to provide consent to have their data included in the study prior in a final question at the end of the survey. Information collected was only available to the lead researcher and supervisor. The raw data did not include names, but there were cases where the participants identified themselves directly or indirectly in their written responses, or via email in response to the invitation, but this data has been redacted from the results. In some cases, there were some provinces where there were few women in office, so responses about length of service, political party or ministerial service made it possible to infer the identity of the respondent based on their

response. However, the individualized data has been kept confidential, and the results of the data analysis have been anonymized.

Adams et al. (2009) used a written questionnaire to survey Canadian federal and provincial politicians of all genders on their perceptions of the mental state of their harassers. They had "an overall response rate of 50.3%" of politicians, within which 9% of the respondents declined to participate (p. 805). My study differs from Adams et al. in terms of the subject matter and the size of the potential respondent pool, but I had hoped to obtain similar response rates in this study, given that the focus on Canadian politicians was consistent across both studies. To establish statistical significance within the population of 339 potential respondents, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 10%, I hoped to obtain 76 or more responses to establish the significance of the quantitative data. As discussed in the analysis section, my response rate did not meet this threshold.

Several factors could have negatively influenced responses rates to the survey, including survey fatigue and time constraints, particularly among a population with many commitments like politicians. Smith (2008) also identified that there are several demographic factors which may depress response rates among certain groups, as "younger people are more likely to participate than older people […] and white people are more likely to participate than non-white people" (p.3). However, Smith also notes some factors which may have positively affected the response rate, including that women are more likely to respond to survey research than men, and that relevance of topic is an important factor to survey participation (p.3); given that the survey was specifically crafted to address the target population rather than being broad-based, this may have assisted in boosting the response rate.

I also considered conducting a comparator study between male and female politicians to understand how their experiences of online abuse differ, but I felt that focusing on female politicians exclusively was consistent with my feminist research ethic. McHugh and Cosgrove affirm this general approach in their chapter on feminist research methods, noting that the feminist researcher must "listen more carefully to how women describe their experiences" (2004, p. 160). The central goal of this study is better served by giving exclusive examination and attention to women's voices and experiences. This focus on respondents' experiences rather than quantitative data also helped to temper the impact of receiving insufficient survey responses to meet the standard for statistical significance.

Instrument

For this study, I used an online questionnaire, hosted on SurveyMonkey and distributed via email to the parliamentary or ministerial email accounts of the subjects. The email invitation to the survey was preceded by an invitation email describing the research purpose that included information about my research supervisor and the confidentiality of the survey. There were roughly thirty questions total, both quantitative and qualitative, separated into seven categories: demographic information, political affiliation, Twitter use, your experience of Twitter abuse, responding to abusive comments, political issues and Twitter abuse, and Twitter abuse and identity. The demographic section established the key identity features of the respondents, the basis upon which the responses in other sections of the survey can be compared. The short political affiliation section also provided sorting responses that helped to illustrate similarities and differences in the sample frame based on political alignment. The section on Twitter use sorted participants based on their use of Twitter and established the frequency of use of the platform, among other things, which further helped to create subgroups within the respondents

for comparison. Both subsequent sections, your experience of Twitter abuse and responding to abusive comments allowed the respondents to provide more specific information about the types of abusive comments they receive and how they choose to respond, factors that are critical to understanding the unique experiences of online harassment among the respondents. Through the sections on political issues and identity, I sought to understand how certain behaviours or identities online might exacerbate the experience of online abuse – the Twitter abuse and identity section was particularly important to understanding the intersectional dimension of Twitter abuse. Appendix 1 includes a full listing of the questions. In testing, the survey took around 15 minutes to complete. Most of the questions are multiple-choice, interspersed with yes/no option questions and written responses. All the questions provided nominal data to produce an average of responses in the analysis phase.

There are a few pitfalls to the use of questionnaires, particularly when distributed over email. As Sims points out, online questionnaires are easy to distribute to a wide range of subjects, but "due to the impersonal nature of an Internet inquiry, result in a lower response rate than mailed surveys" (2019, p. 9-10). However, nonresponse is an issue in all survey forms (Couper, 2008, p. 2), and given the digitally-based subject matter for this study, I believe an online tool is fitting in this case. Additionally, the online questionnaire model allows for the use of skip logics and other features that can garner more specific answers and avoid in-survey fatigue among respondents. For example, one of the central questions asked respondents to select from a list of types of online abuse to choose the types of behaviours they have experienced during their time in elected office. Using a skip logic mechanism, the questionnaire was structured so they received a follow-up question asking how they have responded to that specific type of abuse, what their objective was when responding to the abuse in that manner, and how effective they believe their

intervention was in generating their intended outcomes. The skip logic mechanism allowed a respondent to answer these questions for each of the types of harassment they have experienced while allowing them to skip over questions about the types of behaviour they did not select initially.

Procedures

An email was sent on May 10, 2019, to all 339 potential respondents introducing the principal investigator and the intention of the research project and providing a link to the survey. Any errors or inactive email addresses were identified and amended following this initial email. Due to a misunderstanding on the part of the principal investigator, the initial introduction email that had been intended for distribution including a letter of from the supervising professor was not sent out one week before the distribution of the survey as planned. The survey was distributed to all provincial, territorial, and federal female elected officials over email using their public email addresses, listed in Appendix 3. Responses from completed questionnaires were automatically returned to the researcher through SurveyMonkey for eight weeks, starting on May 10, 2019, with a reminder email going out to those who have not completed the survey or had not responded to decline on June 3, 2019. The letter of introduction from the supervising professor was attached to the reminder email to ameliorate the earlier error. The survey closed for submissions on June 14, 2019. This timeframe was selected to accommodate the busy schedules of the sample population. As Denscombe points out, the web-based questionnaire has the advantage of being easy to use for respondents, so five weeks seemed adequate time for response (2010, p.159).

I anticipated that the forthcoming federal elections and various provincial elections occurring around that time would pose some threat to my ability to elicit responses from

participants. This risk was difficult to account for since it is often unclear when the election period will begin in each jurisdiction. This challenge was part of the impetus behind the decision to open the study up to both elected officials and their communications staff, in hopes that would increase the likelihood of response. An election had taken place some weeks before the May 10 distribution date in Alberta, and a week prior in Prince Edward Island – I amended the email distribution list in both cases in advance of the distribution of the survey to reflect the outcomes of the election. An election took place in Newfoundland and Labrador during the prior of the survey.

Analysis of Data

Once the questionnaire was closed, the data was downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Yes/No questions were coded by assigning each variable a numerical value to illustrate the mode; a similar structure was used to analyze the multiple-choice responses as quantitative data. Various groups were cross-tabulated within the respondent data to examine provincial trends, patterns in political affiliation or role, and patterns based on other collected demographic data, as recommended in Norman Blaikie's work on quantitative data analysis (2003, p. 91). This allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how different groups of women within Canadian politics are experiencing harassment on Twitter, while also providing data on the group. The qualitative data were coded through content analysis to look for recurring themes and phrases, which was coded numerically to demonstrate associations in responses, and portions were also extracted by the researcher to provide context to the quantitative findings.

One validity concern stemming from my broader sampling approach that may have played out in the data is sample bias. As Wetcher-Hendricks points out, a biased sample "may provide data that describe[s] only a portion of the population" (2011, p. 108). While I distributed

the questionnaire to every member of the study population, those who responded may not be fully reflective of the group, and the resulting bias could affect the data. It is possible, for example, that those subjects with more computer literacy were more likely to respond, and their experience of Twitter abuse could be quite different from those with more limited computer skills. I attempted to address this specific validity concern and the time constraints of the subjects by extending the invitation to staff to respond on behalf of the politician they work for, as staff often have higher digital literacy; but this measure may not have been sufficient to address this validity concern, and I was not able to test for that factor on the basis of nonresponse. Because of this validity concern, the presentation of definite associations or even no associations between variables, such as race and quantity of Twitter abuse were made cautiously, and with the caveat that this sample cannot be projected as representative of the entire population. The sample size of just over 300 individuals, while representing all the female provincial and federal politicians in Canada, cannot be made to stand in for female politicians worldwide. Given the scope of this project and the focus on experience over quantitative proof of the phenomenon, I believe the sample size was appropriate and the analysis techniques were suitable to the subject and the goals. I have endeavoured to account for these challenges to validity in the presentation of the data, as I have taken care to avoid extrapolating or overstating the conclusions one can draw from the results.

One concern I had was with the qualitative portion of the data. Offering written responses to certain questions was necessary to meet the experiential focus of the study, and to provide what Castro et al. refer to as “a fully contextualized approach” (2010, p.343) to understanding participant experiences. However, there was more potential for misunderstandings in open-ended questions, and some participants could have chosen not to provide thorough responses to the

quantitative portions. Because there were a small number of qualitative questions on the questionnaire, I was concerned that there would not be enough responses, or the responses would be too brief to provide enough data for content analysis. Because of the questionnaire instrument and the scope of the project, there will be no opportunity for follow-up probing questions to qualitative responses, which would "generate a more complete response from which to construct sound thematic categories" (Castro et al., 2010, p. 356). Castro et al. theorize that the only way to resolve this issue is through further study "to ascertain the overall validity of newly constructed thematic variables and whether these thematic variables would be replicated in a second sample that is drawn from the same subcultural group or population" (2010, p. 356). The authors also suggest that triangulation with quantitative data can help to address validity issues where insufficient qualitative data is collected (2010, p. 356). By cross-comparing the quantitative, demographic questions with the qualitative responses, I hoped to accomplish the recommended triangulation within my limited respondent pool. Ideally, the outcomes of this study will provide helpful foundational research for others who may want to further delve into the issue, both to verify the findings of this study and expand on the findings to investigate policy or regulatory solutions for online harassment.

Summary of Research Design and Methodology

Using an online questionnaire, I sought to understand Canadian female politicians' experiences of abuse on Twitter and the strategies they have developed with their staff to manage the abuse they may be receiving. Every federal, provincial, and territorial female elected official as included in my sample, though their communications staff were also be allowed to respond in their stead. While online questionnaires have several weaknesses, including remoteness and an inability to probe responses, given the geographic distribution of the subjects and the topic under

study, an online questionnaire is the most effective tool for establishing foundational data. The results were anonymized, which hopefully allowed participants the freedom to relate their experiences openly without fear of identification. The questionnaire utilized mostly closed-ended quantitative questions, interspersed with a few open-ended qualitative inquiries. The data gathered allowed me to compare quantity and type of abuse receive and responses to that abuse based on location, political role, party affiliation, race, sexual orientation, length of time in office, Twitter following, and political engagement. Given the small sample size and the limitations of the study, the conclusions from this research have limited scope, but serve an important purpose in establishing foundational data for future work and illustrating problem that Twitter abuse presents for the subject population. While I received a smaller set of responses than I had anticipated, the responses provided valuable insights into the experience of receiving Twitter harassment and affirmed one of the central suppositions of my research – that online harassment is having a negative effect on women's political participation.

Findings and Discussion

Online interaction with constituents has become the expectation for elected officials, but while there may be benefits to engaging with voters through social media, it can also come at a cost for elected officials. This is particularly true for women and people with intersectional identities, who may be targeted based on their 'minority' identity in addition to their position as an elected official. While the problem of online harassment of female politicians is well acknowledged in public discourse and journalism in Canada, there is little research to support the presence of the issue or to explore how female elected officials are coping with the abuse they may be receiving. In this study, I used an online survey, administered through Survey Monkey, to inquire about the online experiences of current female elected officials in federal, provincial, and territorial governments across Canada. I sought to understand how much harassment they feel they are experiencing, what types of harassment they receive, and how they cope with the abusive behaviour.

Research Question

How do Canadian female politicians experience Twitter harassment, and what strategies have they developed to cope with the abuse?

The research survey was distributed to every female elected official in federal, provincial or territorial office across Canada using their publicly available email addresses. It contained 36 close- and open-ended questions in a forced order, though the total length of the survey depended on the responses of the participants. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, the responses were collected without any personal identifying details, and open-ended responses were redacted to maintain anonymity in cases where potentially identifiable disclosures were made. Female elected officials were the intended respondents, but having worked in politics for some time, I

understand the unique time constraints that politicians face. To be more accommodating, I made clear in the invitation letter that their staff could also fill out the survey on their behalf if the staff member was familiar with the day-to-day operation of the elected official's Twitter account.

In this chapter, I will explore and analyze the 42 responses I received to the survey, beginning with a presentation of both the quantitative and qualitative data that was collected. The presentation is broken out into sections that mirror the sections of the survey. For this section, I have selected the data visualizations that I felt were most illustrative of key concepts and findings, but a complete set of tables for all survey questions and the redacted open responses can be found in Appendix 4 for reference. Following the presentation, I have detailed the methods I used to analyze the data and identify the key reliability and validity concerns with the data, including self-selection bias in the survey and issues of underrepresentation in the respondent sample. The subsequent analysis section once again roughly follows the order of the survey questions, pulling together comparator questions to draw conclusions using cross-tabulation and sub-group comparisons, and content analysis for the open-ended responses. In this section, I've also endeavoured to situate my findings within the wider body of research on the topic of online harassment of women and specifically politicians to understand where my findings may agree or disagree with prevailing thought in the scholarship.

Data Presentation

The link to the survey was shared with 339 potential respondents who fit the criteria of being currently elected provincial, territorial, or federal level female politicians within Canada. A total of 48 survey responses were received, generating a response rate of 14%. There's a degree of variability in expectations for survey response rates in the academic literature, but according to Nulty (2008), academic online survey response rates vary between 47% and 20% (p.303), so

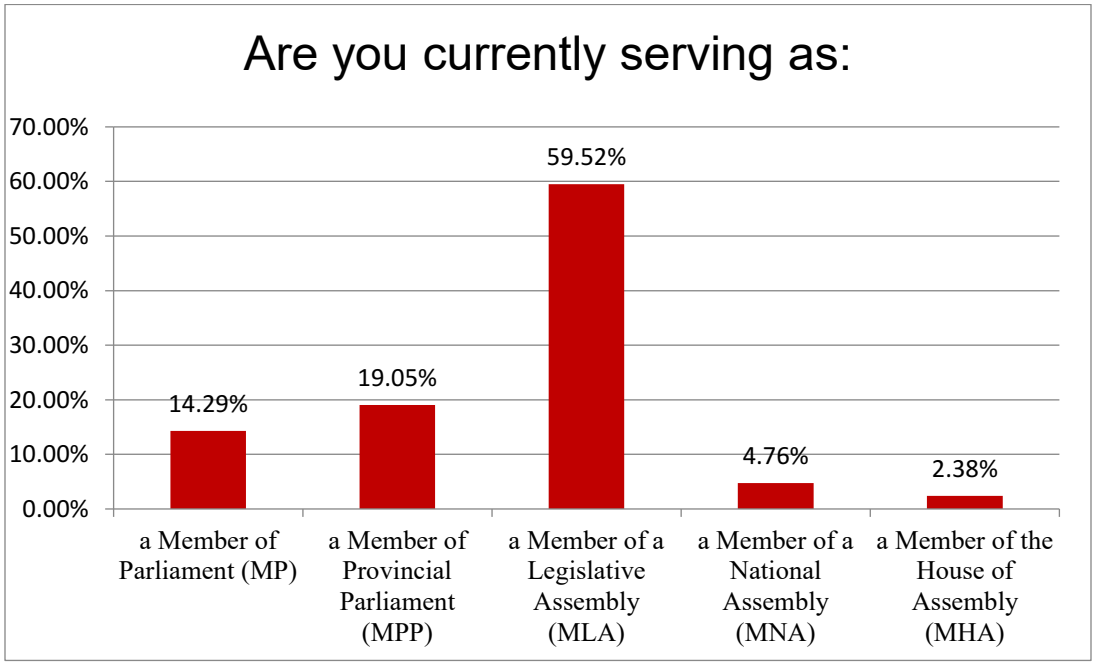
clearly the rate of response received in this study is below what is generally expected. Of the 48 responses, two respondents withdrew consent in the final question of the survey, so their responses have been deleted from the data set and were not be considered as a part of the presentation or analysis. Four respondents did not complete the survey and therefore did not provide final consent for their responses to be included, so their partial responses have also been withdrawn from the presentation and analysis. In total, 42 usable responses were collected, a response rate of 12.4% out of the sample frame.

Demographic Questions

54.76% of respondents identified they were responding to the survey on their own behalf, and the other 45.24% were staff responding on behalf of the elected official. This result provides support for the decision to open the survey up to the staff of elected officials, as without their responses, the results to the survey would have been more limited in number and therefore less significant. 92.86% of respondents identified their preferred language of communication for work as English, while 7.14% selected French. This result is expected given the bulk of potential respondents work in majority English speaking provinces and territories, but the fact that the survey was offered exclusively in English likely also reduced the number of French-language respondents who chose to participate. Respondents were asked to identify the role they play in the government in which they serve (Figure 1.) Over half of the respondents identified as Members of a Legislative Assembly. This represents an overrepresentation of MLAs in the data set, given that MLAs represent 41% of the population to whom the survey was distributed. 14.29% of respondents were federal MPs – this is an underrepresentation of the total population within the data set, which is 26%. The lack of a French-language survey may have negatively affected the response rate at the federal level, and the fact that 2019 is a federal election year

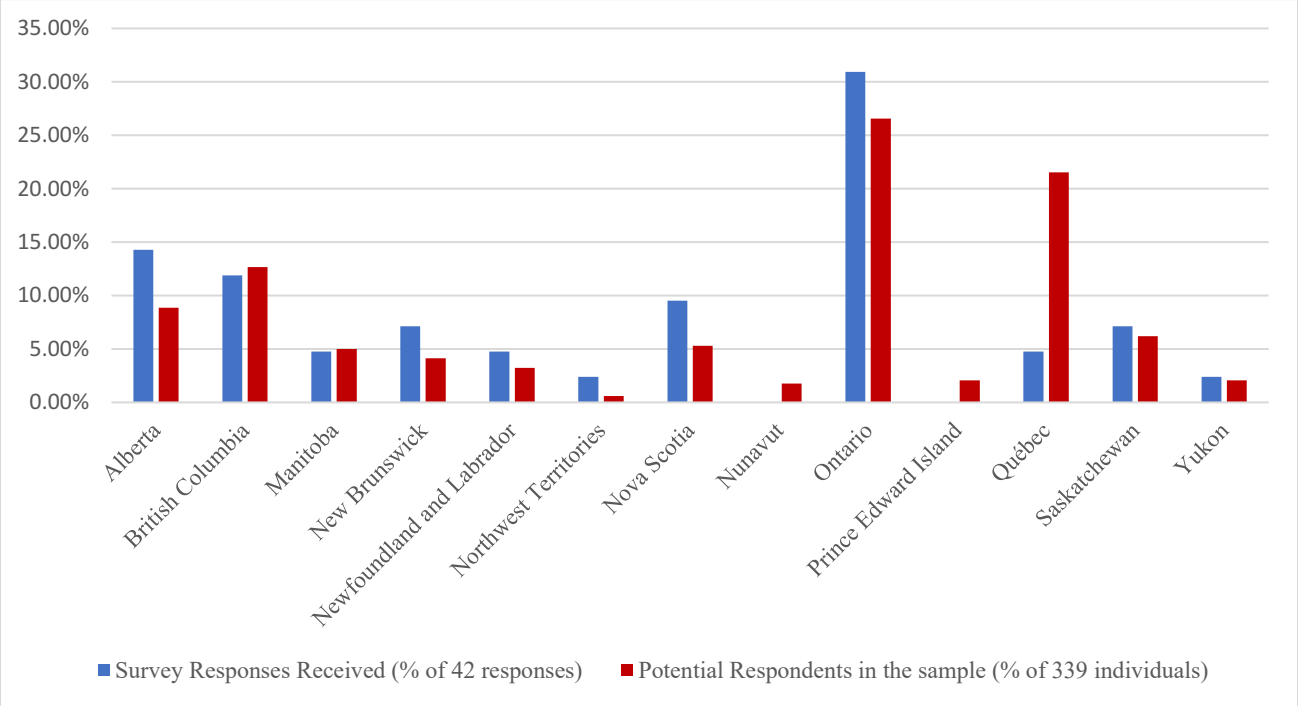
may also have had an influence, as elected officials and their staffs are generally busier between sessions of the House, constituency work and preparing for the campaign.

