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Author

Buncayo, Celina

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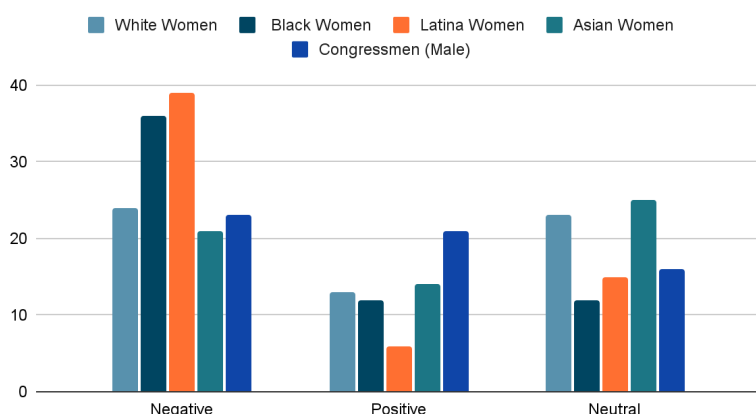
By **Celina Buncayo**, 2025 Cal-in-Sacramento and Jo Freeman Women in Politics Fellow*
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“You need to do much more to gain the same amount of respect that is allowed to be inherent for others,” says interviewee Delina Melaku.

From a young age, young women of color like Delina feel compelled to make a difference and advocate for their communities. Delina grew up politically engaged and joined student government, where she experienced hypercriticism and realized that – as a woman of color – she had to fight for a spot at the table that is traditionally dominated by men. Women of color have faced historical exclusion from politics and government: institutions that were not built with them in mind.

Today, women of color have achieved significant strides in state and federal politics, reaching a [record high](#) in the U.S. Congress and California Legislature. However, representation does not equate to inclusion. Women of color in politics experience hypercriticism for their appearance, behavior, and actions in ways that their male and white counterparts do not.

Comparison of Tweets Regarding Congresspeople



The graph above shows collected data of social media posts or “tweets” on the platform “X.” As displayed, Black and Latina congresswomen representing California disproportionately receive the most negative tweets and the least positive tweets compared to their White, Asian, and/or male counterparts.

Black and Latina congresswomen were hypercriticized through repetitive and aggressively worded tweets that expressed racial stereotypes, name-calling, and personal attacks.

For example, tweets regarding Black Congresswoman Maxine Waters called her names like “wicked witch,” “ultra r*tard,” “severely unhinged,” and “disgusting.” [One tweet](#) compares Waters to a figure of a toad, similar to many other tweets that ridicule her hair, age, and physical appearance. Another example is Latina Congresswoman Linda Sanchez, who is frequently called “idiot,” “ugly angry disgusting left,” and “stupid.”

On the other hand, tweets regarding White, Asian, and male congresspeople were far less concerned with personal attacks on physical appearances, lives, and personal traits. They received more criticism on their [campaign contributions](#), [voting records](#), and [political beliefs](#). Based on data collected from the social media platform “X,” Black and Latina congresswomen receive the most hypercriticism characterized by [irrationality](#), [aggression](#), and [personal attacks](#).

“You have to fit a certain beauty standard, and it seems to be Euro-centric,” says one interviewee. The interviewee argued that the public hypercriticizes women of color in politics because they do not fit the Eurocentric mold of beauty and likeability. All interviewees expressed struggles in presenting themselves to become more likable in university politics by attempting to adhere to Eurocentric beauty standards.

Hypercriticism against women of color politicians is often grounded in Eurocentric biases, which can explain the data of Black and Latina congresswomen receiving the most hypercriticism among their counterparts.

Hypercriticism harms women of color politicians in various ways, and a lesser-known but equally important problem is the negative impact of hypercriticism on women of color youth. Young women of color are dissuaded from considering politics as a future out of fear that they will be subjected to hypercriticism and negativity.

Interviewees shared vulnerable experiences in student government and political institutions. They expressed being victims of online hate, nonstop public scrutiny, and the need to prove themselves worthy to be in positions of power beyond their identities as young women of color.

One interviewee says, *“It just feels like there will always be something to criticize, and it is very discouraging, and it does kind of make you want to be like, you know what? Maybe I shouldn’t be at the forefront of this.”* As a young woman of color, she experienced online hate and personal attacks during her term in student government, receiving private messages and public comments that called her names like “slut” and “ugly.” These experiences deterred her from considering politics as a future path.

Hypercriticism of women of color is a pressing issue both for WOC politicians and WOC youth. It is high time to recognize this systematic violence that has disadvantaged women of color in politics for too long. In a time when [diversity, equity, and inclusion \(DEI\) programs and initiatives are under attack](#), it is crucial to defend the continuity of DEI and the political empowerment of young women of color.

[Women are more likely to become politically engaged when they see other women in politics](#) — the representation and inclusion of women of color in politics is thus vital in empowering young women of color to consider politics as a future path.

“It’s not like you’re alone, and especially now, you know, post-20th-century world, there are obviously more women in positions of power. And it’s not impossible,” says one interviewee.

We must create a future where women of color do not just get a seat at the table but are leading it. Everyone has a role to play, whether it’s advocating for women of color in politics and the continuity of DEI, challenging narratives and instances of hypercriticism, and encouraging youth civic engagement initiatives and spaces. Representation is important, but is insubstantial without inclusion.

*Based at UC Berkeley’s Institute of Governmental Studies, the Cal-in-Sacramento Fellowship Program sends approximately 30 Cal students to the state’s capital every summer for eight-week public service internships. The Jo Freeman Women in Politics Fellowship supports Cal-in-Sac Fellows whose individual research projects focus on women in politics, including research on public policies that affect women.