



## The Politician's Safety Survey 2015



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English summary of Brå report 2015:23

**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.

This report is a summary of the Swedish report  
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The Swedish report can be ordered from Brottsförebyggande rådet, [info@bra.se](mailto:info@bra.se)

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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 is also to compare victimisation during an election year with victimisation during an interim year in which there is no national election. The survey will constitute a basis for future measures for the purpose of combatting and preventing threats, violence, and harassment of elected representatives both generally and during election campaigns.

This is the third survey conducted by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) as instructed by the Government. Almost 14,000 regular members of the Swedish Riksdag and delegates in political assemblies have been asked about their exposure to harassment, violence, and threats during the 2014 election year. The data was collected primarily through an online questionnaire and secondarily through a survey sent by mail.

## Almost three in ten elected representatives have been victimised

Almost three in ten elected representatives state that they have been the victim of harassment, threats, or violence in connection with their political work as an elected representative. In 2012, the corresponding percentage was two in ten. The total number is slightly more than 2,400 elected representatives. The majority were victimised more than once in 2014, and only one-fifth were victimised once in 2014. The victimisation is primarily threats and harassment, while violence is less common. The most common incident was a threat or attack in social media. Younger elected representatives were victimised more often than older elected representatives.

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

At the county and police region levels, municipal and county politicians in Stockholm are victimised more often than elected representatives in other regions. Looking at the type of political assembly, members of the Riksdag are victimised significantly more (65 per cent) than members of municipal and county councils (27 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively). Victimisation also differs depending on the type of task and position within the task; chairpersons were victimised more often than ordinary members, particularly on boards. Women holding a chair were victimised to a greater extent than men. At party level, the percentage of victimisation was greatest for Sverigedemokraterna (50 per cent). As compared with the preceding survey,

the percentage differs the most for elected representatives of Folkpartiet (17 per cent in 2012, 30 per cent in 2014) and Moderaterna (20 per cent in 2012, 31 per cent in 2014).

### **Persons active in social media are particularly victimised**

Elected representatives who were active on the Internet and in social media are victimised to a greater extent than those who are not as active. Among elected representatives who were active on the Internet and/or in social media, 60 per cent were victimised, as compared with 12 per cent of those who were not at all active on the Internet or in social media. Another type of visibility is the number of duties performed by the elected representative and the extent to which the duties were performed. In all cases, the survey shows that the percentage of victims was significantly higher among more active elected representatives than among less active representatives, particularly in respect of women.

### **Political extremism more common during an election year**

As was the case in 2012, the most common perpetrator in 2014 was an upset citizen (34 per cent), or a dogmatist (24 per cent). However, the percentage who perceived the perpetrator as an extremist was remarkably higher during the 2014 election year (32 per cent) than in 2012 (19 per cent). Political decision-making as a motive was less extensive in 2014 (15 per cent) than in 2012 (28 per cent). The attention surrounding the elected representative as a private individual was a more common motive in 2014 (22 per cent) than in 2012 (15 per cent).

### **Low reporting rate even during an election year**

The percentage of incidents which were reported to the police is low (19 per cent), however violence and vandalism are reported to a greater extent (36 per cent) than threats and harassment (15 per cent). The main reason given for not reporting the incident to the police was that the victim did not believe that a report would lead anywhere. One in five elected representatives viewed the incident as part of the job and thus did not report it to the police. In total, almost half of the incidents were reported to the head of security of the party or the political assembly.

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 was better in 2014 than in 2012 (46 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively, did not know whether any such plan existed), but was still low. This also applies to knowledge about the existence of a head of security (38 per cent and 32 per cent, respectively, did not know whether such a position existed).

### **Many are still affected in performing the duties for which they were elected**

Self-censorship, i.e. the elected representative avoiding becoming involved or expressing an opinion on a specific issue, was the most common consequence of victimisation or concern about being victimised (14 per cent among all, 25 per cent among victims). In terms of elected representatives who had been victimised, there were significant differences in the percent-

age who were affected depending on the offence committed against them. A higher percentage of those who were victims of violence, vandalism, or theft, were affected than those who were victims of threats and harassment.

Half of the most recent incidents were associated with election campaigns

More leisure-time politicians than part-time or full-time politicians associate the incident with an election campaign. The perpetrators of the incidents which are associated with an election campaign were more often physically present when compared with perpetrators of incidents which were not linked to election campaigns. Uncertainty regarding the age and gender of the perpetrator is thereby less, notwithstanding that the perpetrators are, to a greater extent, unknown to the elected representative.

## Brå's assessment

The level of victimisation among all elected representatives, regardless of age, gender, or party membership, is higher for the 2014 election year than for 2012. On the other hand, one sees a change in the perpetrator's membership in a group and motive. The reporting rate must increase both to strengthen the preventive work as well as to prevent elected representatives accepting victimisation as normal.



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