Figure 1. Position held



The inquiry about the province or territory the elected official represents, illustrated in Figure 2, showed there were no respondents from Nunavut or Prince Edward Island. The results from Prince Edward Island are not surprising, given that a provincial election took place immediately before the distribution of the survey, so new and returning MLAs and their staffs were busy or were still in the process of setting up their offices. Figure 2 also illustrates the representativeness of the respondents relative to the number of elected officials per province in the sample frame.

Fig 2. Survey Responses Received and Proportion of Potential Respondents by Province



The average length of service for respondents was 5.69 years of service in elected office. 59.52% of respondents were not currently or had not served as a member of Cabinet in any government role, while 40.48% had served in cabinet at some point. Most respondents, 45.24%, were between 50-64 years of age, followed by 38.10% in the 35-49 years segment, 11.90% between ages 25-34, and 2.38% in the 18-24 and 65+ brackets respectively. 9 respondents, 21.43%, identified themselves as persons of colour or as a member of a minority ethnic group, while 78.57% indicated they were not a part of that group. 4.76% of respondents indicated that they identified openly as a member of the LGTBQ+ community.

Political Affiliation

Most respondents, 95.24%, were members of a political party, while the remaining 4.76% indicated that they were not members or preferred not to answer. Of those who identified as members of a political party, 36.59% of respondents felt their party of membership was on the

left of the political spectrum, 29.27% on the centre-right, 19.51% on the centre-left, 7.32% in the centre, and 7.32% were unsure. In the following question, respondents were asked to assess their own political identity independent from their party of membership. 38.10% of respondents felt they were on the left, 21.43% were centre left, 19.05% were centre right, 11.90% were centre, 7.14% were unsure, and 2.38% were on the right.

Twitter Use

41 respondents, 97.62%, indicated that they do have a public-facing Twitter account, while just one respondent indicated that they do not have a public-facing Twitter account that they use in their political role. When asked why she did not use Twitter in her political role, the respondent wrote "It's a very negative forum" and indicated in the following question that concern about online harassment played a part in her decision not to use Twitter for political activities.

Most respondents, 65.85%, tweet or retweet content on their public-facing Twitter account more than once per day, while 21.95% tweet or retweet on average once per day, 2.44% do so monthly, and 9.76% tweet or retweet less than once per month. 53.66% of elected officials were most often managing their own Twitter account on a day to day basis, while 39.02% had members of staff managing the account. 4.88% had an equal-parts mixture of both managing the account, and one respondent, 2.44%, was unsure. Respondents had an average of 9,757 Twitter followers, with a mode of 3,500.

Your Experience of Abuse on Twitter

Before inquiring about their experiences of Twitter harassment, it was important to establish what kind of behaviours the respondents judged to be abusive on Twitter. Respondents

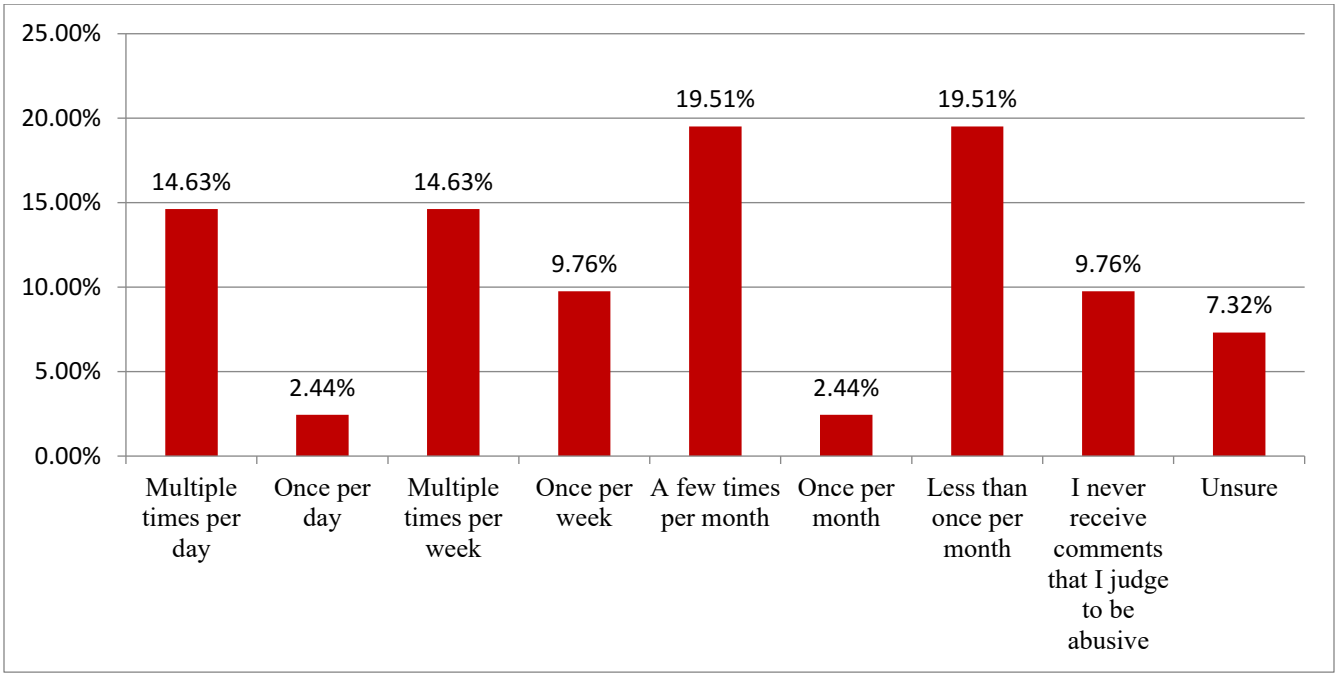
were asked to select from the following types of comments to identify which they agreed were abusive; they could also provide alternative responses:

a. threats of violence or sexual violence
b. threats against your family or staff
c. sexually suggestive or explicit comments
d. comments that include hate speech, including racial, ableist, or anti-LGTBQ+ slurs
e. comments deriding your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your gender, race, sexual orientation, or other features of your identity
f. comments deriding your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include expletives
g. negatives comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official
h. Other (please specify):

90.24% agreed that comments that included hate speech were abusive while 87.80% found comments about their work or capabilities that mentioned their physical appearance to be abusive. 80.49% identified sexually suggestive or explicit comments as potentially abusive, and 78.05% agreed that threats of violence or sexual violence, threats against family or staff, and comments about the work and capabilities of the elected official that included mention of her gender, race, sexual orientation or other identity features could be considered abusive. Comments about their work and capabilities that included expletives were determined to be potentially abusive by 68.29% of respondents, while 41.46% felt negative comments about their work and/or capabilities as an elected official could be abusive. Four respondents provided responses in the Other category, which included negative comments regarding age/experience, name-calling, accusations of criminality, and comments deriding an elected official's abilities as a parent.

In terms of frequency of abusive comments, Figure 3 illustrates the frequency with which respondents reported receiving abusive comments.

Figure 3: Frequency of Receiving Abusive Tweets



The most common type of abusive comments received on Twitter were negative comments about their work and/or capabilities as an elected official, which 78.05% of the respondents had received. Figure 4 illustrates the responses identifying the types of comments received:

Figure 4: Types of Comments Received

Type of Comment	Percentage Received	Number of Responses
Threats of violence or sexual violence	29.27%	12
Threats against your family or staff	21.95%	9
Sexually suggestive or explicit comments	48.78%	20
Comments that include hate speech, including racist, ableist, or anti-LGTBQ+ slurs	53.66%	22
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your physical appearance	60.98%	25

Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your gender, race, sexual orientation, or other features of your identity	65.85%	27
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include expletives	68.29%	28
Negative comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official	78.05%	32
I cannot remember receiving any abusive comments on Twitter since I entered public life	12.20%	5
Other (please specify)	9.76%	4

Responding to Abusive Comments

When asked about actions taken in response to abusive comments, most respondents reported that they followed some variation of muting, ignoring or blocking. Some respondents noted that they would only block under extreme cases. 32 of the responses included some mention of muting, blocking, or ignoring the comments. Three respondents indicated that they would respond to the content to contradict the comment, and another three indicated that they would provide an official response to the comment. Five respondents noted that they generally reported abusive comments to Twitter when they deemed it necessary, particularly if the comments were threatening. One respondent said she would sometimes call people out on their bad behaviour, and another respondent noted that she did not block abusive commenters because she wanted to maintain access to a record of what users have said. Finally, one respondent outlined that their office has created an Online Community Guidelines policy that they share with the public that outlines the responses they may take to abusive behaviour. The reasons reported for respondents'

actions were largely to promote civility amongst followers (50%) and to discourage the specific commenter from continuing the behaviour (52.78%). Other reported motivations included wanting to avoid seeing the comment (41.67%), protecting oneself from psychological harm (33.33%), and protecting family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm (33.33%), as well as drawing attention to the commenter's problematic behaviour (16.67%) and protecting oneself from possible physical harm (8.33%). Several respondents provided alternative responses (16.67%) outlining their motivations, including not wanting to draw attention to the comment or commenter, not wanting to 'feed the trolls', and time management. One comment noted that the elected official was concerned about the perception that she might be stifling debate through her actions.

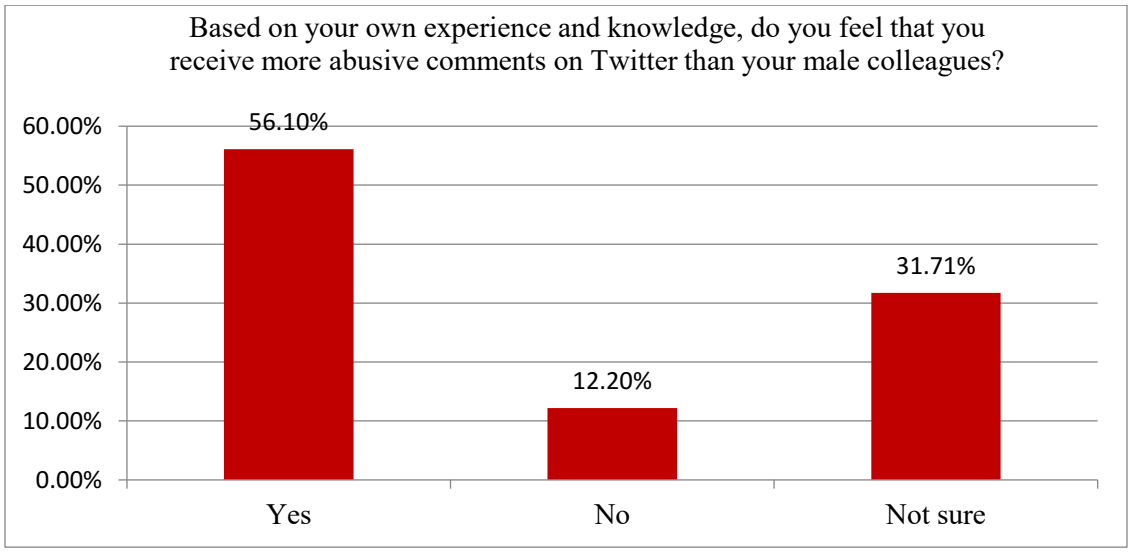
Political Issues and Twitter Abuse

Through this section of the survey, I sought to understand how tweeting about certain political topics might influence the way an elected official experienced harassment on Twitter. 78.05% of respondents felt certain political topics do draw out more harassing comments, while 14.63% disagreed and 7.32% were unsure. The most contentious topic appears to be social justice issues, those pertaining to women, racial minority, LGTBQ+ communities or other minority communities), which was selected by 60.98% of respondents. 36.59% felt environment/resource development discussions also drew out more abuse, and another 31.71% found immigration to be a topic that elicited abusive behaviour. Two respondents noted in the 'Other' section that discussions of cyberbullying or online harassment themselves often attracted abusive commenters.

Twitter Abuse and Identity

As shown in Figure 5, most respondents, 56.10%, felt that they received more abusive comments on Twitter than their male colleagues, while 12.20% disagreed and 31.71% were unsure. This question and the subsequent questions about comparative experiences of Twitter asks respondents to speak from their own frame of reference instead of requiring them to be a subject matter expert, so a higher than average volume of 'not sure' responses is not unexpected.

Figure 5. Perceptions of abuse compared to male colleagues

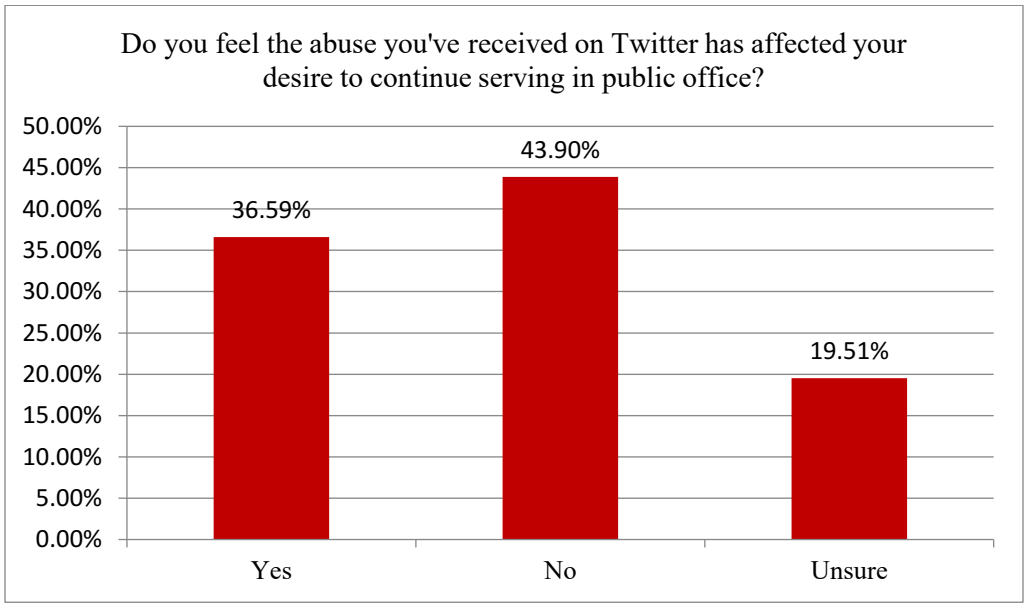


66.67% believe that they experience more harassment than their male colleagues at least in part because of their gender, while 2.78% disagreed and 30.56% were unsure. 46.34% of respondents believe members of the LGTBQ+ community received more Twitter abuse from their colleagues, while 48.78% were unsure and 4.88% did not feel members of the community received more abuse. More respondents were confident that elected officials who are people of colour or members of a visible minority ethnic or religious group received more abuse on Twitter, with 60.98% agreeing, 12.20% disagreeing and 26.83% unsure.

Twitter Abuse and Job Interference

When asked whether the abuse they have received on social media has interfered with their ability to do their job, most respondents (60.98%) felt that it had not, while 19.51% felt it had and 19.51% were unsure. In the written responses, four respondents indicated they felt the abuse they received had made them more cautious to share their views or post about their activities. Several respondents indicated that the abuse had caused personal stress, including anxiety and depression, and one respondent commented that the abuse she received on social media had made it difficult for her to communicate as openly with the public as she might have wanted to. One respondent noted that she felt pressure to maintain a certain image online and to engage with constituents, despite the abuse. 43.75% of respondents who felt social media had interfered with their ability to do their job felt that Twitter had a slight role in that interference compared to other social media, while 18.75% felt it was moderately significant, 12.50% felt it was very significant, and 12.50% felt it was extremely significant.

Figure 6. The Effect of Twitter Abuse on Desire to Serve



More than a third of respondents, 36.59%, felt that the abuse they received on Twitter has affected their desire to continue serving in public office, as shown in Figure 6. 43.90% felt it had not adversely affected their desire to serve, while 19.51% were unsure. One respondent noted in the written comments that Twitter abuse had affected her desire to run by solidifying her decision to run again, implying that the abuse had strengthened her resolve to make change in her community. Another commenter noted that while she did not feel the abuse had discouraged her political ambitions, she did feel that it was dissuading new potential candidates from seeking office.

To close the survey, respondents were asked to provide closing thoughts on their experience of using Twitter as a public figure. 24 responses were received. Two respondents spoke positively about the opportunity Twitter has given them to connect with their constituents, and one respondent noted that she felt Facebook was more of a concern for abusive behaviour, though she did note that the moderation on Facebook has been more responsive in her experience. Two respondents suggested that more moderation on Twitter would help to address the issues, and two other respondents suggested that people should be required to use their real names on Twitter as opposed to creating anonymous accounts. Two respondents also noted that they felt more of the abuse they received came from male commenters. One respondent included this quote: “Falsehood flies, and the truth comes limping after it”, and another respondent echoed the sentiment, indicating that she felt that misinformation and outright falsehoods were difficult to correct or recover from on social media. One respondent noted that she feared Twitter harassment could lead to the incitement of violence.

Data Analysis

Analysis Method

For the evaluation of survey responses, I used different techniques to address the qualitative and quantitative data. For the qualitative data, I relied on "inductive content analysis" (Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 94) to code the responses into categories based on the prevailing themes found within the responses. I counted the responses in each category and have used those as an approximate representation of the collective views of the respondents. Quantitative data was processed initially through the SurveyMonkey data management tool, which provided both the number of responses in each category and the percentage of the sample frame for each response to each question. I subsequently analyzed the individual responses through Excel to cross-tabulate the answers to specific questions to examine correlations and patterns within the data set.

Reliability and Validity Concerns

More women on the left of the political spectrum responded to the survey, according to both their party of membership in question 11 and their own political affiliation in question 12. Abuse on social media is often structured as a debate between the right and left (Hudson Jr., 2019), where people on the right of the political spectrum are positioned defenders of free speech and people on the left advocate for the creation of safe and inclusive spaces. The results of this study show that the problem of harassment on social media affects women across political boundaries and that harassment is not only perpetrated by those on the right. But the fact that more women on the left side of the spectrum chose to respond to the survey may illustrate a self-selection response bias.

