“Maybe I can talk to the Prime Minister”
Syrian residence permit holders’ perception of their role as political actors in Sweden

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Abstract

Democratic inclusion and participation is an issue that has interested political scientists for a long time. However, less attention has been given to how people that live in a country but do not have the legal status as citizens partake in the democratic system of the countries they flee to. During the last years a large number of people have escaped Syria and searched for asylum in Sweden, where they have gotten different kinds of residency permits, both temporary and permanent. In this thesis, ten newly arrived Syrians have participated in qualitative interviews. The aim was to investigate how they perceive their role as political actors in Sweden and if there are differences in their answers based on their type of residence permit. In general, the respondents have a positive view of their possibility to influence, which is surprising considering previous research. In terms of actual participation however, few of the respondents have reported that they were interested. Contrary to the assumption that the temporary residency permits would affect the respondent view of themselves as political actors negatively, the type of residence permit did not seem to play a significant role.
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Definitions

Residency permit

A person who is a citizen of a country outside the European Union and who wishes to live in Sweden needs a residency permit to do so. The residency permit can be permanent or temporary (Migrationsverket “Fakta om uppehållstillstånd och migration”).

Asylum

A residence permit given to a person because he or she is a refugee or subsidiary protectee.

Asylum seeker

An asylum seeker is a person that has reached a second country and applied for protection but the Migration Authorities has not yet made a decision in his or her case.

Refugee

According to the United Nation refugee convention, a refugee is someone with a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UN 1951). If you applied for asylum in Sweden after the 24th of November 2015, and fall under this definition, the rule of thumb is that you get a residency permit for three years as a refugee (Migrationsverket "Asylregler").

Subsidiary protection

According to EU regulations, a person has the right to subsidiary protection if he or she is facing a risk of serious harm if he or she would return to the country of origin. Serious harm is defined as serious threat to a civilian’s life because of armed conflict, death penalty or execution, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment. If you are escaping war but do not face any personal threat you likely will be considered a person under subsidiary protection. If you applied for asylum after the 24th of November 2015, and fall under this definition the normal rule are that you get a residency permit for 13 months as a subsidiary protectee (Migrationsverket "Asylregler").

Newly arrived individual (nyanländ)
According to Swedish regulations a newly arrived individual (nyanländ) is someone who has a residency permit based on their refugee or subsidiary protection status. A person is newly arrived as long as he or she falls under the settlement regulations i.e. between two to three years (Migrationsverket "Vanliga begrepp när det gäller statliga ersättningar").
1. Introduction
Political participation has long been an important field of political science. Among the most important issues in a democratic society is the question of how people choose to express their rights, opinions and demands and to which extent they do it. Democracy in Sweden is considered deeply rooted since a high share of the population vote in the national elections compared to other countries and the trust in political institutions is high (Wästberg 2016, 19). However, there are differences among citizens; socioeconomically weaker groups are not voting and participating in politics to the same extent as stronger groups (Wästberg 2016, 20). It is well known that immigrants do not participate politically to the same extent as the native population (Dancygier et al. 2015, 704). An extensive amount of research has been done about these differences in political power and participation among different groups of citizens. Though, on a juridical level all citizens have the same political rights but the major differences in today’s societies are between the ones with and without citizenship (Beckman 2006, 155).

The reasoning above makes it important to define who has the right to be a member in a democratic society and be a citizen. According to the Human Rights Convention, everyone has the right to freedom of speech and assembly. Human rights are universal while citizen rights are only applicable to members of the state. In addition, the Human Rights give non-citizens the right to some parts of participation, but not to vote. In Sweden, like in most other countries, you are only allowed to vote in the national election if you are a citizen. In other words, there are groups of people living in Sweden, affected by Swedish law, who are not allowed to vote. The problem of deciding who to include or exclude from democratic participation is discussed in the Swedish Governmental Investigation\footnote{Statens offentliga utredning, Låt fler forma framtiden!} \emph{Let many shape the future!} from 2016. The investigation says:

“Considering there is an increasing number of individuals without Swedish citizenship living in Sweden today, at the same time as our world is more globalized than before, also makes the question of whom to include in decision-making more complex.” (My translation, Wästberg 2016, 86–87)\footnote{\”Med tanke på att det i dag är allt fler individer utan svenskt medborgarskap som bor i Sverige, samtidigt som vår värld är mer globaliserad än tidigare, blir också frågan om vem som ska få vara med och bestämma allt mer komplex.\”}
Sweden has solved this by giving possibilities to non-citizens to vote in local elections. If you have been registered in Sweden for three consecutive years you have the right to participate in municipal and regional elections (Valmyndigheten "Rösträtt"). Sweden is thus one of the countries where non-citizens have the best opportunities to participate politically (Adman and Strömblad 2015, 109). It is also fairly easy to become a citizen compared to other countries (Dancygier et al. 2015, 709). Still, apart from children, the largest group excluded from political participation in democratic states, including Sweden, is non-citizens. They can be guest workers, asylum seekers and other immigrants (Beckman 2006, 153). This thesis will look at these “inbetweeners”, who live in Sweden without the right to full participation but who are nevertheless to a large degree affected by Swedish law. The focus of this study lies on Syrians that have been in Sweden between one to three years. The last years’ increase in asylum seekers, especially from Syria, makes this an important issue right now.

The thesis is relevant from other viewpoints as well. From a power perspective, people with little to no power are a significant group to look at in order to clarify power patterns. Even if people lack the right to vote or to have no access to democratic ways of expressing their political beliefs, they are not necessarily apolitical. Therefore, it is important to see how non-citizens think about their possibility to be political, their political confidence and their interest in the Swedish society. Non-citizens can be a politically active group. The last decades there has been a growing number of protests among refugees worldwide, for example the Sans-Papiers movement in France and undocumented workers from Latin America (Tyler and Marciniak 2013, 143). The most recent example in Sweden is the Afghani strike against deportations to Afghanistan during the summer of 2017 (Sveriges Radio P4 Stockholm. ”Unga afghaner avbryter sittstrejk”).

From a policy perspective, it is necessary to find solutions on how to integrate newly arrived individuals in the Swedish society. The field of political involvement and attitudes among newly arrived individuals in Sweden lack research. One needs to know the conditions and the target groups’ perception about their own political participation to take suitable action. Political participation should be a large concern in integration. Without the political voice and participation it is difficult to reach political equality and influence (Wästberg 2016, 78). With such large groups of immigrants living in Europe, political participation should be a concern for democratic countries (de Rooij 2012, 456).
1.1 Question and aim

The aim of this thesis is to explore how newly arrived individuals perceive their role as political actors and to see if they perceive that their length of residency permit influences their role as political actors. The group in focus are persons from Syria with residency permits in Sweden. The emphasis will be on the perceptions they have, rather than on actual actions they take. As will be discussed in the theory section, concepts such as political confidence, belonging and trust are fundamental parts in political involvement. In order to find a person’s attitude towards these concepts, it is necessary to study their perceptions. To this end the research questions are:

- How do newly arrived Syrians in Sweden perceive themselves as political actors?
- Is there a difference in the respondents perceptions based on the type of their residency permit?

The thesis will continue as following: In the theory section, potential important components for political involvement are discussed and what kind of difference in the responses that can be expected based on the type of residency permit. The theory used for this study will be divided into four themes: 1) politics, 2) possibility to influence, 3) participation and 4) residency permit. The first three themes were made by me after analysing the material and are based on empirical data rather than on theoretical assumptions. They are all central to understand how the respondents perceive themselves as political actors. First one must understand how they perceive politics, then how they perceive their possibility to influence and lastly their attitude towards participation in politics. The fourth theme is residency permit, which is helpful to answer research question number two and see what could be expected from the other themes depending on the residency permit’s type. Following the theory section, the method section provides a description of how the interviews were done and on which methodological bases the thesis is built. Then I turn to the result section, which is based on the same categories as the theory.

1.2 Asylum politics

Since this thesis will focus on newly arrived Syrians in Sweden, some words can be said about asylum politics. This background provides an understanding to the respondents’ position and the political circumstances this thesis is conducted within.

