

TORE BJØRGO and EMILIE SILKOSET

Threats and threatening approaches to politicians

A survey of Norwegian parliamentarians and cabinet ministers

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Summary

- 82% of politicians have experienced at least one form of unwanted behaviour or threats, or have received some kind of hateful messages, whether through direct contact or via social media.
- 40% have been subjected to serious incidents. These incidents involve actual or attempted attacks, threats (also directly or indirectly via social media) to attack the politician or people close to them, or damage to their property or personal belongings.
- More politicians were subjected to harassment and threats via social media than previously. This seems to be a growing trend.
- The extent to which parliamentarians are susceptible is linked to political parties and issues rather than to the coalition government. The most susceptible group is Progress Party (FrP) politicians, while politicians from the Conservative Party (Høyre, meaning "Right") are among the least susceptible. Both parties were in government during this parliamentary term, with the prime minister from the Conservative Party.
- The experience of undesirable incidents has an impact on both the private lives and political activity of politicians. Our findings show that the consequences for private life have fallen from 42% in 2013 to 27% in 2017. In the case of political activity, there was a slight increase, from 13% to 17%. There is a clear link between the seriousness of the incidents and their impact on the politicians' behaviour.



Foto: Cato Hemmingby

Introduction

Senior politicians as a professional group are susceptible not only to harassment but also to serious threats and violence. International studies have shown that, among all categories of public figures, politicians are the most susceptible, particularly when it comes to lethal violence. (Meloy & Amman, 2016). In Norway's neighbouring country, Sweden, a prime minister and foreign minister were murdered, and in 2016 a British MP was killed. The 22 July terror attacks in Norway targeted the Norwegian government and young political activists.

In Norway, the Police Security Service (PST) is responsible for ensuring the safety of public officials (ie cabinet ministers, parliamentarians and Supreme Court judges). It does so not only by providing security advice, threat analyses, bodyguard services and other security services for public officials, but also by conducting interviews with, issuing cautions to and, where necessary, prosecuting those responsible for the threats. In this work, it is crucial for the PST to have a systematic mapping of the extent and nature of the unwanted incidents experienced by cabinet ministers and parliamentarians. Since, by its very nature, this would seem to be a research task, the PST requested the research department of the Norwegian Police University College to carry out such mapping studies, which it financed.

The first study mapping "Threats and threatening approaches to politicians" (Bjelland & Bjørge, 2014) was carried out in spring 2013, towards the end of the 2009–2013 parliamentary term. A fresh survey was carried out in spring 2017, towards the end of the 2013–2017 parliamentary term. This second report is a direct follow-up to map updates and changes between 2013 and 2017, and follows the same analytical process and structure. We ask key questions similar to those in the first report: to what extent have Norwegian parliamentarians and cabinet ministers been sub-

jected to unwanted and threatening behaviour and actual attacks? What consequences do such threatening incidents have for their personal lives and political activity? A new, key question is then asked: What changes have occurred since the first mapping study in 2013? The 2013 election brought a new parliamentary majority to power in Norway, involving a shift from a centre-left to a blue-blue coalition. One important question is whether this has led to changes in the parties whose representatives are most susceptible to threats. Which aspect is most significant for their susceptibility: post, political platform or general visibility?

This survey has three aims. The first is to gain an up-to-date insight into the categories of politicians most susceptible to different types of incidents, into how serious, wide-ranging and frequent such threatening incidents are, and into what kinds of consequences these incidents have for the politicians themselves. The second is to carry out comparative analyses to investigate whether the entry of a new administration and a different ruling coalition led to any changes between 2013 and 2017. The starting-point of the survey is the politicians' own experience of these different incidents, but the survey also attempts to gain insight into what kinds of motives and motivations the politicians believe underlie the incidents. The third aim is more practical: to provide the PST with a knowledge base that can be used for risk analysis and security advice.

The data that serve as the basis for this study are drawn from surveys carried out by the research department of the Norwegian Police University College in spring 2013 and spring 2017, commissioned by the PST. The previous survey provided the PST with knowledge that has made an important contribution to its work on threat prevention, threat handling and assessment of the threat levels facing individual public officials. The PST's intention was that a new survey would yield up-to-date information and understanding. From a research perspective, comparative analyses provide valuable information, making it possible to observe trends and develop-

ments. Such data also raise important questions about threat assessments: to what extent do expressed threats to cause harm to a politician represent genuine intention to harm the individual concerned? In conclusion, we will discuss our findings in the light of international research in this field.

Survey of politicians

In all, 198 people received the survey in spring 2017. This includes all cabinet ministers and parliamentarians, as well as deputy representatives who have been sitting for at least two years. Cabinet ministers received the survey as a PDF attachment and in paper form. Parliamentarians and deputy representatives received a link to the web-based survey via Questback. The questionnaire was sent out with an explanatory letter. Following dispatch and after three rounds of reminders, 82 people had responded to the survey. This corresponds to 41.4% of the sample, a lower level than in the first mapping survey (56.3% in 2013). This probably reflects a more general trend whereby it is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve survey response rates at levels as high as one might wish. Since the survey targets a very special and limited target group, we still view the response rate as acceptable, although not ideal.

A comparison between gross and net samples with respect to party membership, post and gender reflects a few minor skews in the 2017 data. Out of consideration for the politicians' anonymity we cannot provide absolute figures everywhere in the article. When it comes to party membership, Høyre is somewhat overrepresented, the Labour Party (AP) and FrP are somewhat underrepresented, while Socialist Left (SV) and the Liberals (Venstre) are slightly underrepresented. When it comes to post, cabinet ministers are slightly underrepresented ($n = 6$) and parliamentarians are slightly overrepresented ($n = 76$). In the case of gender, men are somewhat underrepresented while women are somewhat overrepresented. Generally speaking, we think these skews will have only marginal effects,

although the numbers for the smallest parties are too low to yield any particular information about general patterns and trends.

However, it is conceivable that there may be a skew when it comes to the degree of susceptibility to threats and other troublesome incidents. One possible source of error may be that people who have not had any particular experience of this may be less inclined to answer the questionnaire. On the other hand, we are aware that several politicians who are publicly known to have experienced threats have not responded to the survey. Another source of uncertainty linked to the subject matter is that some people (ie politicians) put up with a great deal more personal attacks and harassment than others before perceiving them as a threat. Consequently, the survey respondents may have quite substantially different thresholds for reporting. We have noted that some of the most controversial politicians who responded to the survey report having experienced fewer or less serious threatening incidents than we might have expected. What's more, cabinet ministers are better protected against threatening letters and e-mails since these kinds of communication are picked up by their staffers and do not reach the politician, whereas parliamentarians are less protected from this sort of thing. Taking all this into account, we therefore have little reason to believe that there is any systematic skew in the material that might suggest the figures offer an exaggerated impression of how susceptible politicians are to these types of threat.

The use of an electronic survey gives rise to a challenge that *may* lead to a certain lack in the data for parliamentarians. One possible consequence is an under-reporting of the number of respondents who have experienced unwanted incidents. Cases where this arises are mentioned in footnotes where applicable.

Different types of unwanted incident

Most politicians experience unpleasant harassment

The respondents first answered a question about whether, in their time as a public official, they had been subjected to certain incidents that they assumed to be linked to their political activity. The twelve different incidents are reported according to frequency in Table 1. Almost all the respondents answered these questions. The percentages are calculated on the basis of those who *did* respond to each individual question.¹

The table shows that the incidents most of the public officials experienced involved unwanted or negative comments. More than 60% of the public officials have received unwanted or troublesome letters or e-mails. More than half reported that somebody has approached them in a troublesome or undesirable way via Twitter or Facebook and that somebody has passed on malicious information about them.

Although the most frequent incidents are “less” serious, it is also clear that a relatively high proportion have experienced more serious incidents. 24% report that somebody has threatened to harm them or somebody close to them. As many as 12.5% have been physically attacked or an attempt has been made to attack them, while 7.5% have experienced somebody vandalising property that belongs to them.