This element of potential response bias based on political alignment also points to a larger concern of response bias among the overall sample frame. During the survey period, 12 potential respondents emailed the primary investigator, either personally or through their staff, to indicate that they were either not interested or unable to participate in the study. Reasons given for declination included time constraints and inapplicability, as potential respondents who did not use Twitter felt that they had little to contribute to the study. While the invitation email stipulated that responses from non-Twitter users were also helpful to the research, it is certainly understandable that these potential respondents did not feel an impetus to respond. This lack of motivation is reflected in the responses to question 13 since this question indicates that only one person who did not use Twitter responded to this survey. The survey was not of interest to those who do not use Twitter, and even among those who do use Twitter but do not feel they experience harassment on the platform or do not feel the harassment they experience merits examination, there would be little incentive to participate in the survey beyond contributing to the data set. While contributing to academic research is always a noble goal, it is certainly understandable that busy politicians who are juggling many issues and commitments might not feel able to do so, particularly when the issue may have limited impact on their work. The group that responded to the survey may be those among the overall group of potential respondents who feel most strongly about the issue of harassment on Twitter, so it is a distinct possibility that the data gathered in this survey presents a limited range of views on the issue of harassment of female politicians on Twitter. This bias in survey sampling was anticipated by the principal investigator and is acknowledged as an inherent flaw in survey-based research (Van Selm and Jankowski, 2006, p. 439). It was for this reason, and to align with my feminist critical research perspective, that I chose to focus this study on exploring the experiences of women in elected

office, rather than seeking to establish a clear base of quantitative data illustrating the volume and type of abuse Canadian female politicians receive on Twitter. Dhrodia (2018) undertook one such study in the UK by using a program to scrape data from Twitter and code it through content analysis. This was certainly an effective technique and there would be value in doing the same in the Canadian context in future research. The limited sample size, self-selecting sampling bias and the experiential focus of this study mean that the results of this study are not generalized to the whole population of Canadian female politicians, nor the larger population or female politicians generally. Instead, this data creates a snapshot of the experiences of a self-selecting group of female politicians who are dealing with the issue of online harassment on a day-to-day basis, which is a gap in the overall research on online harassment of women in leadership positions.

During the survey period, I received a note from a respondent identifying that question 8 was not appropriately structured to capture responses from indigenous women, as many indigenous women do not identify as people of colour or as members of a minority ethnic group. The exclusion of a specific option to identify as First Nations, Inuit or Métis represents a sample bias in the data, as it may have dissuaded indigenous women from continuing the survey. Since respondents were not asked to specifically state their ethnicity, no measures could be taken to ameliorate this issue of validity.

In Question 2, I inquired about the language of preference for respondents to the survey. Most respondents, 92.86%, indicated English as their language of preference, which was an expected outcome given that the survey was only offered in English. Of the four non-complete survey responses, only one identified as a French-language preference, so there does not appear to be a distinct drop-off of French-language respondents throughout the course of the survey.

The lack of French-language survey option is a flaw in the validity and reliability of this study. Given the resource and time constraints of the project, the decision was made to focus exclusively on the English-language survey, with the understanding that this would depress the response rate from Francophone potential respondents. Their experiences are therefore underrepresented in this study.

Only one respondent did not use Twitter for political communication. When asked why she had not chosen to create a public-facing Twitter account or use Twitter for political communication, she wrote "It's a very negative forum" and she responded in the affirmative to the question asking whether concern about harassment on Twitter had played a part in her decision not to use Twitter. Given the very limited sample of non-Twitter users and the sampling bias, no conclusions can be drawn from this data. Considering the number of questions in the survey, I was concerned that survey fatigue might cause respondents to drop off or to put less effort into questions as the survey proceeded (Downes-Le Guin et al., 2012, p. 614). While two survey respondents did drop off, the quality of engagement by the respondents who did complete was quite strong throughout – many provided detailed written responses all the way through the survey. While I would have like to have more responses to evaluate, overall, I am quite satisfied with the high quality of the responses received in terms of completeness and expressiveness.

Discussion of Findings

Federal v. Provincial and Territorial

By comparing the results based on respondents' answers to question 3, I was able to look at the differences in survey responses between those elected at the federal level and those elected at the provincial and territorial level. Federally elected members of parliament tweeted on

average more than their provincial and territorial counterparts – 83.33% of them report tweeting more than once per day, as compared to 62.85% of provincial or territorial representatives. There was also a corresponding increase in the amount of abuse they reported receiving, as 50% of federal representatives reported receiving abusive comments multiple times per day, as compared to 8.57% of provincial or territorial representatives. Federal officials were also more likely to report receiving threats of violence or sexual violence, and abusive comments that contained hate speech. Given the increased frequency with which federal elected officials reported receiving abusive tweets, it is perhaps not surprising that they also reported the abuse as having more of an impact on their ability to do their jobs and their desire to continue serving in office. 33.33% of federal respondents said the abuse they received on social media had interfered in their ability to do their job as an elected official, while only 17.14% of provincial and territorial respondents said the same. Half of the federal respondents reported that abusive comments on Twitter had affected their desire to continue serving in public office, while 34% of provincial or territorial respondents agreed. This suggests that the experience of receiving more social media abuse, as in the case of the federal respondents, has a corresponding impact on their desire to continue serving.

Geography

There was a diverse geographical cross-section among the respondents, except for Prince Edward Island and Nunavut. There was only one response from the Yukon and Northwest Territories each, so the territorial results overall were limited, but the number of female elected officials from the territories within the overall sample population is also quite small. There wasn't a huge variation between different provinces and territories in the survey responses, though there were some response patterns that stuck out. The responses from the Québécois

participants indicated that they may be receiving abuse most frequently out of elected officials in all provinces and territories, with 50% of the respondents receiving harassing tweets more than once per day, followed by Ontario at 30.77% and Alberta at 16.67%. On the other hand, one out of the two Manitoban respondents (50%) said they never receive comments that they found to be abusive. Of those respondents by province and territory who did receive abusive comments, 66.67% of Saskatchewan respondents reported they receive abuse less than once per month. This result is particularly interesting when compared to the results to question 35, where 66.67% of the Saskatchewan respondents also reported that the abuse they receive on Twitter has made them second guess their desire to continue serving in public office. As there must be overlap between these two groups, it's interesting to consider that the volume of abusive tweets may not be the key predictor of the effect that abuse is having on the target politician. This slightly contradicts the findings when comparing federal, provincial and territorial politicians above which suggested a correlation between a higher frequency of abuse and effect on desire to continue serving in office. However, the Saskatchewan respondent pool was significantly smaller than that pool of federal MPs who responded to the survey, so all other things being equal, the trend of increased abuse being tied to decreased desire to return to office should hold out.

Continuing to examine the results by province, Albertan and Ontarian respondents were the only ones to report receiving threats against family and staff during their time in office. 80% of British Columbian respondents reported that they had received sexually suggestive comments, the highest of any province or territory. Ontarian respondents also reported the most hate speech, with 76.92% having received hate speech. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that the Ontarian sample had the highest percentage of respondents who identified as people of colour or members of an ethnic minority – it's possible that women of colour and members of ethnic minorities

communities have a higher likelihood of receiving hate speech, as suggested in Dhrodia (2018, p. 5). However, when we look at the whole set of responses from elected officials who self-identified as women of colour or members of an ethnic minority community, the pattern of increased rates of hate speech did not hold.

On a more positive note, across every province and territory except the Yukon, the most commonly received type of potentially abusive comment on Twitter was general negative comments about the work and capabilities of the elected official. Encouragingly, these types of comments were the lowest rate for the consideration of abuse by respondents. So, while respondents are receiving these types of comments more frequently, they are less likely to perceive these types of comments as abusive and therefore damaging. I feel this is important to note, given that one of the criticisms of examinations of online harassment is that reigning in abusive behaviour would stifle free expression and valid criticisms. These results illustrate that while female elected officials do receive many critical comments, they can discern between those that are legitimately abusive and those that might offer a valid or at least not abusive critique of their performance as an elected official.

Comparing the responses of the small sample of three French-language politicians to the larger group of English respondents, there were a few significant differences. The quantity of tweeting by French elected officials appears to be comparable to their anglophone counterparts, as were the types and quantity of abusive comments they could remember receiving. All three French-speaking respondents said that they most often muted users who were engaging in harassing behaviour, which is largely in keeping with the actions reported by the anglophone respondents. As I am not as familiar with the culture and popularity of French-language Twitter, I was curious to see whether the experiences of French elected officials using Twitter in Canada

would differ significantly from their English counterparts but based on the very small sample available for comparison, there does not appear to be a significant difference in the experiences of French and English elected officials on Twitter.

Length of Service and Age

The length of time the elected official had been in office or having held a position in Cabinet did not have a noticeable effect on either the type or frequency of Twitter harassment received or on the elected official's responses to that abuse. It is notable that of the eight respondents who have served for 10 years or more in their positions, only one respondent reported that felt that harassment received on Twitter had made her question whether to continue in politics. This trend could be owed to the experience of the respondents, as the more seasoned politicians may have made their proverbial peace with abusive behaviour, but their management strategies did not differ from those who had served less time in office. Age played a slightly more significant role in the results, and it had an impact on the type of abuse respondents reported receiving. 80% of respondents in the 25-34-year-old age bracket reported receiving sexually suggestive abuse, compared to 37.50% of 35-49-year-old respondents and 55.56% of 50-64-year-old respondents. This may be due to women in the 25-34-year-old age bracket being, as Krook describes, "particularly susceptible to attack" (2017, p.83). Perhaps due to the higher rates of sexualized abuse, 25-34-year-old respondents were also more likely to agree that they receive more abuse than their male colleagues – 80% of respondents in that bracket agreed, while only 56.25% of the 35-49-year-old bracket and 55.56% of 50-64-year-old bracket did the same. The 25-34 year old group were also more likely to think that the difference in abuse between them and their male colleagues was due in part to gender, and were more likely than their older colleague to think that women of colour, ethnic minorities, and members of the LGTBQ

community receive more abuse on social media than their Caucasian, straight, or cis-gendered colleagues. This could be owed to an increased awareness of the concept of intersectionality among the 25-34-year-old age bracket, or perhaps simply more awareness of the public dialogue around abusive behaviour on Twitter.

Intersectional Groups

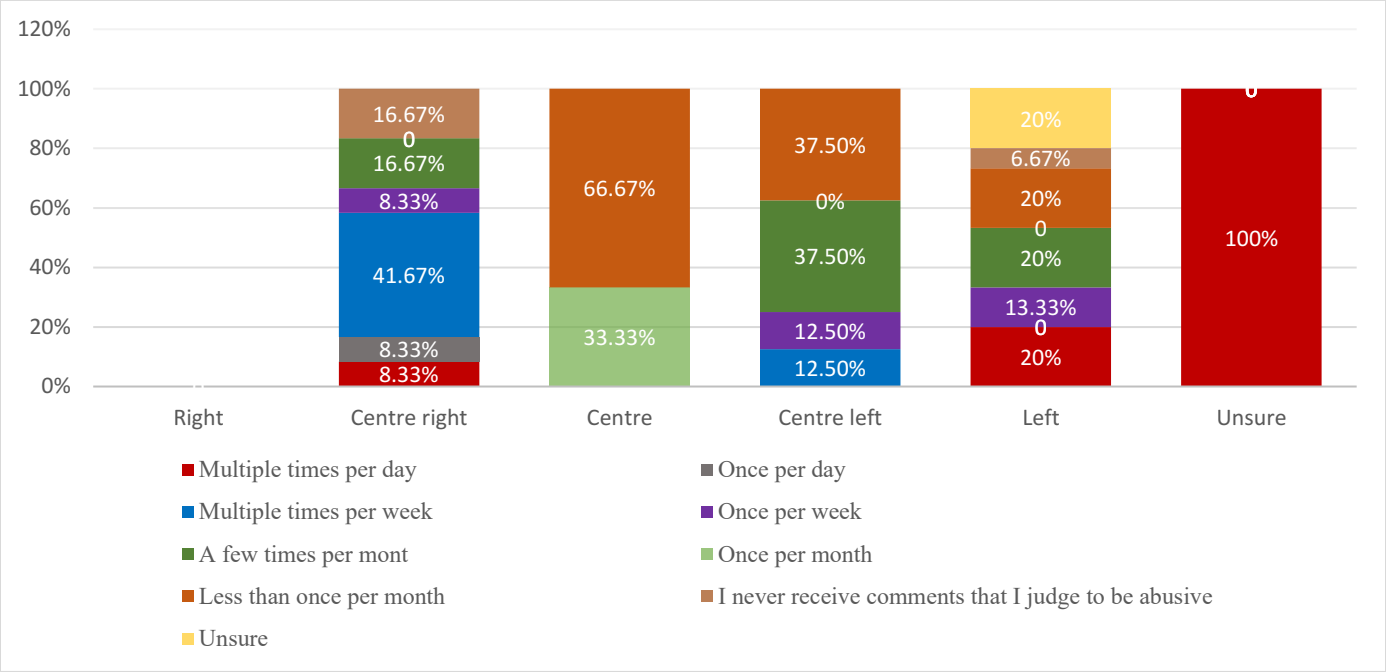
Only nine responses were collected from respondents who self-identified as women of colour of members of an ethnic minority community, and their response patterns did not differ widely from those who did not identify themselves as a person of colour or ethnic minority. The only significant difference was in responses to question 31, which asked whether respondents believed that people of colour or members of visible minority ethnic or religious groups received more abuse on Twitter than their colleagues. 77.78% of respondents who self-identified as POC or members of an ethnic minority community responded in the affirmative, compared to 56.25% of the rest of the respondents. These findings could support Dhrodia's (2018, p.5) conclusions about the impact of race as an intersectional identity feature that intensifies the abuse received by female elected officials. The other intersectional identity feature explored in this study was open identification as a member of the LGTBQ+ community. Only two affirmative responses were received to the identifying question, so limited conclusions can be drawn about the results. Similarly, to the group that identified as people of colour, the self-identified LGTBQ+ respondents had a much higher rate of positive response to question 30, asking if they believe members of the LGTBQ+ community receive more abuse on Twitter than their colleagues. To this question, the two LGTBQ+ respondents both agreed, compared to just 43.59% of their colleagues. Though the sample size in this case is too small to carry much significance, this response pattern also supports the idea that intersectionality amplifies the abuse received by

politicians, as they are targeted based on not just their gender, but also their race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, or other feature of their identity.

Political Affiliation

By including questions about political affiliation and orientation in the demographic section of the survey, I hoped to be able to examine how politics might affect the frequency and types of abuse received by female politicians. The results based on political party and individual political affiliation were similar throughout the survey. Only one respondent was not a member of a political party, and one other respondent preferred not to answer, so that question generated insufficient data to compare responses. Respondents were asked to identify where their party of membership and their individual political identification sat on the political spectrum and comparisons based on that data yielded some interesting insights. As mentioned in the validity section, social media harassment is sometimes perceived as an issue of the 'left' side of the political spectrum. But the data gathered about the frequency with which elected officials receive abusive content on Twitter suggests that women on the right or centre-right of the political spectrum may be receiving just as much abuse that their colleagues on the left, if not more, as illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Frequency of Abusive Tweets by Political Orientation (Self)



While more respondents on the left said they receive abusive content on Twitter more than once per day, looking at the top three most frequency categories of multiple times per day, once per day, and multiple times per week, there are seven respondents from the centre-right group as compared to only four from the centre-left or left group. These responses are based on estimates on the part of the respondents and the sample size is small, so the conclusions that can be drawn from this data are limited. However, the findings suggest that while women on the right may have been less likely to respond to the survey, for those who did, Twitter abuse is as much of an issue as it is for women on the left of the political spectrum. This is affirmed by the fact that 75% of the respondents on the centre-right said that Twitter harassment they'd received had affected their desire to continue serving in public office, while just 20.00% of the centre, 22.22% of the centre-left group and 31.335% of the left group said the same. One elected official on the centre-right wrote "(t)he harshest abusers have ironically been those who promote themselves as "progressives" or even "feminist". Mostly also male, by the way." These findings support the

results found in Dhrodia (2018), whose "findings show that no political party is immune to online abuse against women MPs on social media" (p. 385).

Frequency of Posting

It's commonly known social media best practice that frequent posting is a critical part of a successful social media strategy, as it helps to attract more followers and instigate conversation. The average follower count among those who reported tweeting more than once per day was 17,043; the average dropped to 2,056 for those who reported tweeting once per day, and just 756 for those who reported tweeting less than once per month. As Dhrodia (2018) notes, social media is seen as a necessary component of public engagement for elected officials, and frequent updates are an important part of building a following that can support a political career (p. 385). But there is a dark side to the extra attention: 22.22% of those who post content more than once per day report receiving abusive content multiple times per day, while 18.52% of the group said they received abuse multiple times per week, and 18.52% said they received abuse multiple times per month. The number of followers also influenced the types of abuse received, as respondents with follower counts over 10,000 were more likely to report receiving threats of violence or sexual violence, threats against their family and staff, and comments that included hate speech on Twitter than those will smaller followings. Overall, those who tweeted multiple times per day were also more likely to report having received every type of abusive comment listed in the survey than their colleagues who tweeted once a day or less. Within the context of this limited data set, this confirms that those who post more frequently attract more abusive content across all types.

Types of Abusive Content and Responses

Respondents were asked to consider what types of content they would consider abusive if they received in on Twitter, either through direct messages, subtweeting, or tweets. In Figure 8, I compared the responses to these questions to the types of abuse respondents indicated they had received during their time in office. Comparing these two sets of responses demonstrates the number of respondents who are receiving each type of tweet and find that content to be abusive.

Figure 8. Types of Abusive Comments and Respondents Who Have Received and Rated as Abusive

Type of Comment	**Number of Respondents whom both found the comment type abusive and had received that type**
Threats of violence and sexual violence	12 (29% of total respondents)
Threats against family and staff	8 (20% of total respondents)
Sexually suggestive or explicit comments	19 (46% of total respondents)
Comments that include hate speech, including racist, ableist, or anti-LGTBQ+ slurs	22 (54% of total respondents)
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your physical appearance	25 (61% of total respondents)
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your gender, race, sexual orientation, or other features of your identity	22 (54% of total respondents)
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include expletives	19 (46% of total respondents)
Negative comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official	14 (34% of total respondents)

These results indicate that a good portion of respondents are receiving tweets that they find to be abusive. The most common type of abusive tweets were the negative comments about the work and/or capabilities of the elected official, which 15 respondents selected as their most frequently received type of comment. Figure 9 illustrates the types of comments respondents reported as their most frequently received type and the frequency with which certain actions were mentioned

as responses to that type of comment. Using inductive content analysis, I have coded the respondents' answers to the question inquiring about the action they take to address their most frequently received comments. The five response categories are mute, block, ignore, respond and report. Each numerical value in Figure 9 represents the number of times that action was raised by a respondent. Many respondents mentioned more than one possible response to the abuse, often depending on the context (anonymity of the sender, whether the same commenter had repeated the behaviour over time) and the severity of the tweet in question, so in some cases, multiple choices were counted for one user.

