

Anyone still wanting to enter politics?

The impact of violence on women's political aspirations

Women in politics are role models who can motivate the next generation of young women to enter politics. Observing that women in politics receive hate might deter young women, but it could also motivate women get into action. How does seeing violence against female politicians affect the aspirations of young women to become politically active? For this study by Politica, we spoke with dozens of young aspiring females. Here, a focus on young women both with and without a migration background, who have [had] aspirations to enter politics.

Violence deters

"Will people listen to me if I become politically active? And how much is it going to cost me personally? Those two things constantly alternate."

The vast majority of participants report that observing violence against women in politics daunts them. Online and offline hatred and threats, the constant situation of being under a magnifying glass, and the fear of being judged on appearance rather than on substance are pivotal here. Where does this daunting effect lead to? These are the key findings.

Perceiving violence against women in politics leads aspirants to...

1. Doubt becoming politically active. The political ambition is tempered or postponed.

2. Becoming politically active behind the scenes rather than in the forefront. Thus they can exert political influence without too much visibility.

3. Withdrawal from social media. They consider to be less present on social media to prevent hate.

Women of colour bear a double burden

"Often a kind of multiple discrimination is really the case. If you're a woman of colour or from an immigrant background then you bear a double burden."

Women of colour cite both sexism and racism as obstacles to becoming politically active. The visible hatred toward [former] politicians, such as Sylvana Simons and Kauthar Bouchallikht, who have had to face much hatred in recent years, has struck many of them. Remarkably, both participants with and without a migration background specifically often mention women of colour as political role models. In addition to Simons and Bouchallikht, for example, Khadija Arib is also mentioned. The role model effect thus works both ways: a role model can inspire, and at the same time the hatred she receives can demotivate.

Protecting the family wins over ambition

For women with a child/children, protecting their families is a frequently mentioned reason for their

hesitations to becoming politically active. Here, not only self-protection but also the protection of their family is weighed against ambition, ideals, a political career, and contact with their grassroots support.

Hate deters, but that deterrence motivates

The "deterrent effect" participants are aware of may lead to fewer women in politics. Many participants see this as a major problem and are aware that women are not yet equally represented. Instead, everyone wants more women in politics. For some, the realisation that hatred deters, is also a motivation to become politically active after all:

"For me it might actually give me strength. I would like to set a good example, to show that things could be different."

Recommendations

The "deterrent effect" of violence on aspirants threatens the quality of our democracy. When women stop wanting to enter politics, or withdraw otherwise, the pool of available talent shrinks. Also, the impact of violence on aspirants may lead to the further underrepresentation of women in the future, or continued existing underrepresentation. How do we solve this problem? 'Political parties, politicians themselves and civil society play a vital role in stopping and addressing violence,' participants tell us when asked for suggesting solutions:

1. Political parties and politicians have to:

- A.** Change their internal culture, both inside political parties as, for example, the manners in the House of Commons;
- B.** Create legislation that will better protect people from online and offline hate, such as criminalising doxing and making it easier to shield personal data at the Chamber of Commerce;
- C.** Regulate social media platforms.

2. Civil society has to:

- A.** Bring women together, aiming to build up mutual solidarity and to exchange coping strategies;
- B.** Continue giving attention to the subject of hatred toward politicians;
- C.** Support female politicians and aspirants.

3. In society as a whole, education included, more awareness is needed about sexism and specifically about [the effects of] hatred towards politicians. This should also include men.

"As long as there is a minority of women active in politics, they will remain to stand out more. And therefore, women will also remain more the target of this kind of harassment and threats. The only solution is that we all go into politics together and vote for each other."