We went on to measure how many unwanted incidents each respondent has experienced. Our findings show that most experience few incidents, with almost 70% of respondents experiencing between one and five different incidents. On average, the public officials report experiencing 3.3 incidents.

¹ Parliamentarians who have been elected for a period of more than four years *may* have reported the same incidents as in the previous survey.

Table 1. Reported incidents

2017		2013		2017		2013	
Ranking	INCIDENT	%	N	%	N	%	N
1	1	Sent you unwanted and distressing letters, faxes or e-mails	62,5	50	69,1	76	
2	4	Approached you in a troublesome and undesirable way via Twitter or Facebook	52,5	42	37,8	42	
3	2	Passed on malicious information about you (eg newspaper articles, blog posts, smear campaigns online etc)	50,6	40	52,3	57	
4	5	Made unpleasant or unwanted advances or attempted contact (eg at home, at work or in public places)	37,5	30	37,3	41	
5	3	Made unwanted and annoying phone calls to you	37,5	30	45,0	50	
6	7	Behaved in an uncomfortable or distressing way towards you, in connection with political events or during travels	27,8	22	25,2	28	
7	6	Threatened to harm you or people close to you	24,1	19	27,0	30	
8	8	Physically attacked you or tried to attack you	12,5	10	14,4	16	
9	9	Loitered around your home or around places where you often stay	8,8	7	10,8	12	
10	12	Brought false prosecutions against you	8,8	7	3,6	4	
11	10	Vandalised property or items that belong to you (eg house or car)	7,5	6	8,1	9	
12	11	Followed you (eg in car or on foot)	0	0	7,2	8	

Survey question: During your time as a parliamentarian or cabinet minister, has anyone subjected you to any of the incidents listed below?

There is relatively little difference between cabinet ministers and parliamentarians. The former have been subjected to 2.8 different incidents on average, whereas the parliamentarians have experienced 3.3 incidents. Since the cabinet ministers represent such a limited share of the sample, there is little difference between the average measure for the entire sample of public officials and the sample consisting solely of parliamentarians. One might have expected cabinet ministers to be much more susceptible to threatening incidents given their greater visibility, but the low numbers probably reflect the fact that they are well protected from such incidents by their staffers and other security measures.

To compare the results from 2013 and 2017, we have looked at ranking, percentages and averages. As shown in Table 1, we see that the rankings of the different incidents have only shifted one or two places up or down. This indicates that the proportion of people subjected to the different incidents has remained fairly stable over time. With respect to the frequency of the different incidents, the percentages show little change. The exception to this is a notable increase in troublesome and unwanted approaches via Facebook or Twitter (+14.7%), and a significant reduction in being followed (-7.2%). We observed a certain change among the cabinet ministers, with an average reduction from 4.9 incidents in 2013 to 2.8 in 2017. One possible explanation for this is that the base for comparison involves different sample sizes and that our response rate from cabinet ministers is relatively low. Moreover, factors such as changes in security measures may also influence why cabinet ministers are less susceptible than previously. Our conclusion is that the likelihood of parliamentarians being subjected to the different incidents has, for the most part, remained roughly unchanged since the previous mapping exercise.

Hateful messages on social media

Given the continuous rise in the use of various social media platforms, by politicians as well as the public, there is also a greater probability of receiving hateful messages. In our survey, all but one responded that they were active on different social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Google + or similar. We went on to ask the politicians whether they had been subjected to hateful messages on social media; the percentages are reported in Table 2. The subjective interpretation of what is perceived as hateful messages and what falls under the category of “things you have to put up with” is expected to vary somewhat from one respondent to the next.

Table 2. Incidents experienced through social media.

INCIDENT	2017		2013	
	%	N	%	N
Expressions of extreme disapproval and hateful statements	68,2	45	55,4	56
That one person has made repeated, unwanted and intrusive communications	45,9	28	32,7	32
Indirect threats to harm you or someone close to you	33,3	21	12,4	12
Direct threats to harm you or someone close to you	16,7	10	10,2	10

Survey question: Have you experienced any of the following communications via social media?

Around 20% of the respondents did not answer the question about incidents experienced through social media.²

The different responses can be divided into two categories: *harassment* and *threats*. Within *harassment*, 68% report that they have experienced somebody expressing severe disapproval or sending hateful statements

2 However, 13 respondents failed to answer that they were active on social media, instead reporting that they were active on a daily or weekly basis. Since this is an electronic survey that uses dynamic display (routing), where questions about incidents on social media are conditional on the respondents answering the question about whether they are active or not, these people have not had the opportunity to answer further questions on this topic. The percentages in the table are calculated based on those who did answer the question.

via social media. 56% reported that a single individual had made repeated, unwanted and intrusive communications. Under *threats*, a third reported that they have received indirect threats, while almost 17% have experienced direct threats.

If we include all incidents that were asked about in the survey (all the incidents in Table 1 and 2) 81.7% of the respondents report having been subjected to *at least one* type of unwanted behaviour or threats, or having received some type of hateful communication, either through direct contact or social media. It should be noted that this is an extremely general overview of susceptibility and does not describe the degree of seriousness. The fact that four out of five public officials on average have been subjected to at least one type of unwanted incident shows that politicians must expect to be subjected to these types of unpleasantness.

A comparison with the results from 2013 reflects a clear increase in the occurrence of all unwanted incidents related to social media. Much of this can be explained by the notable rise in the use of social media over this period among both the general public and politicians. The most striking change relates to indirect threats via social media, which have risen sharply from 12.4% to 33.3%. Overall, our analyses show that the experience of both *harassment* and *threats* has increased to a similarly large extent between the surveys.

Serious incidents

To investigate the seriousness of the unwanted incidents, we made an analysis of the most serious incidents. Five types of incident (out of those mentioned in Tables 1 and 2) are classified as “serious incidents”. This includes incidents where (1) somebody has physically attacked or attempted to attack the respondent; (2) somebody has threatened to harm the respondent or other people close to him/her; (3) somebody has vandalised property or items belonging to them, or somebody has used social media

to subject them to (4) direct threats or (5) indirectly threatened to harm the respondent or somebody close to them.

The analyses show that 40.2% of the public officials have been subjected to at least one type of serious incident that they assume to be connected to their political activity. In other words, it appears that half of those who have been subjected to at least one unwanted incident reported this as a “serious incident”.

Of those who were subjected to at least one serious incident, it appears that 56% have been subjected to several incidents, both serious and less serious. However, these may overlap, so reporting an average number of incidents yields little information. Similarly, the data show that 44% report only having experienced one of the five named serious incidents.

A comparison with analysis from 2013 shows a rise in the experience of at least one serious incident (from 35.7% to 40.2%). The data show that this increase largely stems from indirect and direct threats via social media.

The most serious incident

In the survey, the respondents were asked to think of their experience with “the person or incident they *experienced as the most serious*”. They were then asked a series of questions connected to this incident. More than 80% of the respondents reported that the most serious incident occurred during the 2013–2017 term of parliament (ie up to four years ago). This indicates that most of the serious incidents reported in this survey do *not* overlap with the survey from 2013. We went on to ask how long the unwanted behaviour lasted or how long it had been going on for. Half of the respondents reported that there was only a single event, while just over 20% answered that the incident lasted for months or years.

To gain a deeper insight into the most serious incidents, we asked the politicians to describe what happened. It is clear that many of these incidents involved death threats via social media, mail, letter or phone. In some cases

the person threatened to “get” the politician, said something would happen or that they knew where the politician could be found when they were not at work. Other cases of serious incidents involve physical approaches, either in a work situation or in private. Some politicians report that people have loitered in the vicinity of their private address or that they have been physically attacked. The experience the politicians describe as *the most serious incident* takes many different forms. In any event, it is clear that these incidents may lead to concerns about their own safety or that of other people.

