

English summary of Brå report 2019:15



The Politician's Safety Survey 2019

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 Official Statistics of Sweden
Applies to statistics from 2019

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) – centre for knowledge about crime and crime prevention measures

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society by producing data and disseminating knowledge on crime and crime prevention work.

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Summary

Purpose and method

The purpose of the Politician's Safety Survey (*PTU*) is to measure the extent and consequences of harassment, threats, and violence experienced by elected representatives who are exposed in their capacity as elected representatives. The purpose of this most recent survey is also to compare exposure during the two election years 2018 and 2014 and look at the result in relation to exposure during the two interim years 2012 and 2016.

The timing of the PTU – the survey is conducted in alternate years, so that data collection alternates between an election year and an interim year – has been selected based on the result that the exposure experienced by elected representatives is higher during an election year than during an interim year. The survey will constitute a basis for future measures for the purpose of combating and preventing threats, violence, and harassment against elected representatives both generally and during election campaigns.

This is the fourth¹ comparable survey conducted by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (*Brå*) as instructed by the Government. Approximately 14,000 regular members of the Swedish Riksdag² and delegates from other political assemblies have been asked about their exposure to harassment, violence, and threats during 2018. The data were collected primarily through an online questionnaire, but those officials who did not want to, or were not able to, respond to the online questionnaire could instead respond to a survey sent by mail, which was sent together with a reminder about the survey. However, the majority of the respondents used the online questionnaire. The results in this report are based on the elected representatives' experiences or assessments of the incidents to which they have been exposed.

One in three elected representatives were victimised during 2018

One-third of all elected representatives (30 per cent) state that during 2018, they have been the victim of harassment, threats, or violence in connection with their political work as elected representatives. As regards attempted corruption, 2.8 per cent of the elected officials stated that they had been exposed during 2018.

In total, the proportion reporting exposure to harassment, threats or violence is somewhat larger among women than among men (32 and 30 per cent respectively). A total of just over 2,400 elected officials reported having been victimised in this way. The majority of these individuals had been victimised on repeated occasions during 2018; only 16 per cent of the victims stated that the victimisation had occurred only on a single occasion.

¹ Since the first survey should be regarded as a full-scale pilot study, comparisons are only presented for the four subsequent surveys.

² The Swedish Riksdag is the national legislature and the supreme decision-making body of Sweden.

The victimisation primarily takes the form of threats and harassment, whereas violence is less common. The most common type of incident was a threat or attack in social media.

A larger proportion of women than of men were exposed to threats and harassment over the course of 2018 (31 and 28 per cent respectively), whereas the proportion of men exposed to violence, vandalism and theft was somewhat greater than the proportion of women (6.6 and 5.2 per cent respectively).

Younger elected representatives were victimised more often than older elected representatives, and elected men with a foreign background were victims more often than men with a Swedish background.

Victimisation higher in 2018 than previous years

In total, the proportion of elected representatives who report having been victimised is higher than in previous years. During the election year of 2018, 30 per cent reported exposure to victimisation, as compared with 28 per cent during the previous election year, 2014. Furthermore, the proportion who reported exposure to victimisation during the interim years, between elections, was lower (25 per cent in 2016, and 20 per cent in 2012). The increases primarily relate to exposure to threats and harassment.

Politicians in major metropolitan areas, members of the Riksdag, and chairpersons are victimised more often

Municipal and county council politicians in Stockholm state more often that they are victimised than do elected representatives in other regions. Members of the Riksdag are victimised to a significantly greater extent (70 per cent) than members of municipal and county councils (30 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively).

Victimisation also differs depending on the type of duties and positions held by the elected representatives; chairpersons were victimised more often than ordinary committee or assembly members. Women holding a chair were victimised to a greater extent than men in the same position (43 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively).

At the party level, the proportion reporting experiences of victimisation was greatest for elected representatives from the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) (44 per cent). There are no clear patterns with regard to the proportions from the different parties who reported victimisation during the two election years (2014 and 2018). For some political parties, victimisation levels were higher in 2018 than in 2014, while the reverse was true for other parties.

Higher levels of victimisation among persons active on social media or who attracted media attention

Elected representatives who were more active on the Internet and social media, or who have attracted the attention of the mainstream media also state that they are victimised to a greater extent than those who are less active or less visible in the mainstream media. This pattern is found among both women and men.

Among elected representatives who were active on the Internet and/or in social media to a very significant extent, 63 per cent stated that they had been victimised, as compared with 13 per cent of those who were not at all active on the Internet or in social media.

Among those who were written or spoken about in the media a great deal in 2018, 70 per cent reported having been victimised, while the corresponding proportion among those who had not been written or spoken about in the media was 13 per cent.

The type of duties performed by the elected representative and the amount of time spent on these duties also affect the elected representatives' victimisation. The survey shows that the percentage of victims was significantly higher among elected representatives who work in that capacity full-time, as well as among those who are active in multiple political assemblies.