Since 2011 over five million people have fled Syria because of the on-going war. Most of them have fled to surrounding countries but some have gone to Europe. In Europe, Sweden
and Germany have been the biggest receivers of asylum seekers from Syria (UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response). This became especially apparent during 2015 when a large number of Syrian refugees arrived in Sweden. The number of new asylum applications from Syrians increased from 640 in 2011 to 51338 in 2015 (Migrationsverket, “Statistik”).

Previously, Sweden has been one of the most open European countries to take in refugees but due to the unprecedented number of people arriving in 2015 the government implemented several temporary limitations to restrict the number of asylum-seekers. The government’s legislation restricted the possibility to obtain permanent residency permits in Sweden. With the old legislation, permanent permits were the rule whereas now most asylum seekers are given temporary permits (Migrationsverket, “Begränsade möjligheter att få uppehållstillstånd i Sverige.”). The new legislation with temporary residency permits likely influences the group’s perceptions about political involvement. This will be further discussed in the theory section.

Finally, some things can be said about the situation for newly arrived Syrians in Sweden. Since this is a new group of immigrants in Sweden the previous research on the subject is modest. Emma Lundgren Jörum conducted an interview study with newly arrived Syrians in 2015; her respondents expressed gratitude to be allowed to stay in Sweden but at the same time disappointment. The asylum process took very long time and once they acquired residency permits obstacles such as unemployment, problems with housing and waiting for family reunification made it hard to focus on the future and feel included in society (2015, 57).
2. Theory

The theory is structured based on the four themes presented above. From these themes important components, or aspects, of political involvement will be presented. The components are affecting each other in many ways and the themes should not be seen as an absolute division. The theory will based on previous research lead to hypotheses on what can be expected from the results. Since previous research only to a small degree looks at perceptions, much of the hypotheses will be based on what the research says about immigrants’ political involvement and not on their perceptions. This makes it especially interesting to see to which degree the hypotheses correspond with my results since I focus on perceptions.

The concept political involvement is close to the concept political participation but broader. Political involvement can be a personal issue aiming to deepen one’s political view. Since the respondents are new in Sweden merely gathering information and developing an opinion in political issues can be a part of a political involvement. With that definition, a politically inactive person can still be considered politically involved if he or she is interested in politics and has political opinions. Political inactivity is harder to interpret because it can depend on two things: either a lack of possibilities to participate or that one is satisfied and does not feel the need to participate (Adman and Strömblad 2000, 14). The respondents’ perceptions can help us find out which one of those two that is true in individual cases. How one perceives oneself as a political actor, as the aim of this thesis is to find out, is in many ways the same question as how one perceives one’s political involvement. The involvement is defined by the actions or non-actions that the actor does.

Some differences can be assumed based on the respondents’ age and gender. In general, advanced age leads to higher confidence and participation. Among immigrants, however, young people are more likely to assimilate and socialize in the new country and are therefore more likely to participate (Anduiza and San Martín 2011, 201). Especially relevant is at which age the immigrant came to the host country since political orientation acquired during young age tend to determine later political orientation (de Rooij 2012, 459). Women are in most countries less engaged in politics, and it can be noted that in some cultures politics is considered to be a male area and in some cases women are hindered from participation by their male relatives (Tillie 2004, 535, Adamson 2006, 20). In contrast, Hunt points out that women tend to adapt to the new country easier than men. Men often experience a loss in their status and work life while women can experience independence and a possibility to work with
(or engage in) things they were not able to in their homeland (Hunt 2008, 283). These differences can affect perceptions about one self as well.

2.1 Politics
The primary research question is how the respondents perceive themselves as political actors, and here their perceptions of politics are discussed since it helps to understand how they view their own role. The perception of politics among immigrants can be influenced by their lack of recognition in the Swedish political life. There might not be any party that resembles the ones in their home country and other political issues can be on the agenda. Values and norms are possibly different which could make it hard to identify with a political party (Dahlstedt 1999, 68–69). The country of origin is another aspect which affects the political involvement, as immigrants from Europe and North America are more engaged than the ones from poor and unstable countries (Adamson 2006, 20–23). Syria can be considered such a country. The Assad family has governed since the 1970’s and the president’s power is almost unlimited. There are no democratic ways to displace the regime and when demonstrations took place in 2011 the president responded with violence that later lead to a civil war (Landguiden “Syrien”). That people from countries where political opposition is oppressed do not tend to participate politically might be somewhat expected. But the migrant could be interested in politics in the new country as well in those cases where the migration is a result of previous political activity (Dahlstedt 1999, 68). Another reason for the respondents to participate would be an appreciation of the democratic society which is higher for those who compare it to other systems (Maxwell 2010, 28). Given the concerns I have outlined above I found it relevant to only look at persons from the same country since it means that they have similar norms and political situation and no consideration to different countries of origin had to be included in the analysis.

