

Hello everyone. My name is Andra, and I'm speaking on behalf of Women Against the Far Right.

Thank you all for being here today.

In just a few weeks, our communities will be going to the polls in local elections.

As we know, local councils decide things like housing, social care, and youth services.

They decide what support exists for families, and what kind of values shape the communities we live in.

And right now, parties like Reform UK are trying to gain a foothold in those councils.

They are presenting themselves as defenders of "ordinary people". More specifically, they are presenting themselves as protectors of "women and girls."

But as women organizing against the far right, we know that story doesn't hold up.

Because we've seen this playbook before.

Again and again, the far right take our fears, our anger, our very real experiences of violence, and they twist them into a narrative that blames migrants, refugees and minorities.

They step into moments of crisis and redirect people's anger away from the systems that created these problems.

And when you look at the people leading those movements, you see people who exploit fear instead of addressing the real causes of violence and inequality.

And as women, we know something important.

The danger to women has never come from entire communities, it comes from the safest place we should know, home.

91% of women who experience harm are harmed by someone they already know - partners, ex-partners, friends or family members.

Not refugees, not migrants, not specific nationalities.

The answer to male violence will therefore never be found in racism.

And the answer is certainly not giving political power to people who exploit women's fears for votes.

So when politicians try to reduce women's safety to racist talking points, they're not protecting us.

They're distracting from the real work that needs to be done for our sisters, daughters, friends and mothers.

Because protecting women means investing in communities.

It means funding domestic violence services.

It means not voting against stronger protections for stalking victims.

Against measures to tackle spiking.

Against new laws addressing intimate image abuse.

It means not threatening to get rid of flexible working from home, the Equality Act or our NHS.

It also means making sure people have secure housing, decent jobs, and strong public services.

And many of those services rely on migrant workers.

1 in 5 nurses are migrants

1 in 3 care workers are migrants

So, when these politicians say they are "protecting women and girls," I have to ask:

Protecting me from what?

Because their policies certainly aren't protecting my independence, safety, or economic security, and it's their names, we all saw in the Epstein files.

Were not an island of strangers

The far right wants us looking sideways at each other instead of asking bigger questions about why so many women feel unsafe, unsupported, and left behind.

And that's why these local elections matter.

Because the far right doesn't start by taking power nationally.

They start chipping away locally and winning council seats.

They start by embedding their ideas into everyday politics.

And if we want decisions made with hope in mind instead of hate, we must stop that now.

Because history shows us something powerful.

When we organize, things change.

We must organize in workplaces, schools, neighbourhoods and communities.

We need to talk to the neighbour who's worried about the future, the colleague who's heard something online and isn't sure what to believe, the parents outside the school gates who feel angry but don't know where to put that anger.

Because elections are won through conversations as we saw a bit ago in Manchester.

They're won when someone takes the time to knock on a door, hand over a leaflet, and say: "I wanted to talk to you about what's really at stake in this election".

And that's why everyone in this room has a role to play.

And you've already made a massive first step by coming along tonight.

Help us leaflet.

Help us have stalls.

Help start those conversations.

Of course only if you feel able and safe to do so.

If anyone wants extra support having these conversations or something they can physically hand to someone, there's women and violence specific leaflets at the back with key facts and talking points which relate to the topics that come up repeatedly.

So, as we approach these local elections

We can either allow fear and scapegoating to gain ground in our councils.

Or we can organise to try to make sure that when the votes are counted, parties like Reform UK do not gain power in our communities.

Because women's safety should never be waved as a banner when convenient.

And when I look around this room tonight, I know there are people here, whose mums and grandmothers fought for the rights that allow someone like me to stand here and speak openly about women's safety and women's equality.

They're the women who organised before it was popular.
Who pushed for change when the world told them to stay quiet.

And because of that work and courage, women like me and you have a voice today.

We have protections under the law. We have the right to vote.

We have the ability to stand up and say that women deserve safety, dignity, and independence.

That came from decades of organising and refusing to accept injustice.

And that's exactly why we cannot allow all that progress to be used by political grifters who want to turn women's suffering into a prop for their own power.

Because the women who fought for these rights didn't do it so that people can get away with wrapping themselves in the language of women's safety while doing nothing to empower women.

And we owe it those women, and to the generations coming after us, not to let that work be undone in these upcoming elections.

Thank you