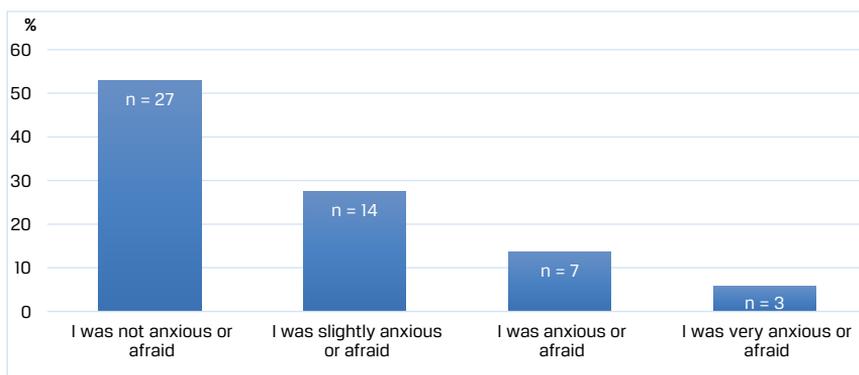


Figure 1. How did you experience the incident(s)? (N = 51)

Survey question: How did you experience the incident(s)?

We went on to ask how the politicians had felt about this incident. Figure 1 shows the politicians’ reaction to the event they themselves characterised as the most serious. Women report being more anxious or afraid than men. Out of 51 respondents, 10 answer that they were either “anxious or afraid” or “very anxious or afraid”. This is equivalent to *at least one in ten politicians (of the total sample) experiencing incidents related to their political activity that make them afraid*. Some politicians also mention that these incidents have had lasting consequences. Examples of this include fear of walking alone or going out in public other than in a political context. The results are strikingly similar to

those in the 2013 analysis. This means that serious threats against politicians are an ongoing problem that needs to be taken seriously.



Foto: Emilie Silkoset

Who is susceptible?

Høyre among the least susceptible, FrP the most

The different political parties have different strategies when it comes to the political issues on their agendas. In this section of the report, we map the extent to which the different political parties are subjected to unwanted incidents. Obviously, the largest parties have the most respondents, so to ensure the anonymity of those who answered, we will not provide detailed tables. It is also important to point out that the underlying data largely reflects party political differences among parliamentarians.³

The overarching pattern indicates that the Progress party (FrP) and – somewhat surprisingly – the Christian Democratic Party (KrF) are the parties most susceptible to unwanted incidents, followed by Ap. Although the KrF's respondents correspond to the distribution within the total sample, this is based on few respondents and the individual answers may have considerable impact. The numbers should therefore be interpreted with considerable caution. It is worth noting that Høyre reports a lower level of incidents than the other parties. One possible explanation for this is that Høyre is a party that attempts to attract moderate, centrist-right voters and therefore does not appear provocative enough to be susceptible to significant harassment. At the opposite pole lies the FrP, which consciously attempts to seek attention through its political agenda and through constant, controversial gambits. In the remaining parties response rates are low and variable, preventing us from drawing any conclusions.

Earlier in the report, we observed a general rise in unwanted incidents experienced through social media in 2017. In the case of those who have

³ One reason for this is the low response rate among cabinet ministers. See section on: "Is our survey consistent with other sources of information?" for greater depth.

experienced at least one incident via social media, there is a clear pattern of the largest parties being more susceptible. If we look at the individual parties, it transpires that FrP (77%) is the most susceptible followed by KrF (60%). Here, more than half of respondents reported having been subjected to at least one unwanted incident through social media. Half of the respondents from Høyre and Ap have been subjected to such incidents. In summary, the 2017 figures for social media reflect a relatively high occurrence of hateful communications with politicians for most parties.

In the case of public officials who have experienced at least one serious incident, FrP reports the highest occurrence (70%), followed by Ap and KrF. In this case, too, the result follows the general pattern in the report, as reflected by the fact that Høyre experiences a low level of serious incidents. Specifically, we see that FrP is notably more susceptible to indirect and direct threats through social media, physical attacks or attempted attacks, and threats of harm to people close to the respondent.

A comparison of 2013 and 2017 shows that FrP was subjected to the most unwanted incidents in both years, including those via social media, and the most serious threats. In addition, the figures show stability for Høyre politicians, who have relatively low susceptibility to both unwanted and serious incidents in both of the periods. However, Høyre's proportion of unwanted incidents via social media increased in 2017, bringing it up to the same level as the other centrist parties on this measure. Generally speaking, we see that the increase in unwanted incidents via social media is highest for the parties that had relatively low susceptibility in 2013 (Høyre and KrF). Susceptibility to unwanted incidents via social media is therefore relatively high for most parties in 2017. It is possible that this may be linked to different usage of social media among the different parties in the last parliamentary term. The results also show that KrF rose on all measures between 2013 and 2017, whereas SV showed a decline in unwanted incidents via social media. For both parties, the number of

respondents is small and the results must be interpreted with caution. Interestingly enough, the figures show that Ap is the only one of the largest parties to have reported a slight decline in unwanted incidents via social media, whereas it reports an average increase in general susceptibility, as well as an increase in the experience of at least one serious incident.

Even though our findings indicate that susceptibility to unwanted incidents directed at parliamentarians is more closely linked to the politicians' party's political profile than to whether they are in government, it is also important to point out that this survey reflects the politicians' own perceptions of the actions to which they were subjected. It is not within the scope of our report to map the actual extent of hateful messages, harassment and threats that are directed towards politicians, but rather to offer an overview of how the parliamentarians' own perceptions play out in the different political parties.

Exposed politicians are the most susceptible

One of the factors that influences susceptibility to unwanted incidents is how exposed the politician is in the media. Politicians who reported a high level of media exposure showed a greater tendency to have experienced at least one serious incident. The same pattern applies to *general susceptibility* (which includes both serious and less serious incidents). In addition, the analyses show a correlation between media exposure and the number of incidents each person has experienced. The politicians with most media exposure also experience the highest number of unwanted incidents. Since social media offer a lower threshold for engaging in hateful communications with public officials, it is not surprising that media-exposed politicians are more susceptible for such behaviour.

Analyses of political post and susceptibility to general or serious incidents indicate that the differences are too small to draw any conclusions about patterns and changes. In addition, this is based on few responses

from cabinet ministers. Moreover, it appears that there is no significant link between the number of years in a given political post and the experience of one or more incidents. This applies to both general susceptibility and serious incidents. The same pattern is observed for age and gender. Our findings indicate that these underlying factors may not be the most significant ones. The degree of susceptibility among politicians potentially has more to do with what they do than who they are.

Since the previous survey, there have been some changes in the factors influencing susceptibility to the most serious incidents. The factors for 2013 included a higher degree of media-exposure, cabinet post and having been in the post for a longer period of time. During the current mapping survey, our analyses show that a greater degree of media exposure is also significant for general susceptibility. One possible explanation is the increase in susceptibility to unwanted incidents via social media in 2017. When it comes to the type of post, we received too few responses from cabinet ministers to be able to carry out comparative analyses. However, we no longer find any link between the length of time respondents have been in their political post and their risk of having experienced at least one or more serious incidents.⁴ As in the 2013 survey, gender has no notable significance when it comes to the degree of susceptibility. It is somewhat surprising that reports of sexual harassment are so low among politicians at this level, although it is worth pointing out that we largely ask about incidents related to the respondents' political activity.

4 There are no notable differences in the length of time respondents spent in their post between the 2013 and 2017 surveys.

The people responsible for the incidents

Who threatens and harasses?

The public officials responded to a series of questions about the person responsible for the incident that they themselves perceived as being the most serious. Of these, (N = 52) 56% believed that the person(s) responsible for the incident was (were) male, 17% that they were female, 19% that they were both male and female; the gender of the person responsible was unknown to 8% of respondents. A high percentage of the respondents answered that they knew the identity of the person responsible for the incident (71%). We next asked which characteristics best described the person or communication. Respondents had the option to give several alternative responses and the figures in the table are based on the number of responses.

