



## The Politician's Safety Survey 2017



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English summary of Brå report 2017:9

**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  
Politikernas trygghetsundersökning 2017, report no 2017:9.

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 of this most recent survey is also to compare exposure during two interim years (2012 and 2016) and look at the result in relation to exposure during the 2014 election year.

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 an assumption that the exposure experienced by elected representatives may be 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 of elected representatives both generally and during election campaigns.

This is the fourth survey conducted by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (*Brå*) as instructed by the Government. Approximately 14,000 regular members of the Swedish Riksdag<sup>1</sup> and delegates in the political assemblies have been asked about their exposure to harassment, violence, and threats during 2016. The data was collected primarily through an online questionnaire, and 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 incidents which occurred.

## One in four elected representatives was victimised during 2016

One-fourth of all elected representatives (25 per cent) state that during 2016, they have been the victim of harassment, threats, or violence in connection with their political work as an elected representative. In respect of attempted corruption, 3.4 per cent of the elected officials stated that they were exposed during 2016.

Taken as a whole, exposure to harassment, threats, or violence, is the same for both women and men. The total was slightly more than 2,000 elected officials. The majority of them were victimised on repeated occa-

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish Riksdag is the national legislature and the supreme decision-making body of Sweden.

sions during 2016; only 16 per cent of the victims state that it occurred on a single occasion.

The victimisation is primarily threats and harassment, while violence is less common. The most common incident was a threat or attack in social media.

A slightly greater percentage of men than women stated that they were the victim of physical violence and vandalism.

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

### **Victimisation higher in 2016 and 2012**

Taken as a whole, the percentage of elected representatives who state that they were victims has increased since 2012, when slightly less than 20 per cent stated that they had been victims. The level for 2016 (25 per cent) is, however, lower than during the 2014 election year (28 per cent). This pattern is reflected in respect of threats and harassment, as well as for violence, vandalism, and theft.

The percentage of elected representatives who are women and who were victimised by threats/attacks in social media, received threatening email, or were shamed on the Internet was higher in 2016 than in both 2012 and the 2014 election year. This pattern is not reflected in respect of elected representatives who are men.

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

Municipal and county politicians in Stockholm state more often that they are victimised than do elected representatives in other regions. Members of the Riksdag are victimised significantly more (66 per cent) than members of municipal and county councils (25 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively).

Victimisation also differs depending on the type of duties and position within such duties; chairpersons were victimised more often than ordinary members of boards. Women holding a chair were victimised to a greater extent than men in the same position.

At the party level, the percentage of victimisation was greatest for elected representatives from Sverigedemokraterna (43 per cent). For all parties, the percentage has increased in comparison with 2012 by between 0.8 percentage points and 7 percentage points, depending on the party in question. The greatest percentage increase has taken place for elected representatives of Socialdemokraterna.

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

Elected representatives who were more active on the Internet and in social media also state that they are victimised to a greater extent than those who are less active. Among elected representatives who were active on the Internet and/or in social media to a very significant extent, 58 per cent

state that they were victimised, as compared with 12 per cent of those who were not at all active on the Internet or in social media.

The type of duties performed by the elected representative and the extent to which the duties were performed also affect the elected representative's 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 between 45–64 years of age**

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 between 45–64 years of age.

As was the case in 2012 and 2014, the most common perpetrator in 2014 was an angry citizen (36 per cent), or a person who abuses the legal process (24 per cent). However, the percentage who perceived the perpetrator as an extremist<sup>2</sup> was noticeably higher in 2016 than in 2012 (30 per cent as compared with 19 per cent). The percentage who stated this in 2016 is essentially at the same level as during the 2014 election year (32 per cent). Among such persons, it is most common that the perpetrator is perceived to be a member of a right-wing extremist group.

### **Continued low tendency to report**

The percentage of incidents which are reported to the police continues to be low; 19 per cent of the incidents in 2016 were stated to been reported to the police, as compared with 17 per cent in 2012. During the 2014 election year, the percentage of incidents reported to the police was also 19 per cent. Violence, vandalism, and theft are reported to the police to a greater extent (41 per cent) than threats and harassment (16 per cent).

The main reason given for not reporting the incident to the police (27 per cent) was that the victim did not believe that a report would lead anywhere, and almost one-fourth of the elected representatives stated that the reason was that they viewed the incident as part of the job.

In total, almost 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.

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 2016, 33 per cent of elected representatives were *not* aware of such action plan, as compared with 46 per cent in 2012. This also applies to knowledge about the existence of a head of security; 26 per cent of the elected officials in 2016 did not know whether such a position existed in the party or the political assembly, as compared with 38 per cent in 2012.

<sup>2</sup> "Extremist" here means a person who the victim has perceived to be a member of a right-wing extremist/racist group or a left-wing extremist group.

### **Need for support and help is often not met**

The majority of the victims did not feel any need for support or help. However, of those who felt a significant need for support or help, one-third state that they did not receive any support at all; this was stated by a greater percentage of women than men.

Among those who, nevertheless, stated that they received support or help, 64 per cent in 2016 state that they received such support or help from another elected representative. Seen over time, this percentage has increased from the level of 49 per cent in 2012.

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

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







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