Figure 9. Most Commonly Received Tweets and Commonly Described Responses

	Mute	Block	Ignore	Respond	Report
Negative comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official	4	6	8	3	3
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include expletives	4	4	6		
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your gender, race, sexual orientation, or other features of your identity	2	2		2	2
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your physical appearance	2		1	1	
Comments that include hate speech, including racist, ableist, or anti-LGTBQ+ slurs	1	1		1	
Sexually suggestive or explicit comments	1				
Total	16	13	15	7	5

The open-ended responses showed that muting was the most popular response overall, though for comments that were generally rated as less abusive by the respondents like those containing expletives or negative comments about work and capabilities were more often ignored. In Figure

10, I've broken out the coded responses to the action question and put them alongside the desired outcome(s) provided by respondents and their estimation of the efficacy of the response in producing their desired outcomes. Each row represents a set of complete responses that were received that included the specific action, the same desired outcomes, and the same selected efficacy. There were very few cases where respondents provided the same set of responses as another respondent, so most of the action-outcome-efficacy chains shown in Figure 9 represent one set of responses. As Figure 10 makes clear, the responses are too varied and the sample size too small to generate any definitive findings. For respondents who want to draw attention to the problematic behaviour, the action of responding was found to be very effective at producing the desired outcome. For those seeking to avoid seeing the comment in their feed or messages, muting was one of the most frequent responses and appears to be effective on average at accomplishing that goal.

Figure 10. Action, Outcomes and Efficacy

Action Code	**Desired Outcome(s)**	**Efficacy**
Mute	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour Protect myself from psychological harm Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	Moderately effective
Mute	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Protect myself from psychological harm	Moderately effective
Mute	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Encourage civility among my followers Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	Extremely effective
Mute	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Encourage civility among my followers	Slightly effective

Mute	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Draw attention to the commenter's problematic behaviour "Ensure there is a record of what was said"	Extremely effective
Mute/Ignore	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Encourage civility among my followers Protect myself from psychological harm Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm Draw attention to the commenter's problematic behaviour	Not at all effective
Mute/Ignore	Unsure	Very effective
Mute/Ignore	Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	Not at all effective
Mute/Block	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour Protect myself from psychological harm	Moderately effective
Mute/Block	Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour Protect myself from psychological harm Protect myself from possible physical harm Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	Moderately effective
Mute/Block/Ignore	Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour Draw attention to the commenter's problematic behaviour	Not at all effective
Mute/Report	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour	Slightly effective

	"Don't want to draw attention to the comment/commenter, and don't want to suggest that I am stifling debate or criticism against myself."	
Mute/Block/Report	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Protect myself from psychological harm "If the issue is bad enough to report, I want to help ensure the actions don't spread to others"	Moderately effective
Ignore	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages	Very effective
Ignore	Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour	Moderately effective
Ignore	Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour	Moderately effective
Ignore	Encourage civility among my followers "Any form of engagement with trolls feeds them and they become more hateful, more aggressive. We do not engage."	Moderately effective
Ignore/Respond	Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour	Moderately effective
Ignore/Respond	Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour	Moderately effective
Ignore/Respond	Encourage civility among my followers	Slightly effective
Ignore/Block	Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	Unsure
Ignore/Report/Block	"No action"	Unsure
Ignore/Report/Block	Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	Slightly effective
Ignore/Report/Block	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour Protect myself from psychological harm Protect myself from possible physical harm	Not at all effective

	Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	
Block	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour Protect myself from psychological harm Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	Very effective
Block	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	Very effective
Block	Encourage civility among my followers	Moderately effective
Block/Report	Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour "I do not believe these comments should be allowed on social media and be seen by me, my staff or my followers"	Slightly effective
Respond	Draw attention to the commenter's problematic behaviour	Moderately effective
Respond	Draw attention to the commenter's problematic behaviour	Extremely effective
Respond/Block	Avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour Protect myself from psychological harm Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	Slightly effective
Respond/Block	Draw attention to the commenter's problematic behaviour	Moderately effective
No response provided by respondent	Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour Protect myself from psychological harm Protect myself from possible physical harm Protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	Extremely effective
No response provided by respondent	Encourage civility among my followers Discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour	Moderately effective

It is interesting to note that the most popular response (52.78%) to question 24 inquiring about the elected officials' motivation for taking the action they outlined in question 23 is to discourage the commenter from continuing behaviour, but the most frequent responses to question 23 were to ignore, mute, or block. Of course, blocking would have the desired effect of discouraging the behaviour of the commenter by providing an obstacle to the commenter, since they cannot tag or message the elected official once blocked. But ignoring or muting the commenter does not actively discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour. As West (2013) put it in an essay on internet trolling, "From the first [troll]…the conventional wisdom has been to ignore them. Ignore them and they'll go away. Stop feeding them and they'll starve […] That's been the policy since day one, and has trolling gotten better or worse?" (para. 12). Ignore, muting or blocking actions may discourage the commenter because of the lack of response from the elected official, but do little to deter the perpetrator from continuing the harassment, either of that elected official or of others. The data captured in this part of the survey illustrates that elected officials and their teams are adopting varied, context-specific strategies to address abuse on social media, with a variety of degrees of success. The question that remains is: what should success look like for elected officials who are seeking to deter harassment on social media? A worthy question for further research would be whether female elected officials, or elected officials overall, believe that their goals for managing abuse on social media should be more ambitious than merely avoiding the abuse or limiting its immediate impact on staff, family and the elected official herself, or if policy changes are needed to set higher standards for social media networks that are providing the platform for the abuse.

Political Topics

Gardiner, *et al*. (2016, n.p.) theorized in their study of the comments section on the Guardian newspaper website that women talking about certain topics on online are more likely to attract more abuse than others. 60.98% of respondents agreed that when they posted about social justice issues, those pertaining to women, racial minorities, the LGTBQ+ community and other minority groups, they observed a corresponding increase in the number of abusive comments they received. Two of the open-ended comments mentioned that tweets about cyberbullying or online harassment of women often attracted more negative attention. These findings affirm Cole's (2015) theory that women posting about feminism online were more likely to attract abusive comments to "discipline feminists into silence" (p.357). Jane (2014) provided examples illustrating how "women who speak out about these attacks tend to draw even more hostility" (p. 563), which supports the comments of the respondents who felt their attempts to discuss online harassment had attracted more negativity.

Interference and Desire to Serve

Turning to the question of where online harassment has interfered with respondents' ability to fulfill their duties as elected officials, most respondents, 60.98%, said it had not. That's not to say that they are unaffected by the abuse. As one respondent put it, "While extremely disheartening and at times personally psychologically damaging [online harassment] does not interfere with the job." A few of the respondents noted that the harassment had made them withdraw on social media or self-censor. One respondent said, "it prevents me from really going as far as I'd like on a number of issues". Another wrote, "It made me less vocal about important issues out of fear and inappropriate gaslighting." Two respondents noted that the harassment was hard to deal with when they first entered office. One said, "Early on, it was

brutal to deal with the hate." Another respondent went further, saying "[a]t the beginning, I was actually going to drop out of politics because of it. I shut down my Twitter and Facebook accounts for months." One respondent detailed a situation in which she was harassed online by a group of people, including minors. She said "it was a pile-on. This lasted for a few weeks until I received professional legal help to make them stop. But after this I was really anxious and stressed out and depressed for several months to a year which I'm sure affected my work although I pushed through it." This comment affirms Fox et al.'s (2017) theory of rumination on online harassment (p.1275), and the experience of the 'pile-on' echoes Banet-Weiser and Miltner's (2017) concept of "network misogyny" as a method of organizing abusive attacks (p.171). The idea of "pushing through it" or choosing not to let the abuse affect their work came up in several of the comments, suggesting that female elected officials feel that while the abuse is "constant and draining", they must carry on in the face of it.

Of course, not all abuse on social media is taking place on Twitter. Respondents who agreed that the abuse they received on social media interfered with their job were asked to rank how significant abuse on Twitter was in that interference. 43.75% of the respondents rated the harassment they received as a slightly significant contributor to the problem, which suggests that Twitter is not the only source of online harassment for the respondents in this study. In her response to question 34, one respondent noted that abuse "in all social media forums" had affected her desire to continue serving in public office. In other portions of the survey, respondents also mentioned receiving abusive comments on Facebook – no other social media platforms were mentioned. This suggests that any policy or regulatory changes that might be made to Twitter to discourage abusive behaviour, like removing anonymous accounts and

increased moderation, would need to be applied to other platforms as well to address the overall issue of social media harassment.

As mentioned previously, the sample size of this survey is small, just 12.39% of the total population of Canadian female elected officials, and there is strong potential for sampling bias. As well, this study has focused on exploring their experiences of abuse on social media. For these reasons, one cannot project the conclusions I've drawn from this survey on to the larger population of Canadian elected officials. But the results of this survey, and particularly the answers to question 34, do show that online abuse is a real problem for at least some women in politics in our country and that it could be affecting the quality of our representation in government. 36.59% of respondents, over a third, said that abuse on Twitter had affected their desire to continue serving in public office. In a country where women are already underrepresented in the political system, where government funding and public awareness is being dedicated to trying to get more women into politics, we cannot afford to ignore the reality, or even the perception, that social media harassment may be discouraging otherwise talented and capable people from staying in politics, or from putting their names forward in the first place.

Summary of Findings

Based on the limited data collected in this study, several conclusions can be drawn about the experiences of online harassment among female Canadian elected officials and the strategies they've adopted to deal with the harassment they are receiving. The data set in this specific case is not large enough to suggest that the experiences of the respondents and the conclusions drawn from those responses can be positioned as representative of all Canadian female elected officials. But there is certainly enough here, within the context of existing research on the topic of online harassment, to make some connections. The findings show that female elected officials can

distinguish between abusive content and more valid types of criticism. It's also clear that the issue of online harassment is non-partisan; it can affect women in office regardless of political stripe. The results also affirm the idea that women of colour, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities experience online abuse differently from their colleagues. There is a clear line indicating that being more active on Twitter draws out more abusive comments and that the experience of receiving high volumes of abusive comments can lead women to question whether they would like to continue serving in public office. As to the coping strategies, it's clear that there is no silver bullet solution to online harassment, at least in terms of managing it on the recipients' end. Elected officials and their staffs are using varied and context-specific strategies to try to deal with the abuse, most commonly choosing to ignore, mute, or block the content. These results are perhaps unsurprising – if there was some secret playbook that helped women to effectively address online harassment, it seems unlikely that it would stay a secret for long. What the results of the coping strategies questions do suggest is that larger changes are needed. Many of the respondents have served in office for years, but the abuse continues. Blocking, muting, and ignoring may be enough to mitigate the damage in the moment, but these solutions also place the responsibility on the victims to manage the abuse, which Krook (2017) suggests is an approach that normalizes the violence (p.81). If things are to improve, policy and regulatory requirements for social media companies may need to be examined to find new ways to address the issue of online harassment, not just for politicians or women, but for everyone.

Conclusion

Fear of online harassment is a real deterrent for women who are considering running for public office. Anecdotal evidence and journalistic inquiry have long suggested this to be the case, and academic research is catching up. While not definitive, the results of this study examining the experience of Twitter harassment among Canadian female politicians and the mechanisms they and their communications staff have developed to manage the abuse they receive affirm this anecdotal knowledge. To sum up, I will reiterate the key findings of this study and attempt to contextualize this research within the wider field of research on online harassment. I will also summarize the important limitations of this study and point to some areas where future research may be warranted, either to fill in gaps in this study or to push deeper into the issue of online harassment targeting politicians.

Based on the responses received in this study, it's clear that female politicians in Canada are experiencing abuse on Twitter, according to their respective personal definitions of abusive behaviour. The abuse is not unique or isolated to one area of the political spectrum, as women across the range of political affiliations have relatively similar experiences in terms of the volume and types of harassing behaviours they experienced. While based on a small respondent pool, the results also indicate that this problem is worse for women with intersectional identities, be they members of the LGTBQ+ community, people of colour, or members of a religious or ethnic minority group. Age is also a contributing factor; while women of all ages experience abuse on Twitter, younger women were more likely to receive sexualized abuse than their older colleagues. Geographically, the results suggest that the problem of Twitter harassment of female politicians may be at its worst in Québec, though a larger sample size would be necessary to definitively prove this result. In reviewing the strategies that respondents and their teams have

developed to deal with online harassment, it's clear that elected officials and their staff have adopted varied and context-specific strategies for addressing the problematic behaviour, often incorporating some variation of muting, blocking, or ignoring the commenter, though there is room for further exploration about the efficacy of these strategies in actually reducing abusive behaviour. The results also confirm the concept described in Cole (2015), that online harassment is a tool to discipline women for being vocal in public space (p. 365), as women who post more often receive more abuse, and women who speak publicly about the harassment they are receiving are also more likely to receive abusive comments. Approaching the results from the perspective of someone who believes more women should be in elected office, the most critical finding of this study is that 36.59% of respondents felt that the online harassment they had received had made them second guess running for office again. Based on these results, we can't be certain that any of the respondents have chosen to leave politics due to the harassment, but it's clear that the abuse is having a real impact on their mental health and their desire to serve. This is where the issue of online harassment of female politicians stops being an individual problem for the victim and starts becoming a problem for our democracy. If qualified women currently in office are being discouraged from staying in politics by online harassment, we can only speculate as to how many qualified candidates are deciding not to run to avoid the suffering altogether.

I was unable to find any other research in the area of online harassment of female politicians, particularly in the Canadian context, so this study and the findings constitute a foundational contribution to this area of research, even within the context of the experiential focus of the study. One of my personal goals in undertaking this research was to provide prospective candidates with some perspective on the scale of the problem they could be facing and some direction on how to deal with online abuse while running for office or once elected. I

believe the results of this study, particularly in the area of management strategies, do provide some helpful information that will help elected officials to contextualize and compare their own experiences. These useful results include the commonly used management strategies of blocking, muting, and ignoring, and the information on quantity and type of abuse received may help politicians or candidates to contextualize their experiences compared to their peers. For academics, there is plenty of room for future research; one could adopt Dhrodia's (2018) approach and undertake a quantitative study by scraping Twitter for abusive tweets and coding them to understand the empirical volume of harassment female politicians are experiencing. Another option would be to explore solutions to online harassment; this is an area that I think could be particularly fruitful. Some work is being done in this area; Kennedy et al. (2017) examined technological solutions to harassment through automated detection (p. 73). Poland (2016) explored solutions like blocking, reporting, and muting on various social networks, as well as increased moderation by both victims and the networks that are hosting the interaction (p.180), but she expresses concern about overreach when discussing the possibility of government solutions (p.163). While solutions were not a focus of this study, I had expected respondents to propose more policy or regulatory solutions to the issue of online harassment, particularly since the respondents are in government and in a position to address the issue head-on. While some respondents did provide suggestions, including removing anonymity features and increased moderation, I believe there is more room to explore the actions that government could take to reduce online abuse, not only for themselves but also for the general population. The Home Affairs Committee report out of the United Kingdom (2017) is a demonstration of government holding social media networks accountable for the problematic behaviour on their

platforms and could serve as a model for Canadian government officials who want to address the root of the issue of online harassment.

This study had several limitations that could be addressed through future research on the topic. Most critically, a dual English and French study of online harassment of female politicians is warranted and could provide some interesting results, especially given that the Québécois respondents in this study reported experiencing slightly more harassment than their anglophone counterparts. Future research could emphasize understanding the unique experiences of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women, as omissions in the survey questions on race and ethnic identity in this study failed to fully account for those groups. As mentioned throughout this report, survey research has several flaws, including self-selecting response bias and the lack of capacity for follow-up. Future research in this area could adopt different strategies, like focus groups or interviews, to gather more in-depth accounts of social media abuse.

In beginning this research, I set out to try to understand how Canadian female politicians are experiencing abuse on Twitter and the management strategies they have developed to cope with the abuse, in hopes of finding results that might be helpful to current or prospective candidates for office. The findings provide a snapshot of the views of some of Canada's currently elected female politicians and illustrate that the issue of online harassment is a pressing one, that is having a negative impact on women's participation in public life. While all respondents have developed strategies to deal with the harassment, their assessments of the success of those strategies are inconsistent, which I believe indicates that more must be done to address the problem of online harassment at its source. Rather than treating the problem of abusive behaviour on Twitter on a comment by comment basis, my hope is that the results of this study will encourage future research and exploration of policy and regulatory changes for social

media platforms like Twitter, changes that could improve the experience of online engagement not just for elected officials like those under study here, but for all users of social media.

Appendix 1 – Information and Consent Letter

INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Angry Birds: Twitter Harassment of Canadian Female Politicians
HERO Study – PR00089044

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Background

- You are being asked to participate in this study in your capacity as a female federal or provincial elected official, or a member of staff of a federal or provincial elected official, answering on their behalf.
- The results of this study will contribute to the completion of a Master of Communication and Technology capstone project.

Purpose

- The purpose of this study is to understand the quantity and type of harassment women in federal and provincial elected office receive on Twitter, and to explore the management strategies they have adopted to deal with harassment on Twitter.
- While the problem of online harassment of female politicians has been thoroughly discussed in the media, there is little academic research exploring the quantity and type of abuse female politicians receive online and the effects of that harassment. This study will help to illustrate the extent of the problem within the Canadian Twitter-sphere and contribute to a growing body of scholarship exploring women's experiences online.

Study Procedures

- The questionnaire will be distributed to all provincial federal female elected officials over email using their public email addresses. Participants will receive a link to a questionnaire, hosted on the SurveyMonkey platform.

- The questionnaire can be filled out by the elected official herself, or by a member of staff who is involved in the operation of the elected official's Twitter account. If a member of staff is responding to the questionnaire, please fill out it from the perspective of the elected official you are representing.
- The questionnaire is 36 questions long and will take approximately 20 minutes to complete, though the length of the survey and time for completion will depend on participant response. Participants will have an opportunity to withdraw consent at the end of the questionnaire should they so choose.
- Due to project limitations, the survey will only be offered in English. Participants will need to be comfortable answering questions in English.

Benefits

- We hope this study will contribute to building academic and public understanding of the problem of Twitter harassment of female politicians and provide helpful context for women who are currently in office or who are considering running for office and are concerned about handling harassment on Twitter.
- However, there are no guaranteed benefits for participating in this study, aside from contributing to general knowledge.

Risk

- This study will ask about experiences of harassment on Twitter and the impact of that harassment. If you find yourself to be experiencing distress as a result of participation in the study, you may stop responding at any time to withdraw your consent to participate.
- The Canadian Mental Health Association is a good resource for individuals who may be experiencing negative psychological effects because of social media harassment. Please go to www.cmha.ca/find-your-cmha to access resources in your province or territory.

Voluntary Participation

- You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You may withdraw your consent to have your data included in the study at any time by closing the questionnaire, or by withdrawing consent at the end of the questionnaire.
- If you choose to withdraw your consent at the end of the survey, your responses to the questionnaire will not be included in the study.
- There is no penalty to opting out of participation at any point in the questionnaire.
- As the questionnaire responses are anonymous, once a questionnaire has been submitted the researcher will not be able to return completed questionnaires to participants and will not be able to remove a participant's responses from the data set.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

- The data gathered in the questionnaire will be used in the principal investigator's capstone study for the completion of the degree requirements of a Master's in communications and Technology. The study will be published online and may be used in future presentations.
- Participants will not be identified in the study, and data such as geography, race, sexual orientation, age, or type of office held will only be presented in aggregate.
- Data will be kept confidentially and will be anonymized. The principal investigator will have access to the data.
- Data will be kept in a secure place for 5 years following completion of research project, under password protection. After 5 years, the data will be deleted.
- During the survey period, data will be stored online in SurveyMonkey. After that period, the data will be deleted from the online platform. The data may be kept on US servers.
- All research data will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection. You should know that while we will keep the information you give us confidential - in the United States under US privacy laws, the government has the right to access all information held in electronic databases. For more information on this topic, you can visit https://www.surveymonkey.com/blog/2011/05/10/patriot-act/

Further Information

- If you have any further questions regarding any component of this study, please do not hesitate to contact the principal investigator at jess@ualberta.ca or at 1(780)221-4512.
- The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call 1(780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.