The most common perpetrators are men aged between 45 and 64

The most common response to the question of how victimised elected representatives perceived the perpetrator's gender and age was that the perpetrator was a man aged between 45 and 64. This was the case for victimised representatives of both sexes, and the pattern is largely similar to that noted in previous years.

As was the case in previous years, the most common perpetrator in 2018 was an angry citizen (37 per cent), or a querulant (21 per cent). However, the percentage who perceived the perpetrator as an

extremist³ was noticeably higher in election years, than in the years between elections. Among such persons, it is most common that the perpetrator is perceived to be a member of a right-wing extremist group.

Low propensity to report

The percentage of incidents which are reported to the police remains low; 19 per cent of the incidents in 2018 were stated to been reported to the police, which is the same level as that noted in the surveys for 2016 and 2014. The level was somewhat lower in 2012. The proportion of men who describe having reported the victimisation incident to the police is somewhat higher than the proportion of women (20 per cent and 18 per cent respectively). Violence, vandalism, and theft are reported to the police to a greater extent (40 per cent) than threats and harassment (15 per cent).

The main reason given for not reporting the incident to the police (28 per cent) was that the victim did not believe that a report would lead anywhere, and almost one-fourth of the elected representatives (23 per cent) stated that the reason was that they regarded the incident as minor or trivial. Almost as many, 21 per cent, viewed the incident as part of the job.

In total, half of the incidents were reported to the head of security of the party or the political assembly. Here, as well, incidents involving violence, vandalism, and theft, were reported to a greater extent than threats and harassment (62 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively).

Knowledge of the existence of an action plan within either the party or the political assembly in respect of threats and violence against elected representatives continues to increase. In 2018, 25 per cent of elected representatives were *not* aware of such an action plan, as compared with 38 per cent in the election year of 2014. This also applies to knowledge about the existence of a head of security; 20 per cent of the elected officials in 2018 did not know whether such a position existed in the party or the political assembly, as compared with 32 per cent in 2014.

Need for support and help is often not met

Of those who felt a significant need for support or help, one-fifth state that they did not receive any support at all; this was reported by a somewhat larger percentage of men than of women. At the same time, the proportion who reported having received a substantial amount of support has been higher in election years than during the years between elections (2016 and 2012).

Among those who, nevertheless, stated that they had received support or help, 68 per cent in 2018 stated that they received such support or help from another elected representative. Viewed over time, this percentage has increased; from the level of 57 per cent in the election year of 2014.

However, the majority of the victims did not feel any need for support or help.

Many are still affected when performing the duties for which they were elected

A total of almost one-quarter of elected representatives (24 per cent) state that their victimisation, or worry about being victimised, affects them in the performance of their duties. Among the elected representatives who have been victimised, the proportion is even larger (42 per cent). The proportion who had been affected in the performance of their duties was also greater during the election year of 2018 by comparison with the election year of 2014, irrespective of whether or not the individuals in question had been victimised.

A larger proportion of women than of men report having been affected in the performance of their duties (28 per cent and 20 per cent respectively). The gender difference is greatest among those who have been victimised (48 per cent and 38 per cent respectively).

The most common consequence of victimisation or concern about being victimised was the elected representative avoiding becoming involved or expressing an opinion on a specific issue. In terms of elected representatives who had been victimised, there were significant differences in the percentage who stated they were affected, depending on the offence committed against them. A higher percentage of those who had been victims of violence, vandalism, or theft were affected by their victimisation than of those who had been victims of threats and harassment.

³ "Extremist" here means a person whom the victim has perceived to be a member of a right-wing extremist/racist group or a left-wing extremist group.

Six of ten victimisation incidents linked to an election campaign

A little over six of ten victimisation incidents in 2018 (61 per cent) were judged by the elected representatives to have primarily been associated with the election campaign. By comparison with the previous election year of 2014, this represents an increase, from 57 per cent. Elected representatives serving in municipal and county council assemblies judged the most recent incident to have occurred in connection with the election campaign to a greater extent than members of the Swedish Riksdag.

Of the incidents categorised as threats or harassment, 60 per cent were linked to the election campaign, while the corresponding proportion for incidents categorised as violence, vandalism and theft was 67 per cent.

A larger proportion of the incidents associated with the election campaign were perceived as quite or very frightening, by comparison with incidents that had not been associated with the election campaign (39 per cent and 33 per cent respectively). Among the incidents associated with the election campaign, it was more common for the perpetrator to have been perceived as a right- or left-wing extremist by comparison with other incidents.

Patterns of victimisation differ between women and men

Women and men are subject to victimisation to approximately the same extent, but there are differences in the nature of their victimisation. It is more common, for example, for women to be exposed to threats and attacks via social media, and a larger proportion of women reported that their most recent victimisation incident had been of a sexual character than was the case among men.

It is also more common for women to be worried that they themselves, or a relative, will be exposed to crime or other similarly disagreeable incidents as a result of their political duties. In 2018, this was particularly clear among women who had themselves been victimised, a group whose level of worry has increased successively in each year that the survey has been conducted.