Table 3: Which characteristics best describe the person/communication? (N = 52)

CHARACTERISTICS	2017		2013	
	%	N	%	N
Hostile (expressing anger and resentment, verbal insults or sarcasm)	44,2	23	43,4	33
Threatening	28,8	15	28,9	22
Concerned with ideas or beliefs that are clearly incorrect	15,4	8	15,8	12
Other	9,6	5	23,7	18
Compulsive (repeats the same thing over and over again)	7,7	4	15,8	12
Suspicious/have thoughts about being persecuted	5,8	3	10,5	8
Sexual approaches	3,8	2	10,5	8
Boasting and bragging	1,9	1	5,3	4
Incoherent (illogical and contradictory thoughts that are difficult to follow)	1,9	1	17,1	13
Intoxicated	0,0	0	15,5	11

Survey question: Please tell us which characteristics best describe the person or communication.

Table 3, based on answers from 52 politicians, shows that, “hostile” and “threatening” are the most frequently occurring descriptions. In addition, a certain proportion report that the person or communication is concerned with incorrect ideas or beliefs (generally referred to as delusions). The politicians report lower values for the other characteristics in the table. For example, there are few indications that intoxication, incoherent thoughts or boasting/bragging communications are prominent among the “perpetrators”. There are no significant differences in descriptions of the communication when it comes to party membership or gender. If we take a more detailed look, only women have been subjected to sexual approaches. This is based on very low numbers. Likewise, only men report that the individual was suspicious or had thoughts about being persecuted by another person.

We then asked whether the respondents suspected that the person responsible for the most serious incident was mentally ill at the time of contact. Of those who responded to this question (N = 52), 31% said yes, 42% said no and 27% did not know. Respondents who answered yes to this question then had an opportunity to explain what made them believe this. Common denominators here are the way the people phrased and expressed themselves, the fact that they appeared incoherent or that the politicians had knowledge of the person’s condition – for example because they were informed about this when they reported the incident to the PST.

Compared with 2013, our findings show that significantly more respondents know the identity of the perpetrator in 2017 (up from 48% to 71%). This is probably linked to the fact that a larger proportion of the incidents take place on social media. A comparison shows that the first two characteristics in Table 3 are most prominent in both surveys. In addition, the percentages for “hostile”, “threatening” and “concerned with ideas or beliefs that are clearly incorrect” are also similar. Of the remaining characteristics, “incoherent” (-15.2%) and “intoxicated” (-14.5 %) commu-

nication showed a significant decline. Fewer of the characteristics in this survey represent aspects that probably fell into the psychiatric realm than in 2013. Nonetheless, we see an almost identical response to the question about whether the perpetrator was mentally ill.

Assumed motives

We next asked the respondents what they believed to be the underlying motives for the most serious incident. 53 people answered this question and it was possible to eliminate several categories.

Table 4: Do you believe that any of the following are underlying motives for the incident?
(N = 53)

UNDERLYING MOTIVES	2017		2013	
	%	N	%	N
Interest in a particular policy issue/case	34,0	18	20,5	16
Unknown	25,0	13	37,7	29
Conspiracy theory	18,9	10	20,5	16
Other	17,0	9	17,1	13
Right-wing extremism	7,5	4	6,5	5
Environmental or animal rights activism	7,5	4	1,3	1
Racism or xenophobia	5,7	3	9,0	7
Religious activism	5,7	3	11,5	9
Left-wing extremism	1,9	1	3,8	3
Anti-racism	1,9	1	1,3	1

Survey question: Do you believe that any of the following are underlying motives for the incident?

In Table 4, we see that most of the underlying motives for the incidents relate to specific cases or policy issues: on the whole, it's a matter of political disagreement. Furthermore, the "unknown" and "other" categories appear high up on the list. Further investigation of the latter revealed no systematic common denominators. This suggests that the motives underlying the incidents may be difficult to grasp, or that they cover a fairly broad spectrum. Among the issues that were specifically named as motives for threats and unreasonable approaches, particular mention was given to asylum and immigration policy, policy on predators and wolves, airline passenger taxes and framework conditions for airports, tax issues, hospital-related issues, maritime policy and child welfare services.

Moreover, a number of people reported conspiracy theories as a possible underlying motive for the incidents. This may be linked to the fact that nearly one-third of the respondents suspected that the person responsible for their most serious incident was mentally ill. In the case of incidents related to extremist attitudes, those involving right-wing extremist motives are reported to be more prominent than religious or left-wing extremist attitudes. Racism and anti-racism also appear lower down the list. Since FrP politicians are among the most susceptible to threats and unpleasant incidents, and opposition to immigration is a core issue for the party, it is somewhat surprising that left-wing extremism or anti-racism are not seen as more prominent motives. However, this may overlap with approaches driven by an interest in a particular political issue or case. There are no clear differences between the underlying motives for the approach and party membership.

We asked those who had been subjected to at least one serious incident (53 people) what they think the person(s) wanted to achieve through their actions.⁵ It was possible to give several alternative answers.

5 The question applies only to "the most serious incident".

Table 5: What do you think the person(s) wanted to achieve through their actions? (N = 53)

PURPOSE OF INCIDENT	2017		2013	
	%	N	%	N
Offend or humiliate	35,8	19	21,8	17
Show displeasure	34,0	18	43,6	34
Affect me in my actions or decisions as a politician	30,2	16	30,8	24
Scare me or create fear *	24,5	13	n/a	n/a
Make me quit as a politician	17,0	9	14,1	11
I don't know	11,3	6	15,4	12
Revenge	9,4	5	9,0	7
Other	3,8	2	11,5	9

Survey question: What do you think the person(s) wanted to achieve through their actions?

* "Scare or create fear" has been added to the 2017 survey as a new alternative answer.

The results in Table 5 can be split into two main categories: *expressive* and *instrumental*. Expressive actions are where the person(s) responsible for the incident wish to offend/humiliate, express displeasure, scare/create fear or take revenge. The other actions are seen as instrumental, in that the “perpetrator” wants to influence the politician’s actions or decisions, or make them quit politics. The results in Table 5 show that the public officials felt both categories to be relevant, given that offend/humiliate and show displeasure (*expressive actions*) and influencing the politician’s actions or decisions (*instrumental actions*) all had a response rate of more than 30%. There are no obvious differences between party membership and what the respondents think the person responsible for the incident(s) wished to achieve.

When questioned about whether, at any time, anybody had threatened, harmed or attempted to harm anybody close to them, four of the politicians confirmed that somebody had threatened family members. None of

the respondents report that a person close to them has been subjected to harm or attempted harm in such a context.

A comparison of the results from 2013 and 2017 shows no significant changes. This implies that both the motives underlying the incident and what the people responsible for the actions wished to achieve are relatively stable background factors that remain unchanged over prolonged periods.

Consequences

Consequences of threats and harassment

Threats and harassment affect both the work and private lives of the targeted politicians. Previous analysis in this report shows that most politicians are subjected to some form of unwanted incident, while 40% have been subjected to serious incidents. Through the following question, we have mapped the consequences of experiencing these threats for both the private life (red text) and political activity (blue text) of the politicians. The survey asked the respondents to consider all types of unwanted and troublesome incidents they have been subjected to, including threats and attacks. The answers are ranked by frequency in the table below.

Table 6 clearly shows that the most common consequences of threats and unwanted incidents relate to politicians' *private lives*. Some of the sample increased security at home, were anxious about the safety of those close to them, changed their daily routines and worried about being physically attacked. This shows that politicians may experience unwanted incidents that have a personal cost for both them and those close to them. Out of all the respondents, 22 people checked at least one of the points in Table 6 covering consequences for their private lives and lifestyle.

The fact that some politicians alter behaviour related to their *political activity* may pose a serious problem for the conservation of a democratic society. In all, 14 people checked one or more of the points that dealt directly with their political activity. *At least one in ten of the respondents in the total sample considered quitting politics as a result of threats and other unpleasant incidents.*

Table 6:⁶ Did any of the incidents make you...

