

Anti-Trump women's group used Facebook and email to secretly organize in rural Texas: study

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Disagreeing with the political views of the majority in your community (city, state, or friends) can feel isolating, and even frightening.

Sometimes dissenting from the community, and instead connecting with like minded individuals seems like a far better, and safer option. That is what 136 women, who voted for Hillary Clinton, secretly did in rural Texas, USA. A recent study by a researcher at University of Texas at Austin explored how these women connected, why they chose to organize secretly, and how this affected their political image.

Emily Van Duyn (University of Texas at Austin) interviewed several [women](#) in this secret political organization referred to as the Community Women's Group (CWG). The group was formed a week after the 2016 USA Presidential election, in which their communities voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump. In a pro-Trump community, through the use of emails and Facebook, CWG gathered like minded women to support, educate, and resist.

Using a semi-structured interview guide the researcher asked questions like: how many people know about your political opinion(s), what risks you face if they were to find out, is it important to keep the group private, and how do you engage in politics as a member of this group?

Van Duyn found that the women were afraid to express their opinions publicly because of fear of retaliation. Some also felt that politics is for

men, or that it would hurt their image if they did. Despite the possible violent backlash that could ensue should their communities find out; the women called their representatives, tracked legislation, and fought back behind the scenes.

Existing research has investigated how differences in [political views](#), within a discussion group, can discourage people from participating. However, there is little research on what happens when these people cannot publicly express themselves.

"What I find is not that these women were just afraid of being isolated from the community they care deeply for, although they were, but also afraid of physical retaliation from that same community," said Van Duyn. "That a group of reasonable, patriotic grandmothers feels the need to hide their political opinions from those around them challenges all of us to reconsider the privilege to be publicly political and the possibility that the things we see on the surface in our communities, the yard signs, the bumper stickers, are not the whole story."

More information: Emily Van Duyn, Hidden Democracy: Political Dissent in Rural America, *Journal of Communication* (2018). [DOI: 10.1093/joc/jqy042](#)

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