Consent Statement

I have read this form and understand the study. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and understand that by completing the questionnaire, I am providing my consent to have my responses included in the research study.

Appendix 2 – Survey Questions and Response Options

1. Are you filling out this survey on your own behalf or on behalf of an elected official?:
    a. On my own behalf
    b. On behalf of an elected official

2. Which is your preferred language for communication within your role as an elected official?:
    a. English
    b. French

3. Are you currently serving as:
    a. A Member of Parliament
    b. A Member of Provincial Parliament
    c. A Member of a Legislative Assembly
    d. A Member of the National Assembly
    e. A Member of the House of Assembly

4. What province or territory do you represent?:

    a. Alberta
    b. BC
    c. Manitoba
    d. New Brunswick
    e. Newfoundland and Labrador
    f. Northwest Territories
    g. Nova Scotia
    h. Nunavut
    i. Ontario
    j. Prince Edward Island
    k. Québec
    l. Saskatchewan
    m. Yukon

5. For how long have you served in elected office, cumulatively?

Open ended – years box and months box

6. Have you ever or are you currently serving as a Cabinet member in any government?:

a. yes b. no

7. What is your age?:
    a. 18-24 years
    b. 25-34 years
    c. 35-49 years

d. 50-64 years
e. 65+

8. Do you identify as a person of colour or as a member of a minority ethnic group?
a. yes
b. No
c. Prefer not to answer

9. Do you identify openly as a member of the LGTBQ+ community?
a. yes
b. No
c. Prefer not to answer

10. Are you a member of a political party?
a. yes
b. no
c. I sit as an independent
d. Other (please specify):

If no, skip to question 12

11. According to your own definition, where does your party of membership sit on the political spectrum?:
a. Right
b. Centre right
c. Centre
d. Centre left
e. Left
f. Prefer not to answer

12. According your own definition, where do you as an individual elected official sit on the political spectrum?:
    a. Right
    b. Centre right
    c. Centre
    d. Centre left
    e. Left
    f. Prefer not to answer

13. Do you have a public Twitter account that you use to post about or discuss politics and/or your work as an elected official?
a. Yes
b. No

14. {If no} Why have you chosen not to create a public-facing account on Twitter, or to use Twitter for political communication?: [Comment box]

15. {If No on 13} Does concern about online harassment on Twitter play a part in your decision not to use Twitter as a tool for political communication? [Comment box] -> {routed to question 36 and the end of the survey}

16. On average, how frequently do you use your public-facing Twitter account to post or retweet content, or to send direct messages?
    a. More than once a day
    b. once a day
    c. weekly
    d. monthly
    e. less than once per month
    f. Unsure

17. In a typical day, who is most often responsible for posting on your public Twitter account and manages comments and messages you receive?:
    a. Elected official
    b. Member of staff
    c. Other (please specify)

18. How many followers do you have on your public-facing Twitter account?: [Comment box]

19. Which of the following types of content would you consider to be abusive when received on Twitter, either through direct messages, tagging, and/or subtweeting (please select all that apply):

i. threats of violence or sexual violence
j. threats against your family or staff
k. sexually suggestive or explicit comments
l. comments that include hate speech, including racial, ableist, or anti-LGTBQ+ slurs
m. comments deriding your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your gender, race, sexual orientation, or other features of your identity
n. comments deriding your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include expletives
o. negatives comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official
p. Other (please specify):

20. Roughly how often do you receive comments (including direct messages, tagged tweets, and subtweets) on Twitter that you find to be abusive?

a. multiple times per day
b. once per day
c. multiple times per week
d. once per week
e. a few times per month

f. once a month
g. less than once a month
h. I never receive comments that I judge to be abusive
i. Unsure

21. Which of the following types of comments can you remember receiving on Twitter since you entered public life, including your initial campaign for elected office (please select all that apply):

a. threats of violence or sexual violence
b. threats against your family or staff
c. sexually suggestive or explicit comments
d. comments that include hate speech, including racial, ableist, or anti-LGTBQ+ slurs
e. comments deriding your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your gender, race, sexual orientation, or other features of your identity
f. comments deriding your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include expletives
g. negatives comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official
h. Other (please specify):
i. I cannot remember receiving any abusive comments on Twitter since I entered public life {If selected, skip to question 26}

22. Of the types of abusive comments you recall receiving on Twitter, which type would you say you receive most frequently?:
- Multiple choice options based on the responses to question 21

23. What, if any, action do you usually take to respond to {Answer from 22} when you receive them on Twitter? [Comment Box]

24. Which of the following statements best describe your motivation for taking the action you've described? (please select all that apply):

a. I want to avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages
b. I want to encourage civility among your followers
c. I want to discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour
d. I want to protect myself from psychological harm
e. I want to protect myself from possible physical harm
f. I want to protect my staff and/or family from psychological or physical harm
g. I want to draw attention to the commenter's problematic behaviour
h. Other (please specify):
i. Unsure

25. Do you feel that taking the action you've described has helped you to achieve your intended outcomes?:
a. Not at all effective

b. Slightly effective
c. Moderately effective
d. Very effective
e. Extremely effective

26. Research on abuse in newspaper online comments sections has indicated that discussion of certain political topics draws more abusive commenters than others. Have you found that your engagement with certain political issues has resulted in you receiving an increased number of abusive comments?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

27. Which political issues have you engaged in that have resulted in you receiving an increased number of abusive comments? (please select all that apply):

a. Immigration
b. Environment/Resource Development
c. Social Justice (topics relating to women, racial minorities, LGTBQ+ community, or other minority communities)
d. Foreign Policy/Trade
e. Arts/Culture
f. Courts/Law Enforcement
g. Taxation/Economics
h. Education
i. Indigenous Issues/Land Rights
j. Other (please specify):

28. Based on your own experience and knowledge, do you feel that you receive more abusive comments on Twitter than your male colleagues?

a. yes
b. no
c. not sure

29. {If yes or not sure on question 28} Do you believe that you receive more abusive comments on Twitter than your male colleagues in part because of your gender?:

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not Sure

30. Based on your own experience and knowledge, do you believe that elected officials who are people of colour or members of visible minority ethnic or religious groups receive more abuse on Twitter than their colleagues?:

a. yes
b. no
c. not sure

31. Based on your own experience and knowledge, do you feel that elected officials who are members of the LGTBQ+ community receive more abuse on Twitter than their colleagues?:

a. yes
b. no
c. not sure

32. Do you feel the abuse you've received on social media during your time as an elected official has interfered with your ability to do your job?:

a. yes
b. no
c. Unsure

Comments:

33. {If yes or unsure on question 32} How significant a role has Twitter abuse played in that interference?:

a. Not at all significant

b. Slightly significant

c. Moderately significant

d. Very significant

e. Extremely significant

f. Unsure

34. Do you feel the abuse you've received on Twitter has affected your desire to continue serving in public office?:

a. yes
b. no
c. Unsure

Comments:

35. Would you like to offer any comments about your experience of using Twitter as a public figure?:

Comment Box

36. Do you consent to have your responses to this survey included in the research study?

a. Yes
b. No

Appendix 3 – Canadian Female Elected Officials by Province/Territory and Source Websites

Name	Province/Territory
Adriana LaGrange	AB
Agnès Grondin	QB
Alaina Lockhart	NB
Alana Paon	NS
Alexandra Mendès	QB
Alice Wong	BC
Amanda Lathlin	MN
Amanda Simard	ON
Amy Fee	ON
Andrea Anderson-Mason	NB
Andrea Horwath	ON
Andrea Khanjin	ON
Angela Pitt	AB
Anita Vandenbeld	ON
Anju Dhillon	QB
Anne Kang	BC
Anne Minh-Thu Quach	QB
Barbara Adams	NS
Bardish Chagger	ON
Belinda Karahalios	ON
Bernadette Jordan	NS
Bernadette Smith	MN
Betty Parsley	NWFL
Bhutila Karpoche	ON
Bowinn Ma	BC
Brenda Shanahan	QB
Brigitte Sansoucy	QB
Bronwyn Eyre	SK

Candice Bergen	MN
Carla Beck	SK
Carla Qualtrough	BC
Carol Anne Haley	NWFL
Carol Hughes	ON
Carole James	BC
Caroline Cochrane	NWT
Caroline Mulroney	ON
Caroline Proulx	QB
Carolyn Bennett	ON
Cathay Wagantall	SK
Catherine Dorion	QB
Catherine Fife	ON
Catherine Fournier	QB
Catherine McKeen	ON
Cathy Cox	MN
Cathy McLeod	BC
Cathy Rogers	NB
Cathy Sproule	SK
Cathy Towtongie	NU
Celina Caesar-Chavannes	ON
Chantal Rouleau	qB
Chantal Soucy	QB
Chantale Jeannotte	QB
Cheryl Gallant	ON
Cheryl Hardcastle	ON
Christina Gray	AB
Christina Maria Mitas	ON
Christine Elliott	ON
Christine Hogarth	ON
Christine Labrie	QB
Christine Moore	QB
Christine St. Pierre	QB

Christine Tell	SK
Chrystia Freeland	ON
Cindy Lamoureux	MN
Claire Isabelle	QB
Claire Samson	QB
Claire Trevena	BC
Claudia Chender	NS
Colleen Mayer	MN
Colleen Young	SK
Coralee Oakes	BC
Daisy Wai	ON
Danielle Chartier	SK
Danielle McCann	QB
Darlene Compton	PEI
Deborah Schulte	ON
Diane Finley	ON
Diane Lebouthillier	QB
Doly Begum	ON
Dominique Anglade	QB
Donna Barnett	BC
Donna Harpauer	SK
Donna Skelly	ON
Dorothy Shephard	NB
Effie Triantafilopoulos	ON
Eileen Clarke	MN
Elisapee Sheutiapik	NU
Elizabeth May	BC
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin	NS
Émilie Foster	QB
Émilise Lessard-Therrien	QB
Emmanuella Lambropoulos	QB
Eva Nassif	QB
Filomena Rotiroti	QB

Filomena Tassi	ON
Flor Marcelino	MN
France Gélinas	ON
Francine Charbonneau	QB
Francine Landry	NB
Geneviève Guilbault	QB
Geneviève HÉBERT	QB
Georgina Jolibois	SK
Geraldine Van Bibber	YK
Gerry Rogers	NWFL
Gila Martow	ON
Ginette Petitpas Taylor	NB
Goldie Ghamari	ON
Gudie Hutchings	NWFL
Hannah Bell	PEI
Heather Stefanson	MN
Heather Sweet	AB
Hedy Fry	BC
Hélène David	QB
Hélène Laverdière	QB
Iqra Khalid	ON
Irene Mathyssen	ON
Isabelle Charest	QB
Isabelle Lecours	QB
Isabelle MelanÇON	QB
Isabelle Thériault	NB
Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk	AB
Jackie Lovely	AB
Jackie Tegart	BC
Jane McKenna	ON
Jane Philpott	ON
Jane Thornthwaite	BC
Janet Routledge	BC

Janice Morley-Lecomte	MN
Janis Irwin	AB
Jean Yip	ON
Jeanie Dendys	YK
Jeannie Hakongak Ehaloak	NU
Jennifer French	ON
Jennifer Maccarone	QB
Jennifer O'Connell	ON
Jennifer Rice	BC
Jennifer Stevens	ON
Jenny Kwan	BC
Jessica Bell	ON
Jill Andrew	ON
Jill Dunlop	ON
Jinny Sims	BC
Joan Isaacs	BC
Jody Wilson-Rayboudl	BC
Josephine Pon	AB
Joyce Murray	BC
Judith Monteith-Farrell	ON
Judy Darcy	BC
Judy Klassen	MN
Judy Sgro	ON
Julie Dabrusin	ON
Julie Dzerowicz	ON
Julie Green	NWT
Kamal Khera	ON
Karen Ludwig	NB
Karen Lynn Casey	NS
Karen McCrimmon	ON
Karen Vecchio	ON
Karina Gould	ON
Karine Trudel	QB

Karla Bernard	PEI
Karla MacFarlane	NS
Kate White	YK
Kate Young	ON
Kathleen Ganley	AB
Kathleen Weil	QB
Kathleen Wynne	ON
Katrina Chen	BC
Katrine Conroy	BC
Kellie Leitch	ON
Kelly Block	SK
Kelly Regan	NS
Kim Masland	NS
Kim Rudd	ON
Kinga Surma	ON
Kirsty Duncan	ON
Laila Goodridge	AB
Lana Popham	BC
Laura Mae Lindo	ON
Laura Ross	SK
Laurie Scott	ON
Leela Aheer	AB
Lena Metledge Diab	NS
Lenore Zann	NS
Leona Alleslev	ON
Linda Duncan	AB
Linda Lapointe	QB
Linda Larson	BC
Linda Reid	BC
Lindsey Park	ON
Lisa Beare	BC
Lisa Dempster	NWFL
Lisa Gretzky	ON

Lisa Harris	NB
Lisa Lambert	SK
Lisa MacLeod	ON
Lisa Raitt	ON
Lisa Roberts	NS
Lisa Thompson	ON
Lise Lavallée	QB
Lise Thériault	QB
Liz Hanson	YK
Lori Carr	SK
Lori Sigurdson	AB
Lorraine Michael	NWFL
Lorraine Richard	QB
Lucie Lecours	QB
Lynne Lund	PEI
Mable Elmore	BC
Manon Massé	QB
Margarent Nakashuk	NU
Margaret Miller	NS
Marie Chantal Chasse	QB
Marie Montpetit	QB
Marie Renaud	AB
Marie-Claude Bibeau	QB
Marie-Claude Nichols	QB
Marie-Eve Proulx	QB
Marie-France Lalonde	ON
Marie-Louise Tardif	QB
Marilène Gill	QB
Marilyn Gladu	ON
Marilyn Picard	QB
Marit Stiles	ON
Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet	QB
Marquerite Blais	QB

Marwah Rizqy	QB
Mary Ng	ON
Mary Polak	BC
Mary Wilson	NB
Maryam Monsef	ON
MaryAnn Mihychuk	MN
Marysa Gaudreault	QB
Megan Mitton	NB
Méganne Perry MélaÇon	QB
Mélanie Joly	QB
Melanie Mark	BC
Merrilee Fullerton	ON
Michaela Glasgo	AB
Michele Beaton	PEI
Michelle Conroy	NB
Michelle Mungall	BC
Michelle Rempel	AB
Michelle Stilwell	BC
Mila Adjukak Kamingoak	NU
Miranda Rosin	AB
Mitzi Dean	BC
Mitzie Hunter	ON
Mona Fortier	ON
Monique Leblanc	NB
Monique Pauzé	QB
Monique Sauvé	QB
Monique Taylor	ON
Myrna Driedger	MN
Nadine Girault	QB
Nadine Wilson	SK
Nahanni Fontaine	MN
Nancy Guillemette	QB
Nancy Heppner	SK

Natalia Kusendova	ON
Nathalie Des Rosiers	ON
Nathalie Roy	QB
Nicole Goehring	AB
Nicole Ménard	QB
Nicole Rancourt	SK
Nicole Sarauer	SK
Niki Ashton	MN
Nina Tangri	ON
Pam Angnakak	NU
Pam Damoff	ON
Pam Parsons	NWFL
Pamela Goldsmith-Jones	BC
Patricia Arab	NS
Patti McLeod	YK
Patty Hajdu	ON
Paule Robitaille	QB
Pauline Frost	YK
Peggy Sattler	ON
Rachael Harder	AB
Rachel Blaney	BC
Rachel Notley	AB
Rachna Singh	BC
Rafah DiCostanzo	NS
Rajan Sawhney	AB
Rebecca Schulz	AB
Rima Berns-McGown	ON
Robin Martin	ON
Rochelle Squires	MN
Ronna Rae-Leonard	BC
Rosemarie Falk	SK
Ruba Ghazal	QB
Ruby Sahota	ON

Ruth Ellen Brosseau	QB
Salma Zahid	ON
Sandy Shaw	ON
Sara Singh	ON
Sarah Guillemard	MN
Sarah Hoffman	AB
Selina Robinson	BC
Shannon Phillips	AB
Shannon Stubbs	AB
Sheri Benson	SK
Sherry Gambin-Walsh	NWFL
Sherry Romanado	QB
Sherry Wilson	NB
Shirley Bond	BC
Siobhan Coady	NWFL
Sonia Furstenau	BC
Sonia Lebel	QB
Sonia Sidhu	ON
Sonya Savage	AB
Stephanie Cadieux	BC
Stephanie Kusie	AB
Stéphanie Lachance	QB
Susan Leblanc	NS
Suzanne Blais	QB
Suzanne Dansereau	QB
Suzanne Lohnes-Croft	NS
Suze Morrison	ON
Sylvia Jones	ON
Sylvie Boucher	QB
Sylvie D'Amours	QB
Tanya Fir	AB
Teresa Armstrong	ON
Teresa Wat	BC

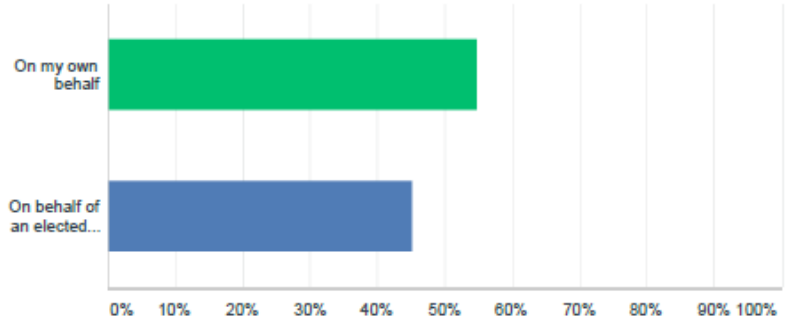
Tina Beaudry-Mellor	SK
Tina Mundy	PEI
Tmmy Martin	NS
Tracey Perry	NWFL
Tracey Ramsey	ON
Tracy Allard	AB
Tracy Redies	BC
Tracy-Anne McPhee	YK
Trish Altass	PEI
Véronique Hivon	QB
Vicki Mowat	SK
Whitney Issik	AB
Yasmin Ratansi	ON
Yvonne Jones	NWFL

Federal: https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members
Alberta:http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=mla_report&memPhoto=True&alphaboth=True&alphaindex=True&build=y&caucus=All&conoffice=True&legoffice=True&mememail=True
British Columbia: https://www.leg.bc.ca/content-committees/Pages/MLA-Contact-Information.aspx
Manitoba: https://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/members/mla_list_alphabetical.html
New Brunswick: https://www1.gnb.ca/legis/bios/59/index-e.asp
Newfoundland and Labrador: https://www.assembly.nl.ca/Members/members.aspx
Northwest Territories: https://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/members
Nova Scotia: https://nslegislature.ca/members/profiles
Nunavut: https://assembly.nu.ca/members/mla
Ontario: https://www.ola.org/en/members/current
Prince Edward Island: http://www.assembly.pe.ca/current-members
Québec: http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/deputes/index.html
Saskatchewan: http://www.legassembly.sk.ca/mlas/
Yukon: http://www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca/members/index.html

Appendix 4 – Survey Responses

Q1 Are you filling out this survey on your own behalf or on behalf of an elected official?