2017	2013		2017		2013	
Rank		CONSEQUENCES	%	N	%	N
1	1	Increase security at home?	16,0	13	18,8	21
2	2	Anxious for the safety of your loved ones?	13,6	11	15,2	17
3	4	Change your daily routines?	11,1	9	11,6	13
4	7	Be afraid that you could be physically attacked?	11,1	9	9,8	11
5	10	Consider quitting politics?	11,1	9	6,3	6
6	5	Reduce your social activities?	8,6	7	11,6	13
7	6	Worry about being out in public?	8,6	7	10,7	12
8	3	Anxious for your own safety?	8,6	7	12,5	14
9	11	Restrict your freedom of speech on a political issue?	8,6	7	4,5	5
10	13	Hesitate to take a position publicly on a specific issue?	7,4	6	3,6	4
11	9	Refrain from engaging or expressing yourself about a specific matter or field?	7,4	6	6,3	6
12	8	Increase security at work?	4,9	4	8,9	10
13	14	Change your phone number?	3,7	3	2,7	3
14	12	Worry about being alone at home?	3,7	3	4,5	5
15	16	Be influenced to make a different decision?	1,2	1	0	0
16	15	Take time off work?	0	0	1,8	2

Survey question: We would now like you to consider all types of unwanted and troublesome incidents you have been subjected to, including threats and attacks. Did they make you...

A comparison with figures from 2013 shows a marked fall in the consequences for politicians' *private lives*. In 2013, 42% of all respondents answered that threats and unwanted incidents had consequences for their *private life*. In 2017, the figure fell to 27%, showing that the trend is heading in a positive direction. However, consequences for *political activity* have remained relatively stable, rising slightly from 13% in 2013 to 17% in 2017.

⁶ The percentage is based on the total sample. Red text indicates consequences for private life, while blue text indicates consequences for political activity.

Consequences of serious incidents

There is a clear link between the degree of seriousness of the events and the consequences these have for politicians' private lives and political activity. In all, 40% report having experienced at least one serious incident (ie an attempted or actual physical attack, threats of harm directed at the politician or other people close to them or damage to property/items belonging to the politician). Of these, a third respond that the incidents have had consequences for their political activity, and half that they have had consequences for their private lives. If we look at the figures for those who have experienced at least one *lesser* serious incident, we can see that the impact is not as great. In that case, only one in ten report that the event(s) had consequences for their private life. The same pattern applies to political activity.

Interestingly enough, the degree of seriousness does not seem to have had any great impact on how the respondents experienced the events. Of those who have been subjected to at least one serious incident, 62% responded that they were either "a bit anxious or afraid", "anxious or afraid" or "very anxious or afraid". 47% of respondents who have been subjected to at least one *less* serious incident responded in the same way.

Figure 2 (next page) provides a more general overview, illustrating susceptibility to unwanted incidents and the consequences that follow. The percentage on the left shows the proportion of politicians who have experienced unwanted incidents with varying degrees of seriousness. These are classified on a range from "none" to "lesser serious" and "serious". We have then measured the frequency of susceptibility, ie *how often* the politicians have experienced the different incidents. "Rarely" refers to incidents politicians have experienced once or twice. "Often" is based on politicians answering that they experienced the incident 3–9 times or more than 10 times. The percentage on the right shows the share of politicians who report that exposure to the incidents had consequences for their political activity or private life.

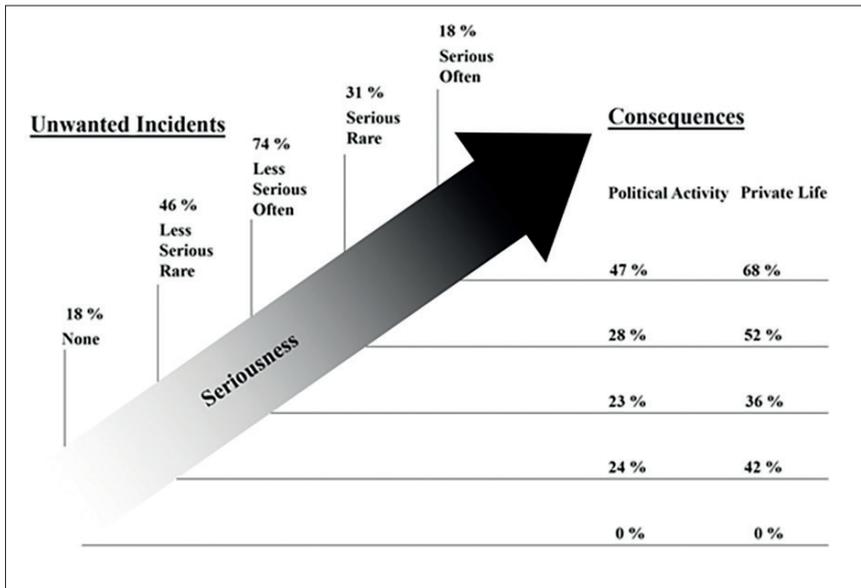


Figure 2: Unwanted incidents: Degree of seriousness and consequences.

On the whole, Figure 2 shows that a greater degree of seriousness also increases the occurrence of ensuing consequences. Almost one in five politicians have often been subjected to serious incidents. Of these, half say that it affects their political activity, and one in three see consequences in their private lives. At the opposite end of the scale, almost one in five politicians answer that they have not experienced any unwanted incidents. However, we see that most politicians are frequently subjected to less serious incidents. Much of this stems from the fact that politicians receive many hateful communications via social media and the internet in general. This does not have such a striking impact when it comes to consequences. Consequences are more prevalent among those who rarely experience less serious incidents than those who are more frequently subjected to them. One possible explanation is that politicians who are often harassed on the internet are also more accustomed to the situation, whereas an

isolated incident may seem more frightening to those who have not experienced or have not been especially susceptible to such unwanted incidents before.

If we compare the effect of the degree of seriousness for 2013 and 2017, we see both common features and changes. Among the common features, we see that politicians who have experienced at least one serious incident more frequently suffer consequences in both their private life and political activity, and that some of them felt anxious or afraid. Among the differences, there is no longer a link between *less* serious incidents and the consequences this can have for private life and political activity. In addition, we see that more of those who have experienced *less* serious incidents feel more anxious or afraid than the respondents reported feeling in 2013. This is largely explained by the fact that personal vulnerability varies considerably among the individual politicians: some are extremely robust, while others, for various reasons, may for various reasons be highly vulnerable to threats and personal attacks. It is unreasonable to expect all politicians to be equally thick-skinned.

