

Mr Lee Tarlamis MP  
Chairperson  
Electoral Matters Committee  
Parliament of Victoria

EMC Submission No 117  
Received 4 November 2020

Dear Mr Lee Tarlamis MP,

### **Inquiry into the Impacts of Social Media on Elections and Electoral Administration**

Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) enthusiastically welcomes this enquiry into the impacts of social media on elections and electoral administration. This inquiry is timely and necessary, the rise of partisan politics and overseas electoral interference through social media threatening to destabilise and cause disruption to our democratic processes. In addition to these threats, we are particularly concerned with the rise of online abuse and harassment of women politicians, which is directly connected to the willingness of women to stand for election.

Democracies function most effectively when they are representative of the populations they serve. According to analysis from the University of Melbourne conducted in 2018, around 40% of Victorian politicians are women. This does not accurately represent the gender breakdown in Victoria, and is even less reflective of the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of Victoria's communities. This lack of representation directly contributes to inequality in our society.

The gendered and identity-based cyberhate experienced by women politicians is a serious threat to our democracy. In a survey conducted across 39 countries, 44 per cent of women politicians reported having received threats of death, rape, assault or abduction, with a majority of these occurring online. This is markedly different to the experience of men in politics. For instance, it was reported that Julia Gillard received about twice as much abuse on Twitter as Kevin Rudd, who she deposed as Prime Minister.

Online violence against women in politics has increased steadily as women have increased their profile and presence in politics. This violence takes the form of sexualised and extreme abuse, including sexual harassment, image-based abuse, slutshaming, doxing, rape threats and death threats. This also includes violent threats to family members.

Women are underrepresented in elected office and studies from the UK suggest that the potential for vitriolic online harassment and abuse makes it even less likely that women will stand for election.

Gender Equity Victoria therefore recommends the Inquiry to investigate the impacts of social media harassment and vilification of women. We advise the undertaking of an intersectional analysis to determine what effects this harassment is having on the willingness and interest of women and other underrepresented groups to stand for election.

We look forward to the Inquiry's response to this matter.

Kind regards,



Tanja Kovac  
GEN VIC CEO