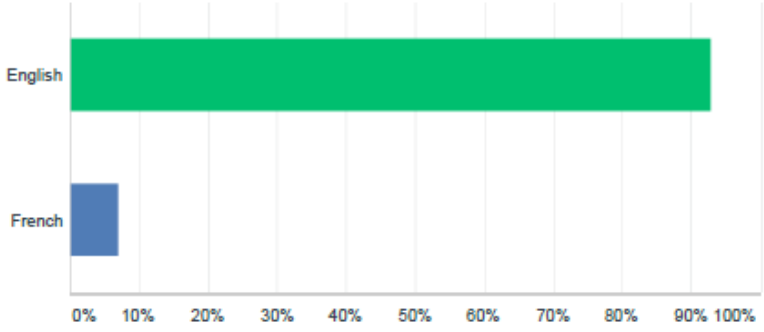
Answered: 42 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
On my own behalf	54.76%	23
On behalf of an elected official	45.24%	19
TOTAL		42

Q2 Which is your preferred language for communication within your role as an elected official?

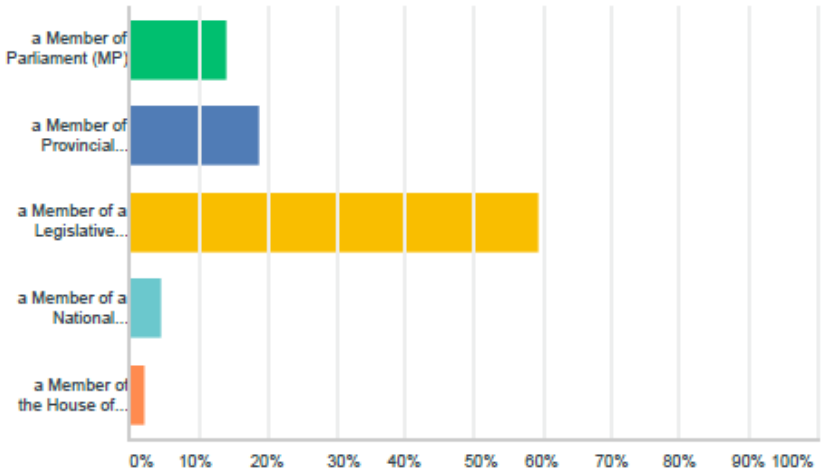
Answered: 42 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
English	92.86%	39
French	7.14%	3
TOTAL		42

Q3 Are you currently serving as:

Answered: 42 Skipped: 0

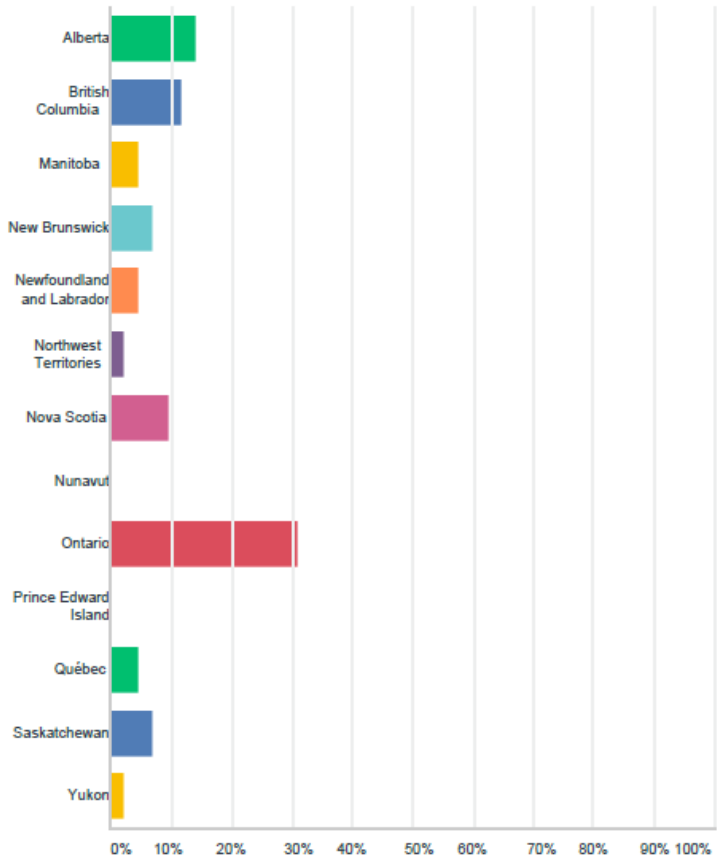


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
a Member of Parliament (MP)	14.29%	6
a Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP)	19.05%	8
a Member of a Legislative Assembly (MLA)	59.52%	25
a Member of a National Assembly (MNA)	4.76%	2
a Member of the House of Assembly (MHA)	2.38%	1
TOTAL		42

Nova Scotia	9.52%	4
Nunavut	0.00%	0
Ontario	30.95%	13
Prince Edward Island	0.00%	0
Québec	4.76%	2
Saskatchewan	7.14%	3
Yukon	2.38%	1
TOTAL		42

Q4 Which province or territory do you represent?:

Answered: 42 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Alberta	14.29%	6
British Columbia	11.90%	5
Manitoba	4.76%	2
New Brunswick	7.14%	3
Newfoundland and Labrador	4.76%	2
Northwest Territories	2.38%	1
Nova Scotia	9.52%	4
Nunavut	0.00%	0
Ontario	30.95%	13
Prince Edward Island	0.00%	0
Québec	4.76%	2
Saskatchewan	7.14%	3
Yukon	2.38%	1
TOTAL		42

Q5 For how long have you served in elected office, cumulatively?

Answered: 42 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Years	85.71%	36
Months	64.29%	27

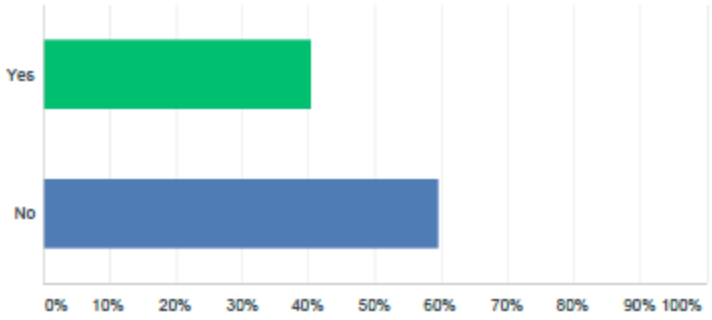
#	YEARS
1	3
2	3
3	15
4	3
5	1
6	0
7	3
8	3
9	8
10	9 years as an MLA
11	3
12	11
13	21
14	3
15	5
16	O
17	12
18	6 years
19	4
20	10
21	28 years
22	5
23	3
24	5
25	3
26	3
27	4
28	3
29	4
30	10
31	2

32	12
33	3.5
34	4
35	6
36	6 years

#	MONTHS
1	2
2	2
3	7
4	1
5	6
6	8
7	5
8	6
9	1.5
10	6
11	2
12	7
13	11
14	11
15	11
16	9 months
17	7 months
18	8
19	8
20	1
21	2
22	6
23	11
24	7
25	11
26	7
27	11

Q6 Have you ever or are you currently serving as a Cabinet member in any government?

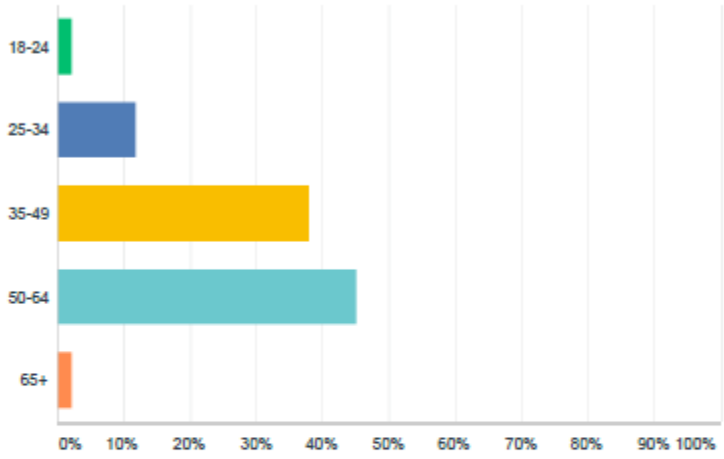
Answered: 42 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	40.48%	17
No	59.52%	25
TOTAL		42

Q7 What is your age?

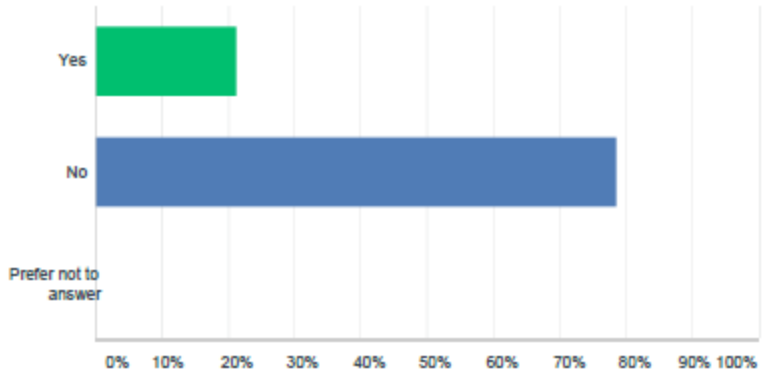
Answered: 42 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
18-24	2.38%	1
25-34	11.90%	5
35-49	38.10%	16
50-64	45.24%	19
65+	2.38%	1
TOTAL		42

Q8 Do you identify as a person of colour or as a member of a minority ethnic group?

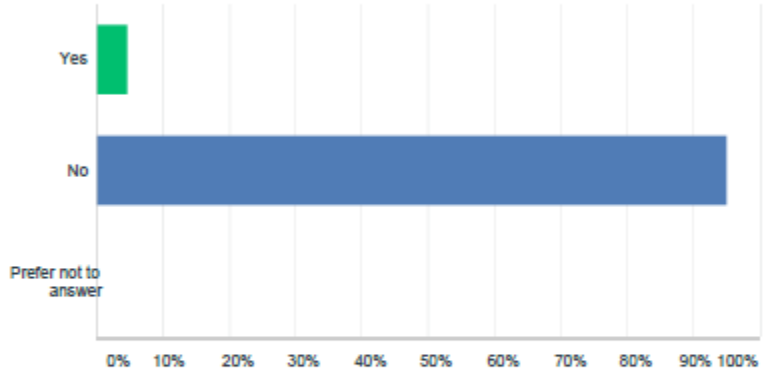
Answered: 42 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	21.43%	9
No	78.57%	33
Prefer not to answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		42

Q9 Do you identify openly as a member of the LGTBQ+ community?

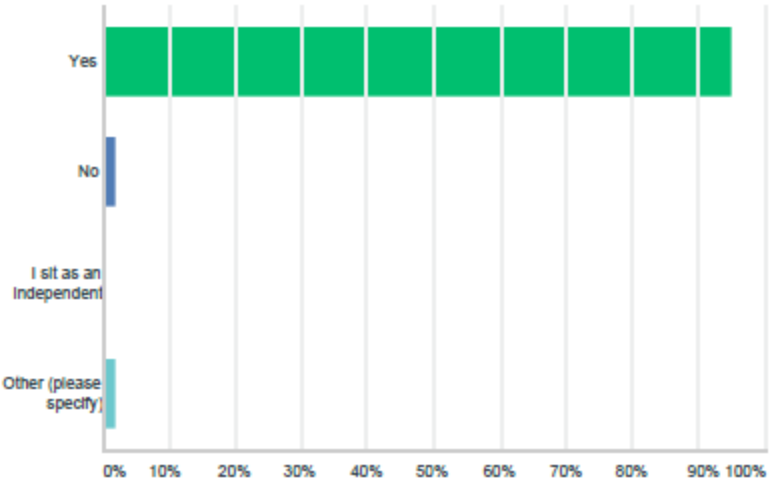
Answered: 42 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	4.76%	2
No	95.24%	40
Prefer not to answer	0.00%	0
TOTAL		42

Q10 Are you a member of a political party?:

Answered: 42 Skipped: 0

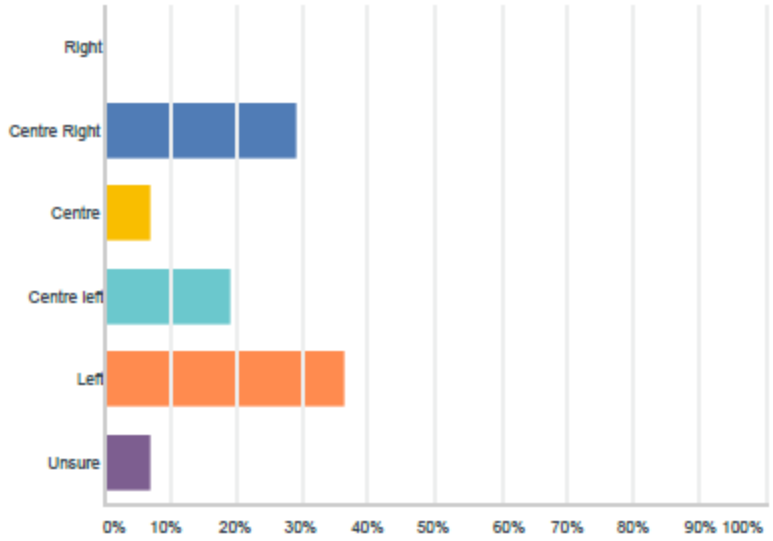


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	95.24%	40
No	2.38%	1
I sit as an independent	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	2.38%	1
TOTAL		42

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Prefer not to answer	6/5/2019 12:07 PM

Q11 According to your own definition, where does your party of membership sit on the political spectrum?:

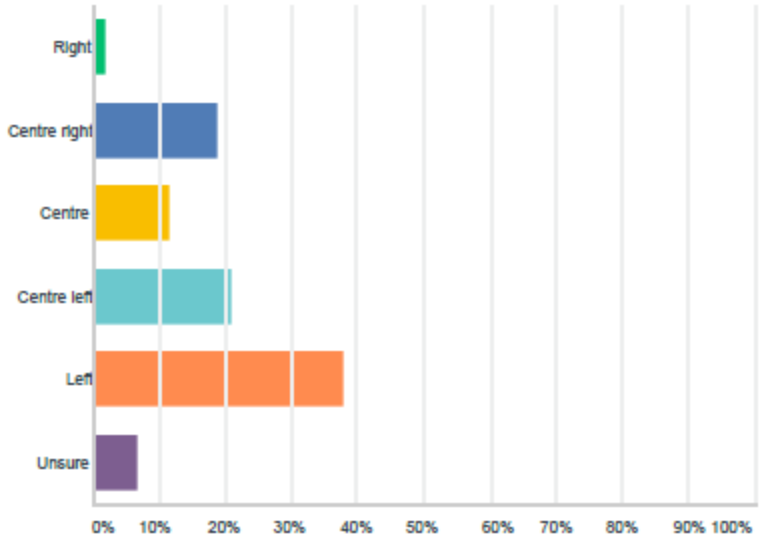
Answered: 41 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Right	0.00%	0
Centre Right	29.27%	12
Centre	7.32%	3
Centre left	19.51%	8
Left	36.59%	15
Unsure	7.32%	3
TOTAL		41

Q12 According to your own definition, where do you as an individual elected official sit on the political spectrum?

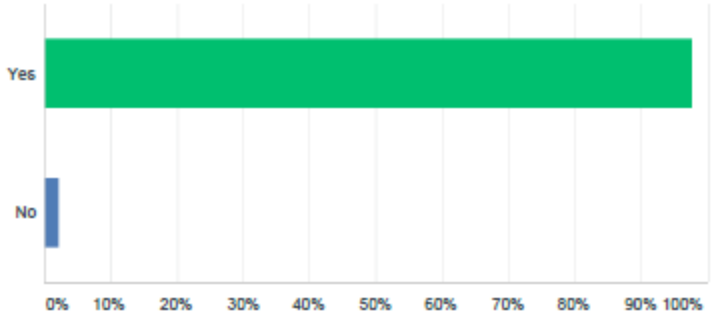
Answered: 42 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Right	2.38%	1
Centre right	19.05%	8
Centre	11.90%	5
Centre left	21.43%	9
Left	38.10%	16
Unsure	7.14%	3
TOTAL		42

Q13 Do you have a public Twitter account that you use to post about or discuss politics and/or your work as an elected official?

Answered: 42 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	97.62%	41
No	2.38%	1
TOTAL		42

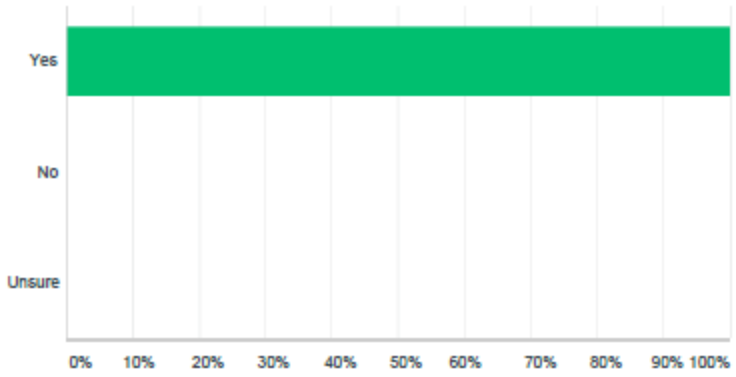
Q14 Why have you chosen not to create a public-facing account on Twitter, or to use Twitter for political communication?

Answered: 1 Skipped: 41

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	It's a very negative forum	5/10/2019 9:08 AM

Q15 Does concern about online harassment on Twitter play a part in your decision not to use Twitter as a tool for political communication?

Answered: 1 Skipped: 41

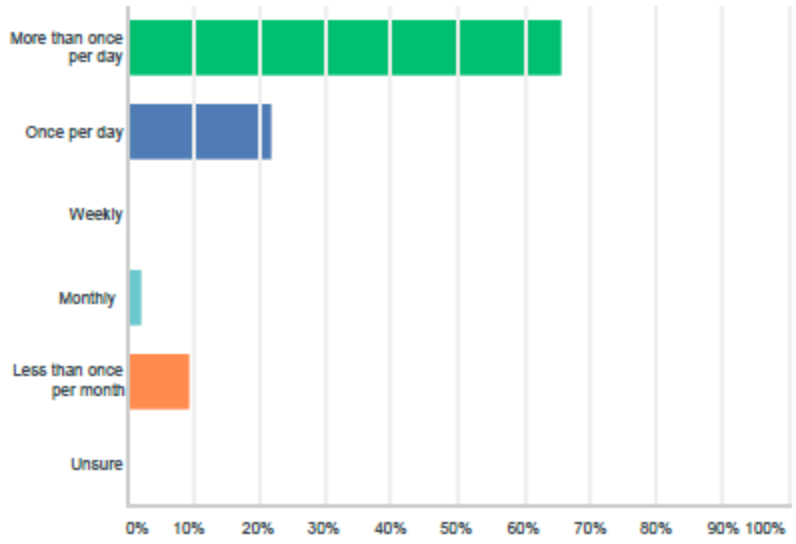


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	100.00%	1
No	0.00%	0
Unsure	0.00%	0
TOTAL		1

#	COMMENTS	DATE
	There are no responses.	

Q16 On average, how frequently do you use your public-facing Twitter account to post or retweet content, or to send direct messages?