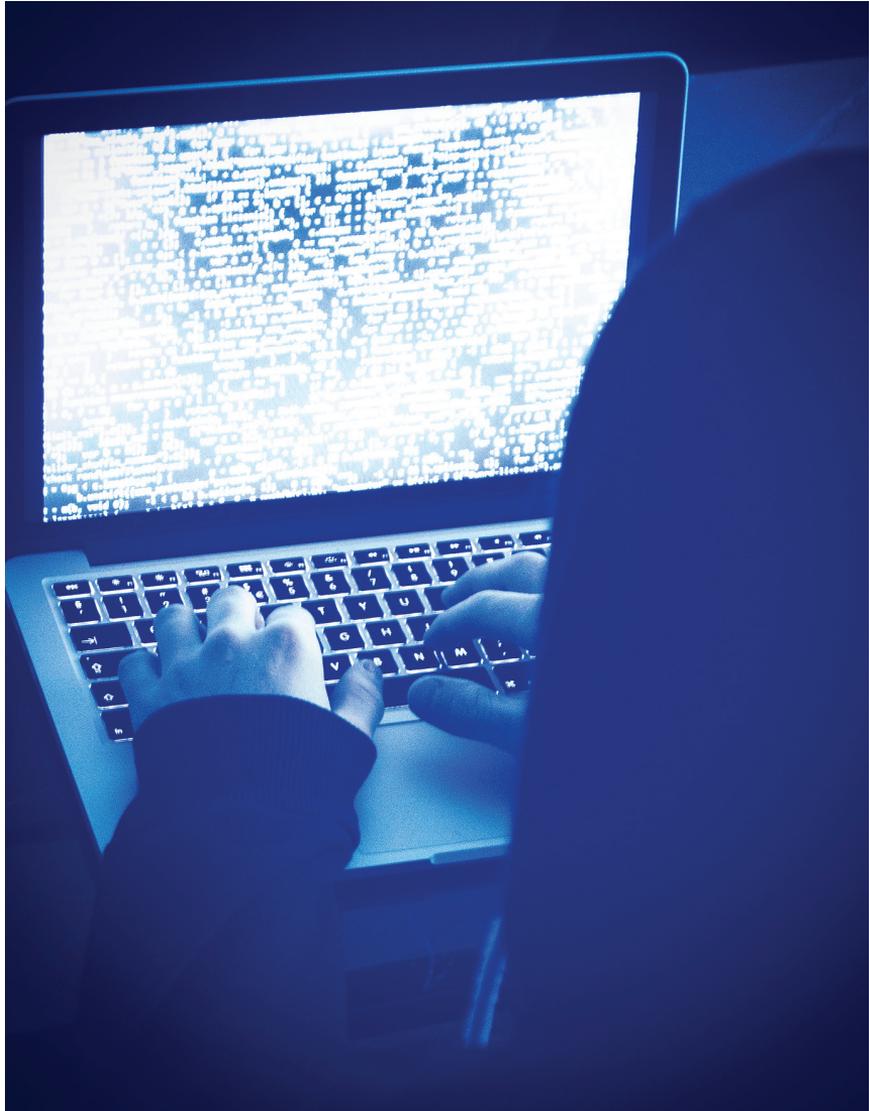


Foto: Emilie Silkoset

Conclusion

Threats – just part of the job?

To a great extent, a politician's job is to make decisions and prioritise issues on behalf of other people. This entails exposure to people who disagree with them in an objective way or who express their opinions in a less constrained fashion. This study shows that most parliamentarians and cabinet ministers have experienced unpleasant incidents involving different approaches and degrees of severity. Four out of five (82%) of the politicians who responded to the survey have experienced at least one unwanted incident, with an average of 3.3 incidents. Those with greater media exposure are most susceptible.

Given that the previous survey in 2013 was carried out at the end of a parliamentary term led by a centre/left coalition, we had a hypothesis that a change of government to a Høyre/FrP administration would entail changes in the parties that were most susceptible in the more recent period. Based on the parliamentarians' own perceptions, our hypothesis has been disproven. We find that the fact of being in government does not affect the degree of susceptibility for parliamentarians, since it appears to be related to political parties and issues rather than the ruling coalitions. For example, Høyre respondents consistently report a low degree of susceptibility to various threats and unpleasantness even though the party is in power, whereas FrP remained stable, with a high degree of susceptibility, even though it has switched from being in opposition to being part of government. By contrast, Ap representatives have displayed a slightly higher level of general and serious susceptibility, but a slight decline in susceptibility via social media. As for the cabinet ministers, we have too few respondents to draw any general conclusions. However, we have good

grounds to assume that when parliamentarians occupy government posts, this is usually accompanied by a significant increase in susceptibility to threats and other unwanted attention.

Many of the incidents we asked about in our survey are of a type that senior politicians must expect to have to live with – they almost go with the job. Within the framework of freedom of expression in a liberal democracy, people must be given ample space to communicate their anger and frustration to politicians, even though the form of expression may be both subjective and inappropriate. That said, some of these incidents go well beyond the bounds of freedom of expression, tipping over into criminal threats and actions. In this study, 40% report that they have experienced physical attack, damage to their property, or threats of harm either to themselves or those closest to them. In some cases, this has adverse consequences for both the private lives and the political activities of the politicians. Several have reported that they increased security at home and became anxious about the safety of people close to them. One in ten reported that they were afraid of being physically attacked and just as many considered quitting politics. In addition, we see that, for a minority of politicians, the incidents have caused them to avoid engaging or expressing themselves on controversial issues. In such cases, the threats pose a problem for democracy.

Changes since the previous parliamentary term

A comparison with the first mapping survey from 2013 shows that many of the same patterns apply in this new survey from 2017. Roughly the same share of politicians have been subjected to unwanted incidents. However, there has been a slight rise in the percentage who experienced at least one serious incident. This stems largely from unwanted incidents via social media, which have risen markedly since 2013. When it comes to the different political parties, FrP is still the most susceptible. In the case of the

smaller parties, whose data are also based on fewer respondents and must be interpreted with caution, we see that SV has become less susceptible, whereas KrF has shown an increase.

If we compare the impression the respondents have of the people responsible for the incidents, the results are strikingly similar to those reported in the 2013 survey. When it comes to characteristics, motive and what the people behind the incidents wished to achieve, we see that the results have remained stable between the first and second mapping survey. The politicians think that the “perpetrators” wanted to create incidents with both expressive and instrumental aims, and suspected that a third of them were mentally ill. However, it appears that more of the respondents in 2017 knew the identity of the “perpetrator” than in 2013. This is probably linked to the fact that an increasing proportion of the incidents take place on social media.

A similarly large proportion of respondents became anxious and afraid as a result of the unwanted incidents, although this is no longer associated with the degree of seriousness in 2017. Although the most serious incidents have had consequences for the politicians’ private lives, we see a positive development here, given the decrease between 2013 and 2017. In the case of a minority of respondents, threats and unwanted incidents have had consequences for their political activity; this level remained relatively stable between the two parliamentary terms.



Foto: Emilie Silkoset

From another perspective

Threats – an international phenomenon

The questionnaire used in the Norwegian mapping survey has already been used in numerous other countries. This makes it possible to compare the Norwegian data at an international level. The mapping survey from 2013 is cited in two international studies that conducted a very similar survey of British MPs (James, Farnham, et al., 2016b; James, Sukhwal, et al., 2016). The studies also did comparative analyses using data from Great Britain, New Zealand, Queensland and Norway (Bjelland & Bjørge, 2014; Every-Palmer, Barry-Walsh, & Pathe, 2015; Pathé, Phillips, Perdacher, & Heffernan, 2013).

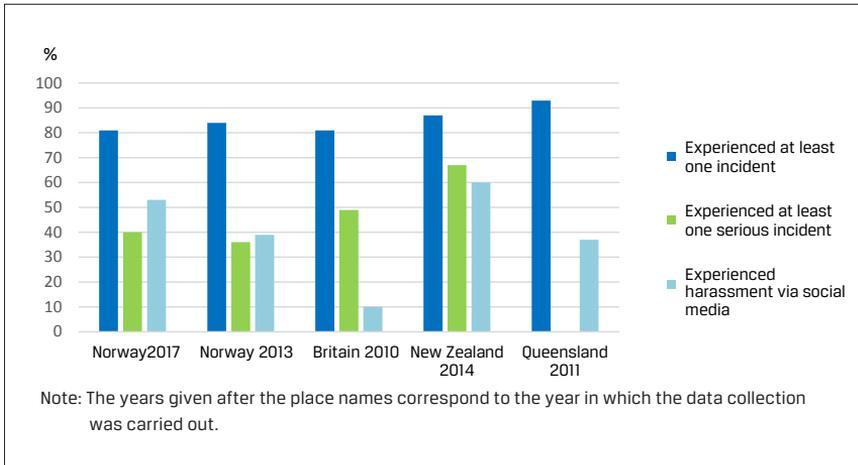


Figure 3: Percentage of susceptibility for politicians in different countries.

The main feature of Figure 3 is that a high share of politicians is susceptible in all the places surveyed. The percentage of politicians who experienced at least *one of 12 different incidents* is almost identical in all the

different places. When it comes to the experience of *serious incidents*, we can see that Norwegian politicians report the lowest susceptibility in both mapping surveys. In all, this indicates that politicians' susceptibility to unwanted incidents is an international phenomenon that transcends national borders. The share of politicians subjected to serious incidents shows the same pattern, although in this case we see greater variations between the different places.

