



The Politicians' Safety Survey

Exposure to harassment, threats and violence

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Summary

Purpose and method

The purpose of the Politicians' Safety Survey (Swedish abbreviation: PTU) is to measure the extent and development as well as the consequences of threats, violence and harassment experienced by elected representatives. The purpose is also to present data which can be used to design measures to prevent or limit the victimisation, catch incidents that take place and improve the care provided to the victims.

This is the second survey produced by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Swedish abbreviation: Brå) on behalf of the Government. Almost 14,000 ordinary members in the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) and assemblies of delegates (municipalities, county councils and regions) have been asked about their exposure to harassment, threats and violence in 2012. The data was mainly gathered through an online questionnaire and supplemented by a questionnaire sent by post.

One in five elected representatives has been victimised

One in five elected representatives state that they have been the victim of crimes or similar incidents connected to their work in the political sphere. In total, this amounts to 1,721 elected representatives. The victimisation mainly concerns threats and harassment (19 per cent); few incidents constitute physical attacks (2.7 per cent). Violence is very rare. The most common form of incident was threats or harassment via social media. Almost half of those victimised (40 per cent) had been involved in some sort of incident in 2012. Younger representatives were more victimised than older ones.

The majority of the victimised representatives had several incidents of this nature in 2012, with only one fifth having a single incident during the year.

Members of the Riksdag and chairpersons are more often victimised

The risk of being victimised varies between the three political assemblies in question. Almost six out of ten members of the Riksdag were victimised in their capacity as elected representative. Among members of the county council assembly, the number was one in four, and among members of the municipal assembly, one in five. Victimisation also varies greatly between elected representatives on different boards and with different positions. The position with the highest victimisation rate is chairperson, where on average three in ten elected representatives have been victimised. But this also varies between types of chairpersons; chair of the board (54 per cent), chair of the social welfare board (39 per cent) and chair of the planning and building board (38 per cent) are more frequently victimised than other chairpersons.

Of the parties, Sverigedemokraterna (the Sweden Democrats) have the highest rate of victimisation (43 per cent), but members of Miljöpartiet and Vänsterpartiet (the Green Party, 26 per cent and the Left Party, 24 per cent, respectively) are also more victimised than members of other parties. When it comes to counties, Blekinge (28 per cent) and Gotland (27 per cent) have the highest victimisation rates.

More active politicians are more victimised – especially women

A clear result indicated in the PTU is that the more active a politician is, the greater risk of being exposed to harassment, threats or violence connected to their role as elected representative. Among elected representatives who have five or more roles and duties, almost 30 per cent were victimised in 2012, and among full-time politicians the number was 50 per cent.

Women who are chairpersons are significantly more victimised than men in the same position (37 per cent compared to 28 per cent). Women are also more victimised among elected representatives with five or more roles and duties (35 per cent compared to 24 per cent among men). A greater proportion of women who are full-time politicians are victimised compared to men with the same range of duties and roles (59 and 45 per cent, respectively).

Upset citizens and dogmatists are the most common perpetrators

Almost six in ten perpetrators are, according to victimised elected representatives, “upset citizens” or “dogmatists”. However, almost 15 per cent of the perpetrators are other elected representatives.

The two most common motives were to humiliate or insult the elected representative (27 per cent) or influence their actions or decision making (24 per cent). The incident was often connected to a specific decision (28 per cent). More than four in ten victimised elected representatives were victimised during off-duty hours.

Victimisation and worry has consequences for many

One in five (20 per cent) of all elected representatives were affected in their official capacity by victimisation or worry. Of the **victimised** elected representatives, 40 per cent were affected in some way. More than one in ten elected representatives overall have, due to victimisation or worry regarding victimisation, avoided commitment or voicing an opinion on a specific matter. When it comes to only the victimised persons, as many as one in four have censored themselves in some context connected to their role as elected representative.

Low rate of reporting

Of the victimised elected representatives, 17 per cent reported their last incident to the police. Violence, vandalism and theft were reported to a significantly greater extent (39 per cent) than threats and harassment (14 per cent).

The main reason for incidents not being reported to the police differed between women and men. The main reason for women not filing reports was that the victimisation was felt to be part of their job (27 per cent compared to 19 per cent among men). Among men the main reason was that they did not believe that the report would go anywhere (28 per cent compared to 24 per cent among women).

In total, 43 per cent of the incidents were reported to someone other than the police. However, more than half (54 per cent) of elected representatives *neither* filed a police report nor some other report of their latest incident. Almost half of the elected representatives (46 per cent) did not know whether there was an action plan or not. Almost four in ten elected representatives (38 per cent) did not know if there was a head of security whom they could contact if victimised.