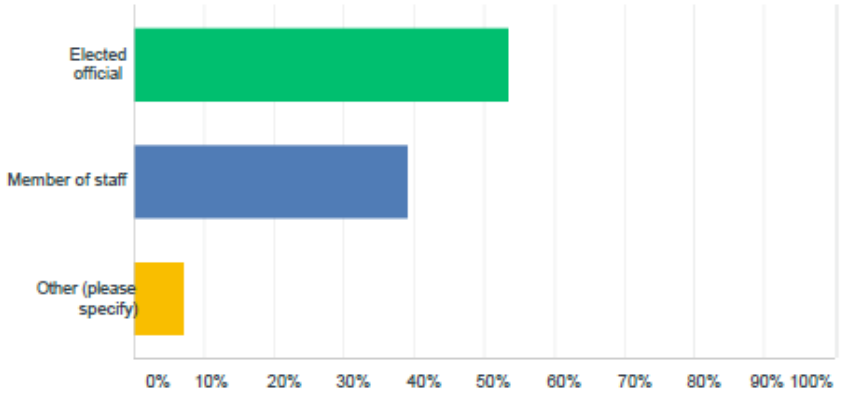
Answered: 41 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
More than once per day	65.85%	27
Once per day	21.95%	9
Weekly	0.00%	0
Monthly	2.44%	1
Less than once per month	9.76%	4
Unsure	0.00%	0
TOTAL		41

Q17 In a typical day, who is most often responsible for posting on your public Twitter account and managing the comments and messages you receive?

Answered: 41 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Elected official	53.66%	22
Member of staff	39.02%	16
Other (please specify)	7.32%	3
TOTAL		41

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
1	[redacted]
2	Equal mix of both elected official and staff
3	Both

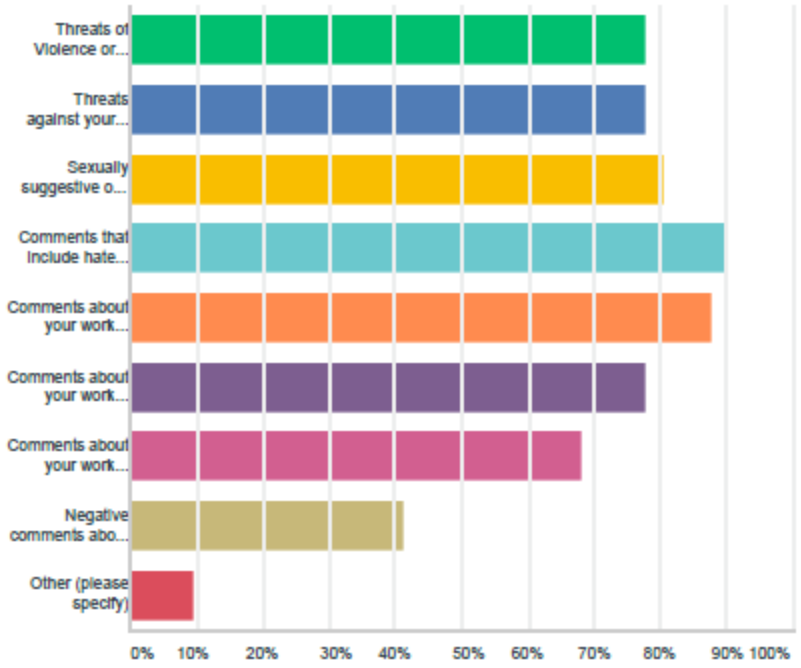
Q18 How many followers do you have on your public facing Twitter account?:

Answered: 41 Skipped: 1

#	RESPONSES
1	3500
2	1198
3	57,000
4	118000
5	200
6	1,757
7	2,220
8	1032
9	3476
10	599
11	No idea, I'm a bad twitter user
12	147
13	6500
14	3339
15	121,508
16	Just under 3000
17	3500
18	4061
19	5847
20	Over 2000
21	less than 100
22	11,300
23	6,100
24	8937
25	545
26	2576
27	18K
28	35 000
29	3176
30	520
31	2009
32	12,000
33	3000
34	More than 8000
35	1900
36	2700
37	2500
38	4244
39	4700
40	11000
41	over 4500

Q19 Which of the following types of content would you consider to be abusive if you received it on Twitter, either through direct messages, mentions, and/or subtweeting (please select all that apply):

Answered: 41 Skipped: 1

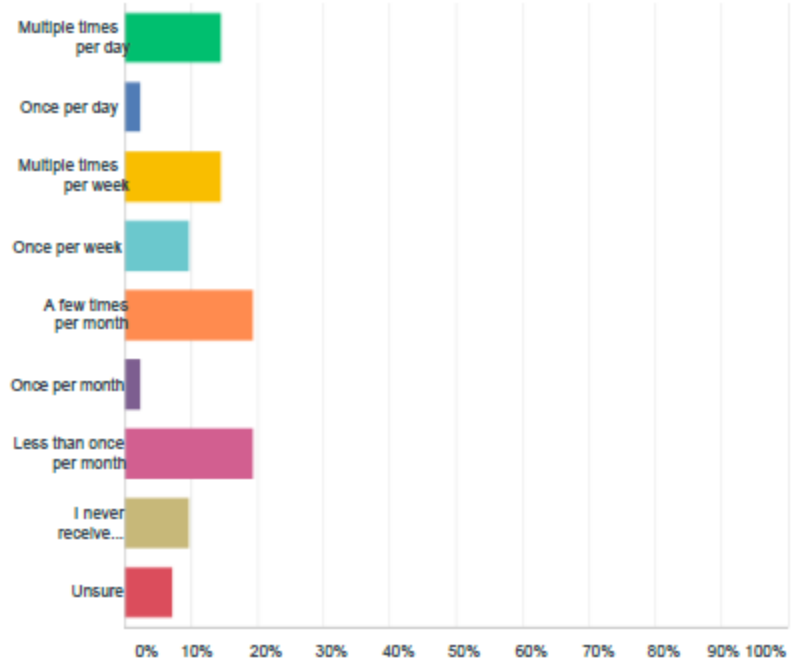


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Threats of Violence or Sexual Violence	78.05%	32
Threats against your family or staff	78.05%	32
Sexually suggestive or explicit comments	80.49%	33
Comments that include hate speech, including racist, ableist, or anti-LGTBQ+ slurs	90.24%	37
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your physical appearance	87.80%	36
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your gender, race, sexual orientation or other features of your identity	78.05%	32
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include expletives	68.29%	28
Negative comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official	41.46%	17
Other (please specify)	9.76%	4
Total Respondents: 41		

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
1	Negative comments regarding my age/expenence
2	Personally, I don't use the forum enough or pay close enough attention to my own account to notice. But I certainly notice in others, often sexual violence, drogatory comments directed towards women and challenges to intelligence...
3	name calling
4	Accusations of criminality; accusations of being a bad mother

Q20 Roughly how often do you receive comments (including direct messages, mentions, and subtweets) on Twitter that you find to be abusive, according to your own definition?

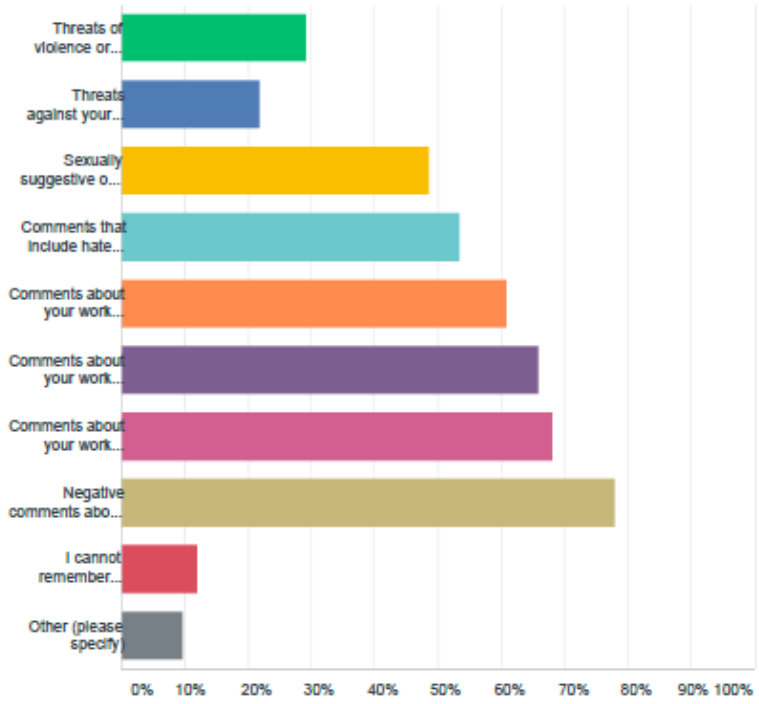
Answered: 41 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Multiple times per day	14.63%	6
Once per day	2.44%	1
Multiple times per week	14.63%	6
Once per week	9.76%	4
A few times per month	19.51%	8
Once per month	2.44%	1
Less than once per month	19.51%	8
I never receive comments that I judge to be abusive	9.76%	4
Unsure	7.32%	3
TOTAL		41

Q21 Which of the following types of comments can you remember receiving on Twitter since you entered public life, including your initial campaign for elected office (please select all that apply):

Answered: 41 Skipped: 1

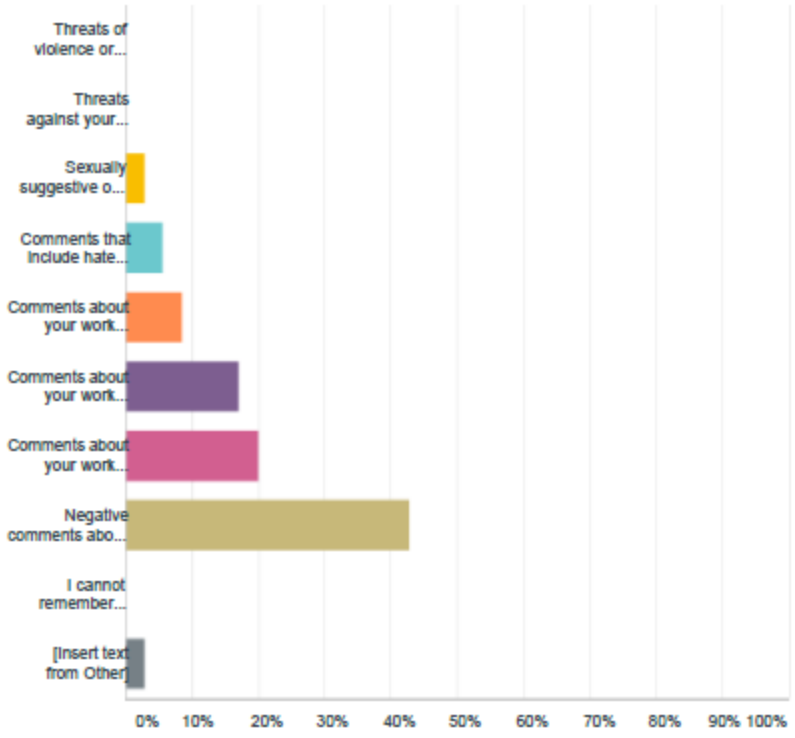


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Threats of violence or sexual violence	29.27%	12
Threats against your family or staff	21.95%	9
Sexually suggestive or explicit comments	48.78%	20
Comments that include hate speech, including racist, ableist, or anti-LGTBQ+ slurs	53.66%	22
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your physical appearance	60.98%	25
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your gender, race, sexual orientation, or other features of your identity	65.85%	27
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include expletives	68.29%	28
Negative comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official	78.05%	32
I cannot remember receiving any abusive comments on Twitter since I entered public life	12.20%	5
Other (please specify)	9.76%	4
Total Respondents: 41		

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
1	negative comments regarding my age/experience
2	I'm sorry that I'm not a more active user so that I can help with the study. This information is important. Women in politics are viewed and treated differently than our male counterparts.
3	name calling
4	Accusations of criminality; accusations of being a bad mother

Q22 Of the types of abusive comments you remember receiving on Twitter, which type would you say you receive the most frequently?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Threats of violence or sexual violence	0.00%	0
Threats against your family or staff	0.00%	0
Sexually suggestive or explicit comments	2.86%	1
Comments that include hate speech, including racist, ableist, or anti-LGTBQ+ slurs	5.71%	2
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your physical appearance	8.57%	3
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include mention of your gender, race, sexual orientation, or other features of your identity	17.14%	6
Comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official that include expletives	20.00%	7
Negative comments about your work and/or capabilities as an elected official	42.86%	15
I cannot remember receiving any abusive comments on Twitter since I entered public life	0.00%	0
[Insert text from Other]	2.86%	1
TOTAL		35

Q23 What, if any, action do you usually take to respond to {{Q22 }} when you receive them on Twitter?

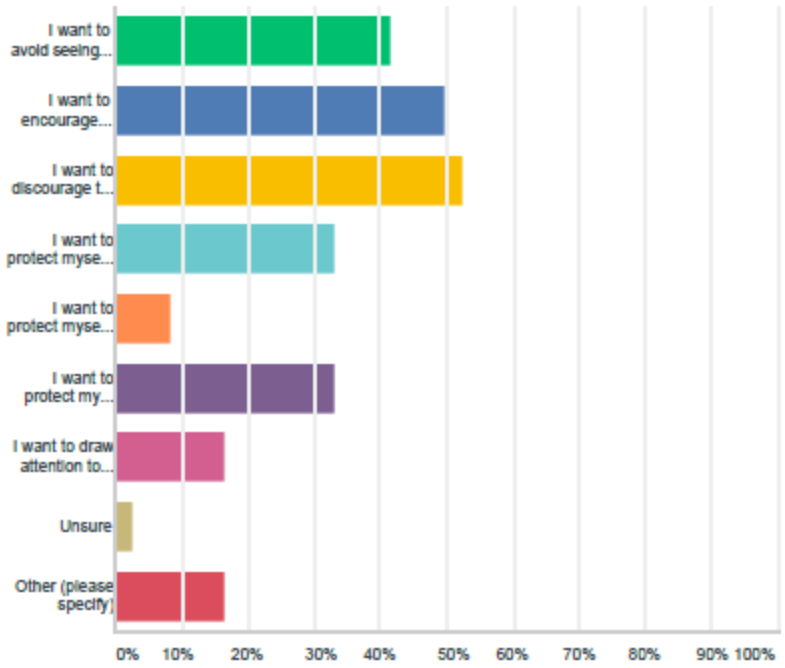
Answered: 36 Skipped: 6

#	RESPONSES
1	Ignore Mute I mute the perpetrator if it happens more than once, I ignore if once
2	Ignore Mute Ignore or mute.
3	Mute Mute
4	Mute Mute user.
5	Ignore Mute Completely ignore them and/or hide them depending on how many negative comments there are
6	Block Respond I will retweet a fact to contradict the tweet or block the person.
7	Respond Sometimes an official response
8	Block We have created online community guidelines [redacted] of this, we delete any extreme comments. We also have removed followers who continuously harass and are negative.
9	Ignore Typically ignore it.
10	Respond I call people out for their bad behavior
11	Ignore Respond Sometimes respond; usually ignore
12	Ignore We don't respond and we hide the comment when it's on Facebook.
13	Block Ignore Report None, as this is simply part of the job. We only ever took action if the comments were threatening [redacted] or went against the Twitter TOS (reported them to Twitter through the White List access available to verified accounts). Very, very rarely were people ever blocked.
14	Mute Mute Seldomly respond back- They just want a larger audience.
15	Respond Usually I respond by talking about the other work that I'm doing (i.e., if they think I only speak about [redacted] I reply with a list of all of the other advocacy work I do as an [redacted]
16	Block Mute mute/block
17	Block Ignore I do not respond on social media. If the comment is very offensive and is constant I may block the user.
18	Ignore We do not engage
19	Block If it is repetitive enough that we consider it harassment, the person is blocked.
20	Block Respond If it is an anonymous account I block it. If it is an actual person, I will sometimes ask questions back.
21	Block Ignore Mute when they are just negative, but don't include foul language or threats, nothing when they include foul language or name-calling, I mute the sender when they are worse than that, I report and block
22	Mute Report The comments are muted. If threats of violence were to be received, they would be reported through a different Twitter account. We do not reply.
23	I am no longer active on Twitter

24	Mute Mute the user. I do not block because I want there to be a record of what users said about me while I was here.
25	Mute I mute the individual.
26	Ignore Respond Je leur réponds quand je vois qu'il y a ouverture d'esprit et matière à discussion. Sinon je ne réponds pas.
27	Ignore We ignore them. We have a policy of "don't feed the trolls".
28	Block Report block and report
29	Report report it to twitter
30	Block I usually block the person sending the tweet
31	Block Block them
32	Ignore Do not respond.
33	Ignore Respond Try to correct if they are misinformed, or simply ignore
34	Block Mute Report Report to Twitter on occasion. Generally block or mute accounts.
35	Block Ignore Mute block, mute, ignore
36	Block Ignore Mute We do not engage with commenters. If the comments are inappropriate they will be hidden. If they are abusive the commenter will be banned, although banning is not something that is taken lightly the comments have to be excessively abusive.

Q24 Which of the following statements best describes your motivation for taking the action you've described? (please select all that apply)

Answered: 36 Skipped: 6

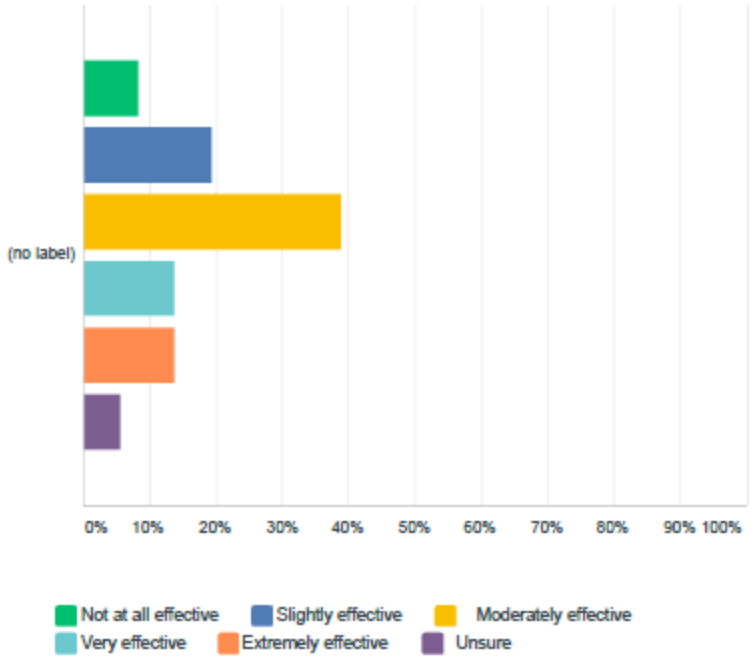


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I want to avoid seeing the comment in my feed or messages	41.67%	15
I want to encourage civility among my followers	50.00%	18
I want to discourage the commenter from continuing the behaviour	52.78%	19
I want to protect myself from psychological harm	33.33%	12
I want to protect myself from possible physical harm	8.33%	3
I want to protect my family and/or staff from psychological or physical harm	33.33%	12
I want to draw attention to the commenter's problematic behaviour	16.67%	6
Unsure	2.78%	1
Other (please specify)	16.67%	6
Total Respondents: 36		

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
1	no action was taken, partly because 1) it would be very time consuming and 2) did not want to draw attention to it
2	if the issue is bad enough to report, i want to help ensure the actions don't spread to others
3	Don't want to draw attention to the comment/commenter, and don't want to suggest that I am stifling debate or criticism against myself.
4	Ensure there is a record of what was said
5	Any form of engagement with trolls feeds them and they become more hateful, more aggressive. We do not engage.
6	I do not believe these comments should be allowed on social media and be seen by me, my staff or my followers

Q25 Do you feel that taking the action you've described has helped you to achieve your intended outcomes?