From an international perspective, it is clear that inappropriate contact via social media is a growing trend, as shown in Figure 3. The more recently the survey was carried out in the different places, the more the politicians have been subjected to *harassment* via social media. In addition the Norwegian mapping surveys show an increase in *threats*. Based on international and national studies, it is therefore possible to infer that both *harassment* and *threats* to politicians via social media are growing phenomena.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that perceptions that there were psychiatric cases among those responsible for the incidents were almost identical across the different places. The percentage of politicians who reported this ranged from 30% in Norway to 50% in New Zealand. If we link this up with existing research, we see reason to believe that some of these perceptions reflect real cases (Gill, Corner, Farnham, Wilson, & James, n/a⁷; James et al., 2009).

A real danger of violence?⁸

Most of the incidents that underpin our data involve hateful communications and verbal threats against politicians. Some politicians have also experienced unpleasant approaches or attempted contact by the perpetrator. However, some have also experienced direct attempts to carry out

7 "Working paper" sent personally by Paul Gill.

8 Much of the content in the remaining paragraphs is based on the first report (Belland & Bjørge, 2014). However, some updates have been added.

a physical attack or vandalism to their property. To what extent do these incidents represent a genuine danger to politicians' lives and safety? Most of the incidents were relatively harmless in themselves, and some of them were probably the result of mental disorders. Nonetheless, there is reason to consider these incidents in the light of some genuinely serious violent attacks on politicians.

The 22 July 2011 attacks on the Government Quarter in Oslo and Ap's youth camp on Utøya were the most extreme manifestations of hatred of politicians in Norway. Despite the absence of senior politicians among the dead and wounded, the ensuing investigation and court case showed that Anders Behring Breivik's intention had been to strike Ap and several named politicians, including former prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland and the then foreign minister, Jonas Gahr Støre. Ap's annual conference, its HQ on Youngstorget, SV's party offices and the Norwegian parliament were high on the list of relevant targets for attack (Hemmingby & Bjørge 2016).

In the previous mapping survey in 2013, several serious violent attacks on politicians in Scandinavia were mentioned. Of these, historical incidents include the murder of Sweden's prime minister, Olof Palme, who was shot down in the streets of Stockholm in 1986. The murder was never fully solved, but there were many groups in Swedish society that had expressed strong hatred of the controversial politician. It is therefore unclear whether Palme was the victim of a disturbed person or a politically motivated assassination carried out by political enemies.

In 2003, the Swedish foreign minister, Anna Lindh, was stabbed to death. The perpetrator showed clear signs of mental disorder, but after several different judgements, he was sentenced to life imprisonment (Unsgaard & Meloy, 2011). In a subsequent newspaper interview (Dragic & Holmén, 2011) the killer said he had committed the murder because he felt hatred for politicians, whom he considered responsible for his own lack of success. However, it was a matter of chance that Anna Lindh was the person he met on the day he was carrying a knife.

Another historical incident occurred in 1982, when the car of an Ap parliamentarian, Anne Lise Bakken, was blown up outside the parliament building. The perpetrator, who had been responsible for several explosions in Oslo, was described as a psychiatric case. It was a matter of chance that Bakken's car, in particular, was the one affected; his revenge was directed at politicians in general (Bjørge & Heradstveit, 1988, p. 119).

Since the earlier survey, no further serious violent attacks have taken place against politicians in Scandinavia. However, if we look beyond this region towards the rest of Europe, there are still some attacks that merit mention. In 2015 Henriette Reker was stabbed, sustaining severe injuries, the day before she was elected mayor of Cologne, in Germany. The perpetrator disagreed with Reker's liberal views on immigration policy and had previously taken part in Nazi demonstrations.⁹ During the court case, it emerged that the man had psychiatric problem. Another notorious assassination was the 2016 murder of the British MP, Jo Cox, who was shot and stabbed repeatedly while attending a meeting with voters in her constituency. The court found no proof that the killer was affected by mental disorders but he did have strong links to right-wing extremist ideology. The attack was probably linked to political disagreement over Brexit.¹⁰

So there have been a series of cases of extremely serious violent attacks on key politicians and political institutions in Scandinavia. Since 2013, we have seen such attacks in other European countries. Did these extreme incidents come out of the blue, or can they be understood as an extension of the less extreme but more frequently occurring forms of hate speech, harassment and threats to politicians that are mapped in this survey?

9 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/01/german-man-sentenced-to-14-years-in-prison-for-stabbing-cologne/>.

10 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/23/thomas-mair-slow-burning-hatred-led-to-jo-cox-murder>.

The relationship between threats and actual attacks

An enduring issue for both the police and research is how close the links are between expressed threats or other threatening behaviour and actual attacks on politicians. Moreover, the increasing level of communication via the internet has made it more difficult to establish whether expressed threats involve genuine violent intention. This type of threatening communication can be more anonymous, immediate and easily accessible for people who may not pose any genuine threat of violence (Every-Palmer et al., 2015). That said, it is difficult to know whether threats via the internet diverge from offline communication or whether they occur in parallel. Research in the field shows that the links are complex and not as direct as one might assume. However, further information about potential risk factors related to mental health and various types of “warning behaviour” may give a deeper insight (Eke, Meloy, Brooks, Jean, & Hilton, 2014).

Few people make direct threats before an attack. In studies involving assessments of threats to politicians and public figures, the perpetrators have tended to be split into two categories: “communicators” or “approachers” (Eke et al., 2014; Gill et al., n/a; James & Farnham, 2016a). The first category consists of individuals who engage in disturbing communication to public figures, while the second relates to individuals who make problematic approaches. There is broad agreement in current research that most individuals usually operate in one or other of these categories. (Eke et al., 2014; James & Farnham, 2016a; Gill, Corner, Farnham, Wilson, & James, n/a). This means that individuals who express direct threats rarely make physical contact, but subsequently persist in various forms of communication. Similarly, those who make approaches to public figures in a way that merits concern rarely make direct threats beforehand, instead making continual efforts at contact. For example, systematic studies from the US and Canada show that only a tiny minority of individuals expressed direct threats to politicians before their attempted attack (Adams,

Hazelwood, Pitre, Bedard, & Landry, 2009; Eke et al., 2014; Meloy & Amman, 2016). Although direct threats do not necessarily represent a genuine violent intention, it is still important to point out that such cases have occurred.

Many individuals who attack politicians and public figures are mentally unstable. A study of attacks on European politicians reflects a more detailed pattern of the perpetrators' behaviour patterns: In particular, perpetrators with mental disorders had often given warnings through communication or approaches. Politically motivated attackers, on the other hand, showed much less of a tendency to offer advance warnings (James et al., 2007). In the case of attacks on politicians, research has shown that the perpetrators often suffer, or have suffered, severe mental illness (Meloy, 2014). These people also have more of a tendency to carry out the action alone, to have had previous problems with drug addiction and to belong to the "approachers" category (James, Kerrigan, Forfar, Farnham, & Preston, 2010; James et al., 2007; Schoeneman et al., 2011). It is important to mention that even though the perpetrators are often associated with severe mental illness, this does not necessarily mean that they are irrational and unstable (Corner & Gill, 2014).

Many tell other people about their ideas and plans. Although perpetrators rarely make direct threats before attacking politicians, they often tell other people about their ideas, plans and intentions. This applies in particular to family members and acquaintances (Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, & Berglund, 1999). High incidence of so-called "leakage" has also been found in studies of lone terrorists and attacks on public figures (Fein & Vossekuil, 1988; Gill, Horgan, & Deckert, 2014).