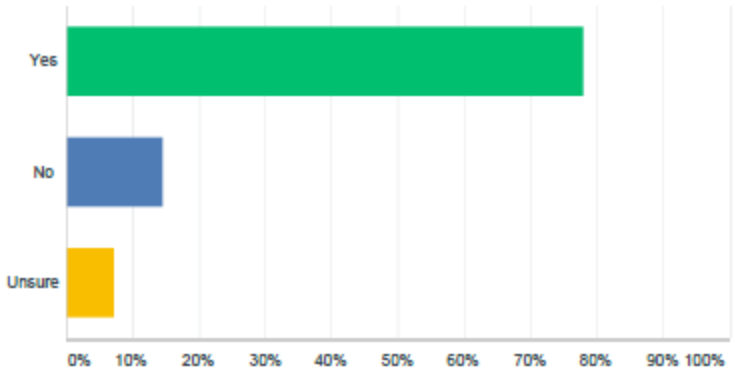
Answered: 36 Skipped: 6



	NOT AT ALL EFFECTIVE	SLIGHTLY EFFECTIVE	MODERATELY EFFECTIVE	VERY EFFECTIVE	EXTREMELY EFFECTIVE	UNSURE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	8.33% 3	19.44% 7	38.89% 14	13.89% 5	13.89% 5	5.56% 2	36	3.22

Q26 Research on abuse in online newspaper comments sections has indicated that discussion of certain political topics draws more abusive commenters than others. Can you recall a time when engagement with particular political issues resulted in you receiving an increased number of abusive comments on Twitter?

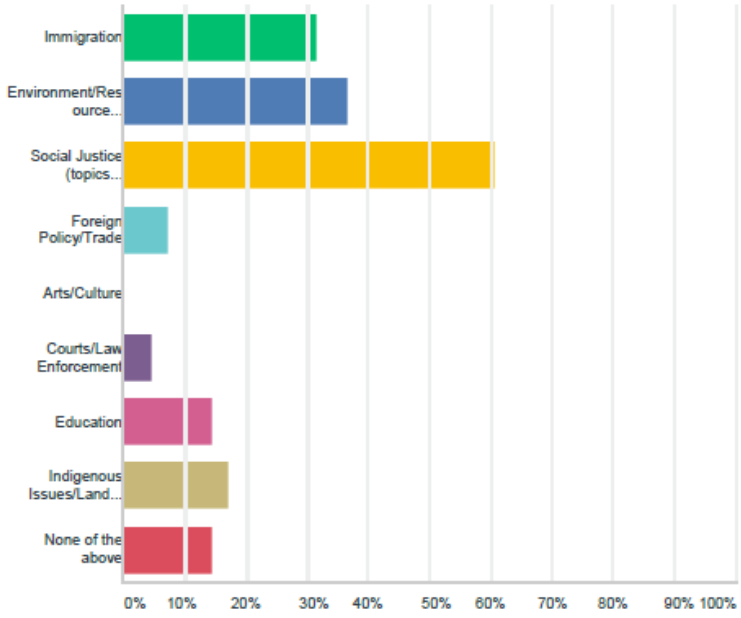
Answered: 41 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	78.05%	32
No	14.63%	6
Unsure	7.32%	3
TOTAL		41

Q27 Which political issues have you engaged with that have resulted in you receiving an increased number of abusive comments on Twitter? (please select all that apply)

Answered: 41 Skipped: 1

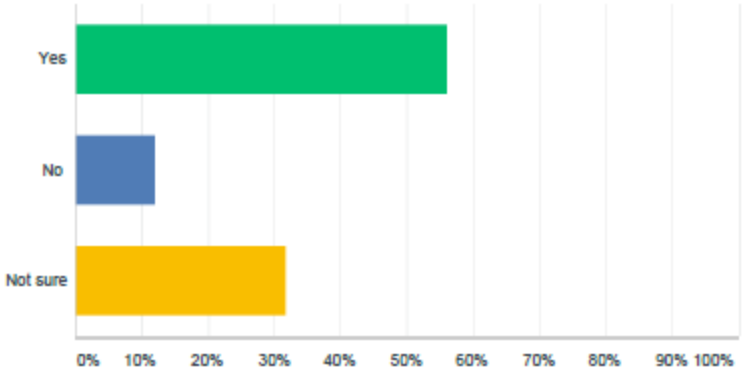


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Immigration	31.71%	13
Environment/Resource Development	36.59%	15
Social Justice (topics relating to women, racial minorities, LGTBQ+ communities, or other minority communities)	60.98%	25
Foreign Policy/Trade	7.32%	3
Arts/Culture	0.00%	0
Courts/Law Enforcement	4.88%	2
Education	14.63%	6
Indigenous Issues/Land Rights	17.07%	7
None of the above	14.63%	6
Total Respondents: 41		

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
1	Political decisions
2	Any mention of Muslims.
3	Again, I'm not an active user...
4	News reports of online harassment directed a[redacted]regularly resulted in an uptick in online harassment.
5	Events (galas, dinners, meetings with community groups/lobbyists). A recent post on Yom HaShoah had more than the usual number of abusive replies.
6	Health Care
7	Cyberbullying
8	Hasn't really happened. I preemptively mute folks and thats been effective for me. Also I am aware of selfcensoring somewhat to not attract a pile on. I use Twitter selectively

Q28 Based on your own experience and knowledge, do you feel that you receive more abusive comments on Twitter than your male colleagues?

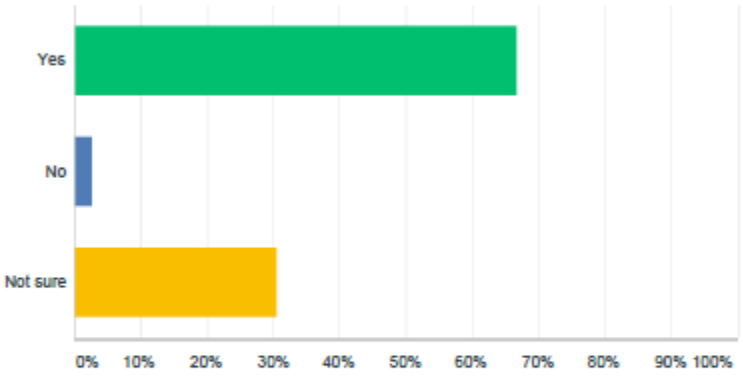
Answered: 41 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	56.10%	23
No	12.20%	5
Not sure	31.71%	13
TOTAL		41

Q29 Do you believe that you receive more abusive comments on Twitter than your male colleagues in part because of your gender?

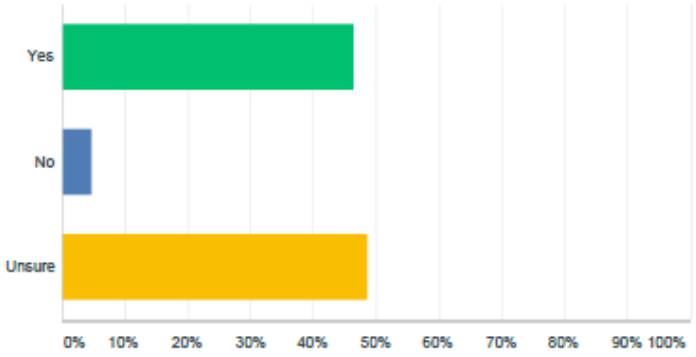
Answered: 36 Skipped: 6



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	66.67%	24
No	2.78%	1
Not sure	30.56%	11
TOTAL		36

Q30 Based on your experience and knowledge, do you believe that elected officials who are members of the LGTBQ+ community receive more abuse on Twitter than their colleagues?

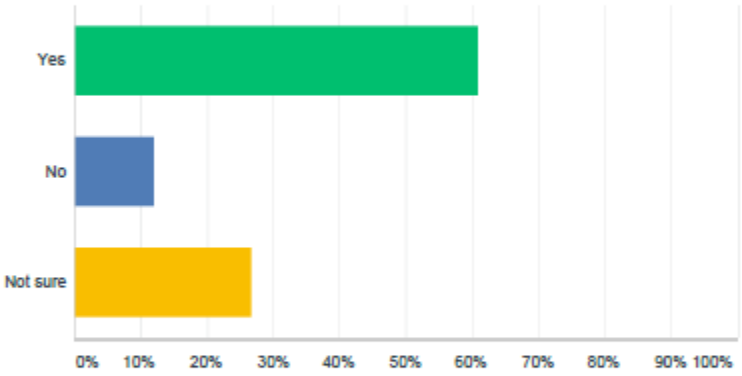
Answered: 41 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	46.34%	19
No	4.88%	2
Unsure	48.78%	20
TOTAL		41

Q31 Based on your experience and knowledge, do you believe that elected officials who are people of colour or members of visible minority ethnic or religious groups receive more abuse on Twitter than their colleagues?

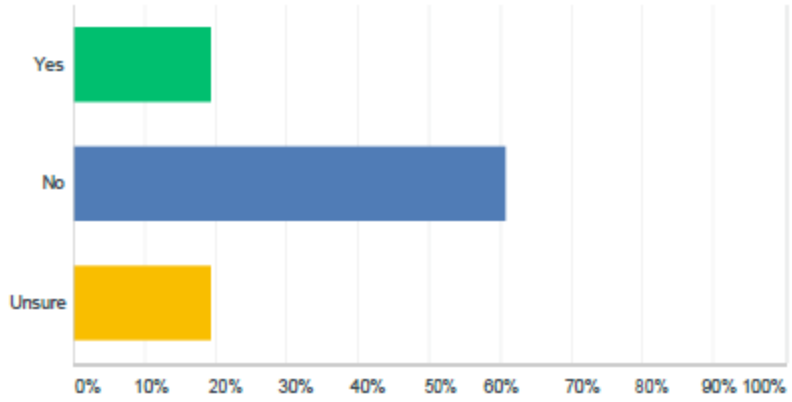
Answered: 41 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	60.98%	25
No	12.20%	5
Not sure	26.83%	11
TOTAL		41

Q32 Do you feel the abuse you've received on social media during your time as an elected official has interfered with your ability to do your job as an elected official?

Answered: 41 Skipped: 1

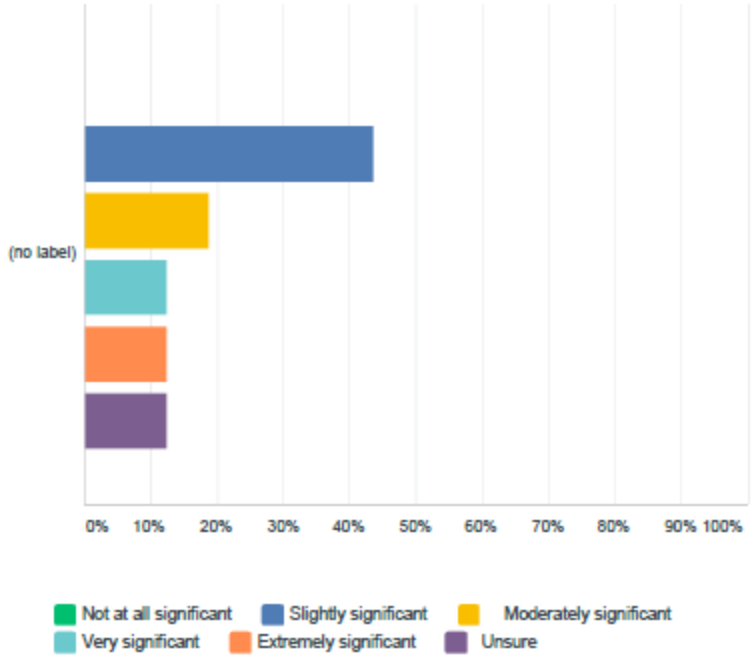


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	19.51%	8
No	60.98%	25
Unsure	19.51%	8
TOTAL		41

#	COMMENTS:
1	It has made me proceed with more caution than I otherwise would and it makes me question my instincts
2	But there is pressure to maintain an image on social media
3	Sometimes ... it prevents me from really going as far as I'd like on a number issues.
4	Early on, it was brutal to deal with the hate. I now don't ever read comment sections of anything that includes my name
5	As we ignore the abuse we receive, it has not interfered in our work.
6	I have not spoken to [redacted] personally on this issue, so I cannot in good faith answer this on her behalf.
7	Have not received social media abuse
8	I choose to not allow it affect me
9	it has caused me to question whether or not to continue serving

Q33 How significant a role has abuse on Twitter played in that interference?

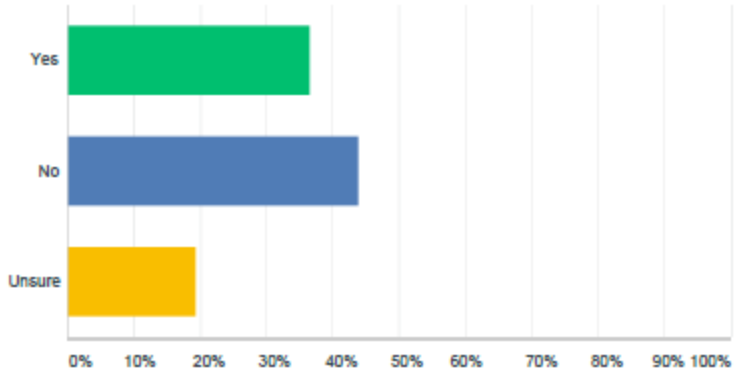
Answered: 16 Skipped: 26



	NOT AT ALL SIGNIFICANT	SLIGHTLY SIGNIFICANT	MODERATELY SIGNIFICANT	VERY SIGNIFICANT	EXTREMELY SIGNIFICANT	UNSURE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	0.00% 0	43.75% 7	18.75% 3	12.50% 2	12.50% 2	12.50% 2	16	3.31

Q34 Do you feel the abuse you've received on Twitter has affected your desire to continue serving in public office?

Answered: 41 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	36.59%	15
No	43.90%	18
Unsure	19.51%	8
TOTAL		41

#	COMMENTS
1	But it can be emotionally taxing
2	In all social media forums, yes.
3	Have not received social media abuse
4	Solidified my decision to run again.
5	I've been doing this role a long time - I'll stop when I want to stop. But I do think for many, who have not yet experienced such levels of abuse, it is discouraging them from running.

Q35 Would you like to offer any comments about your experience of using Twitter as a public figure?

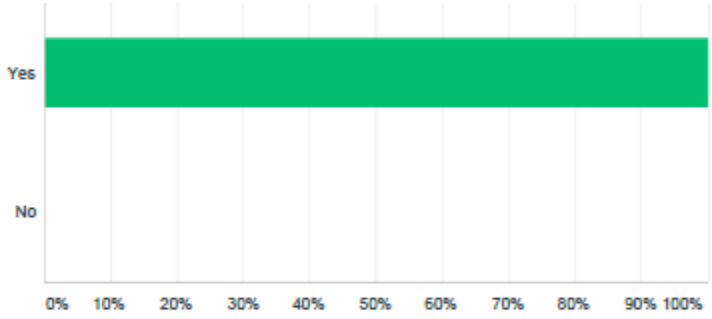
Answered: 24 Skipped: 18

#	RESPONSES
1	The harshest abusers have ironically been those who promote themselves as "progressives" or even "feminists". Mostly also male, by the way
2	My experience on Facebook is worse than Twitter but Facebook is much more receptive to help than Twitter. I avoid responding on Twitter now.
3	I purposely avoids posting about certain topics that garner more hate and when we do post, we are very careful and selective. Specifically, those relating to abortion. When we do post, she avoids checking her social media during the times that the posts get attention. As one of her staff members, we continuously are dealing with online hate that often is not related to the topic of issue. Many of our online hate on twitter is also related to environment issues, and the hate mostly comes from those not in [redacted]
4	Twitter can be a toxic, vile social media forum.
5	More involved moderators would be helpful
6	na
7	Positive experience. Great way to connect with constituents.
8	I attempt to be politely-partisan. I represent over 116,000 who have 116,000 different views. The most important thing I can do is to lead by example
9	Don't engage with the hate.
10	People should be required to use a real name.
11	For my boss, there is an expectation of posting quite regularly on all topics of concern, whether it's her critic portfolios or her constituency. However, the more you post, the more open you are to negative interactions on twitter. We try to strike a balance and we never respond to personally negative or hateful messages.
12	Male looking twitter accounts also like to tell me how to behave or what to say. This happens on a very regular basis. Male colleagues do not appear to have the same problem.
13	the platforms seem unwilling to moderate the usage of their platforms I think disagreement and even vigorous debate is ok - but name-calling, defamation and threats should never be tolerated
14	Women and men can say the same things, but women will be targeted for it. Female politicians will be targeted for their appearance, if they're good mothers - I raised both of my children while a MLA. Twitter commenters have mentioned this as though I were abandoning them. My experience with Twitter is less representative of other women in politics, as I have a smaller following, am less visible provincially/nationally [redacted] Yet I have also been a MLA for a long-time, meaning I have many years of "material" for abusers to pull from. The more prominent women get, the more likely they are to become targets of abuse. It's disappointing. The more egregious comments can be called out; it seems the others need to be ignored.
15	I believe that the experience has made me a target for violence and one can never no what is next. We see violence escalate in the general public and there is a real fear created.
16	Hard for the left, especially in Quebec.
17	"Falsehood flies, and the truth comes limping after it." We are called liars every single day due to rumours, incomplete reporting, and interest group propaganda. Even when the truth is revealed, it never makes the 'front page' so the lies persist as truth and my office a den of liars - despite our steadfast commitment to providing accurate, fulsome information to anyone who requests it. It is demoralizing.

18	The outright lies that get spread are very hard to stop. A lie spreads faster than the truth in every case
19	The negative impacts of twitter almost outway the positive
20	I find the comments about physical appearance to be very difficult.
21	The anonymous aspect of twitter and other social media forms allows people to be more rude & [redacted] I had no one within the caucus who cared about me or or in whom I could confide. It was an extremely painful, scary, lonely experience. I believe now the result of this experience was that it caused me to have PTSD - and that, along with the other abusive behaviour I was experiencing from Caucus members and staff at the time and for another two years caused me to have a high level of anxiety and insomnia as well as a state of being on constant high alert. Exhausting. I went off twitter for a year because of this experience. Since I went off and cane back on I haven't experienced this kind of abuse since.
22	I like Twitter but have felt really torn when witnessing pile ons of good people I follow. I don't intervene because I would not have time to manage the traffic, and because many of these twitter event really don't engage constituents but are beyond any one jurisdiction
23	It's best to let staff manage it.
24	Twitter rarely is a place to share ideas and promote constructive conversation and criticism.

Q36 I consent to submit my responses for inclusion in this study:

Answered: 42 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	100.00%	42
No	0.00%	0
TOTAL		42

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