Different types of "warning behaviour" may come to the attention of the police or intelligence services. This can include planning, reconnaissance, securing weapons or explosives, or telling other people about their plans and intentions (Meloy, Hoffmann, Roshdi, Glaz-Ocik, & Guldemann,

2014). Explicit threats and other direct communication with the selected victim are therefore simply one type of “warning behaviour”, and perhaps not the most important one. The conclusion in the American study, that “those who pose threats frequently do not make threats, does not allow us to draw the conclusion that “those who make threats do not pose threats” (Fein & Vossekuil, 1988, p. 14). The European study showed that some of those who made threats did actually carry out attacks too (James et al., 2007). Repeated threats directed at specific politicians (especially when they come from several quarters) may, however, be an indicator that the individual is actually more generally susceptible to hatred, including from people other than those making the concrete threats. Such expressed threats and other forms of threatening behaviour should therefore prompt the police or intelligence services to undertake a threat assessment and provide the threatened person with advice on how to deal with such threats through sensible measures.

Creating fear

It is relevant in this context that the underlying intention of a threat is not necessarily to carry out the threatened action, but to create fear that may cause the threatened person to alter their behaviour – for example to cease engaging in a controversial political issue. A paradox here is that the PST is responsible for the safety of “public officials”, ie parliamentarians, cabinet ministers and Supreme Court judges, and has systems in place for this purpose. At the same time, we know of several other groups in society that are also susceptible to serious threats in connection with their roles as politicians or opinion formers, and whose safety is left to the ordinary police force. This applies to local politicians, who may be subjected to threats from numerous quarters – from local businesspeople who lose their licence to serve alcohol, private individuals who are refused planning permission or criminal motorbike gangs that come into conflict with the

municipality. Substantial documentation from Sweden demonstrates that such threats against local politicians are a major problem (Deltér, 2004),¹¹ although there has not, as yet, been any mapping of the issue in Norway.

Is our survey consistent with other sources of knowledge?

Part of the intention behind PST's decision to give the Police University College (PHS) the task of carrying out this survey was to gain an alternative view, beyond the PST's own, on the extent to which and ways in which parliamentarians and cabinet ministers themselves experience their susceptibility to threats and other unwanted approaches. This does not mean that our survey offers a truer or more correct picture than the PST has formed for itself, but that it gives a fresh perspective and a different source of information beyond those the PST uses as a basis. We have discussed our findings with the PST and found some interesting differences of nuance.

Based on the survey, it appears that more politicians have experienced threats and unwanted incidents than were reported directly to the PST. This indicates that the survey captures incidents that have not come to the attention of the PST.

There are further differences of nuance concerning party membership and susceptibility to threatening activity. In the PST's experience, immigration policy is the issue that clearly generates most violent and threatening communications. Such communications are directed primarily at Ap and other opposition parties, and not at FrP politicians, who showed the highest susceptibility to threats in our survey.

One possible explanation for why Ap politicians are less likely to talk about their experience with such threatening communications is that they may be less likely to follow the Facebook groups where hateful and threatening communications directed at the Ap are most prevalent. If Ap politi-

¹¹ The Expressen newspaper also carried out a survey in 2013.

cians are less liable to notice and be affected by this kind of harassment than they might have reason to, this could be positive on the one hand, because the harassment stays in the echo chamber and has few adverse consequences for the targets of the hatred and threats. On the other hand, though, one cause for concern may be that a climate characterised by hateful expressions, in which violence against political opponents is generalised and legitimised, could inspire some individuals to move from words to violent action.

Our survey has few respondents who are cabinet ministers and therefore offers a poor basis for determining the extent to which cabinet ministers are more susceptible than parliamentarians. Generally, we find that the politicians with the highest media profiles are also the most susceptible, and can therefore assume – even in the absence of specific, supporting data – that the highest-profile cabinet ministers are also the ones who are targeted with most threats and hateful communications. The PST confirms that this is also its impression. However, at the same time, we know that cabinet ministers are surrounded by an apparatus that protects them from such threats to a much greater extent than the normal parliamentarians, who receive the communications directly from the public, “unfiltered”. There are good reasons why the highest-profile cabinet ministers have bodyguards.

The news media have reported that young political activists in Norway are also susceptible to harassment and threats.¹² They have grown up in a society where social media have become part of their everyday life. Since hateful messages and threats via social media are a growing phenomenon, one should also seriously consider the consequences they may have for young politicians. It is a known fact that some young politicians have been subjected to extremely hateful communications and threats. This applies to the leaders of the youth wings of all the parties, but it would appear that leading Ap youth activists and leaders have been particularly susceptible to hatred, especially in the wake of 22 July 2011. Both the former

¹² <https://www.nrk.no/finnmark/mener-hetsen-skremmer-unge-politikere-til-taushet-1.13674795>;
<https://www.h-avis.no/debatt/leder/meninger/hets-mot-politikere/o/5-62-406905>

and the current leader of the AUF, the party's youth wing, have experienced extremely serious threats.¹³ Young female politicians have reported rape threats and other sexual harassment.¹⁴ We lack reliable data to support whether these are common patterns or simply an impression created by media coverage. However, if it is the case that AUF members and female activists are the most susceptible, this marks a divergence from the pattern shown in our survey of cabinet ministers and parliamentarians, in which women are not especially susceptible and FrP representatives are the ones who report having experienced most incidents.

Threats to democracy and free speech

As mentioned earlier, the PST has a special responsibility for the safety of public officials. However, the category of people in Scandinavia most susceptible to threats and terror is “the fourth estate”: journalists, editors, cartoonists, authors and publishers, media institutions, as well as political activists and those who engage in social debate (in this last category, especially women). If we look back at the terror plots that have been uncovered, thwarted or carried out in Scandinavia in the past few decades, most of them involve attacks on practitioners of free speech, in the broad sense. Examples include the attempt on the life of Salman Rushdi's editor, William Nygaard, as well as an attempted terror attack and preparations for an attack on Danish newspaper, Jyllandsposten, and on the cartoonists. Media targets were also high on Anders Behring Breivik's list of high-priority targets for bombings and shootings (including the Skup investigative journalism conference, and the Aftenposten and Dagsavisen newspapers). A survey from 2013 showed that around 20 per cent of journalists and 40

¹³ <https://www.aftenposten.no/amagasinet/i/zL1QR1/De-overlevde-Utoya-Na-lever-de-med-drapstrusler>

¹⁴ https://www.aftenposten.no/kultur/i/AaQW5/-Jeg-er-redd-nar-jeg-mottar-drapstrusler_-men-det-skal-ikke-hindre-ytringsfriheten-min?spid_rel=2;
<http://www.nettavisen.no/nyheter/innenriks/auf-leder-mani-hussaini-lever-med-drapstrusler-hver-eneste-dag/3423360768.html>; <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/RRaPx/Ma-i-retten-etter-trusler-mot-AUF-leder;>

per cent of editors had been threatened in the preceding five years. The study documented a long series of threats and attempted violence directed at Norwegian journalists (Idås, Heftøy, Stormark, & Hauge, 2013). In many of these cases, the aim of those making the threats was to frighten the journalists from reporting on a given topic or to influence their journalistic coverage in some other way. Such threats consequently pose a danger to press freedom and free speech. The same applies to threats and harassment of those who engage in public debate who have, in many cases, withdrawn from public debate owing to the tremendous burden it entails.

That said, politicians as a group are also highly susceptible to threats and harassment. Our survey on the experiences of parliamentarians and cabinet ministers covers only a small part of the stream of hateful communications that are directed at people in political life, and this is a group that is well protected and cared for, since they have an administrative apparatus around them and are specially protected by the PST. The patterns we have found in our surveys from 2013 and 2017 are hardly representative of the threat levels experienced by other people in political life beyond Parliament and the cabinet.

* * *

Although most threats against politicians, media workers and other socially engaged people may seem minor and insignificant in themselves, the research has shown that many – a total of 40 per cent of the politicians in the survey – have experienced serious threats to themselves and their families. In some cases, this has had adverse effects on the way they perform their political role, which issues they engage with and how they express themselves. Threats and harassment have also caused one in ten respondents to consider withdrawing from high-level politics. Such threats to politicians therefore represent a significant challenge to democratic processes and public debate. People who engage or express themselves politically should not be scared into silence.

Literature

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