2.2 Possibility to influence
Apart from how one perceives politics, the individual’s perception about oneself in relation to the political system and belief in one’s possibility to influence that system are significant factors to look at in order to answer the research question. Without confidence people lack the motivation to affect change even when they are confronted with the possibility. Powerlessness becomes a vicious circle. By housing a perception of powerlessness people become even more separated from power (Dahlstedt 1999, 66). Political confidence can further show to
which degree the individual feels incorporated in the society (Anduiza and San Martín 2011, 198). This elucidates the importance of perceptions while discussing power relations.

Political confidence concerning influence is often defined as efficacy and can be divided into external and internal efficacy. Internal efficacy is the belief in oneself to have the abilities to influence the political process through one’s own participation. External efficacy is the belief that the political system is responsive to peoples’ demands and incorporate residents’ opinions into decisions (Anduiza and San Martín 2011, 199). The political efficacy affects the individual’s likeliness to become politically engaged.

The internal and external efficacy among immigrants is likely to be low. In a similar approach to this thesis, Stubbergaard (2010, 234) was able to show that her respondents do not believe in their ability to affect change nor in the good will of politicians. Dahlstedt’s finds that for the immigrant citizens in his study, politicians are not seen as being able to change the respondents life’s situation and they have a feeling of alienation, injustice, arbitrariness and a perceived distance to the power apparatus (1999, 86-87). Immigrants’ low efficacy is understandable considering the mechanisms affecting efficacy. Self-confidence and efficacy are affected by resources such as knowledge about possible ways for participation as well as norms about how you should act in the political life (Dahlstedt 1999, 67). Another well-established effect on political influence is education, and a commonly held belief is that education affects both knowledge and political efficacy. According to Beaumont political confidence is built not only by education or good socioeconomic conditions but also by experiences of political agency, i.e. you have to be engaged to learn how politics works in practice (Beaumont 2011, 216 and 229). Immigrants often lack knowledge of the political system, norms and experiences of political agency, as will be discussed in the next section.

2.3 Participation

I have not found any previous research about how immigrants perceive their political participation. Instead the chapter will show common components for actual participation. If the respondents have many components that increase the chances of participation I draw the conclusion that it can be expected that their perception about participation is positive. Political participation is a deeper form of involvement; here it is defined broadly and qualitatively. All forms of action with the aim to influence politicians or the general opinion are considered to constitute political participation (Adman and Strömblad 2000, 14). That can, among other things, be to demonstrate, sign a petition list or express a (political) opinion on Twitter. There
is a quite large field of studies that look at political participation. A common theory is the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) by Verba et al, which points out that the most important factors for influencing political participation are resources, motivation and recruitment (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 270).

**Motivations** are things such as beliefs and stakes which influence the individual’s interest to participate. I have already discussed one important motivation- efficacy. Political trust is another motivation which is worth to consider. Political trust focuses on trust in government and institutions (Anderson 2010, 65). Political institutions need to be perceived as effective and reliable, otherwise they lose legitimacy. Citizens who distrust state institutions are generally not interested in politics (Tillie 2004, 530). Several studies show that immigrants tend to trust the institutions of the host country more than the native population do. This seems to be due to that immigrants compare the institutions to how they were in their countries of origin. The high trust decreases with time and ends up close to the native population’s level. In other words the “over-confidence” decreases the more the immigrant is integrated in the new society (Röder and Mühlau 2012, 777; Adman and Strömblad 2015, 113).

**Resources** are things or knowledge that makes the cost of participation in politics lower. The most important resources are in general money, time and civic skills, which explains a high socioeconomic status being correlated with high political involvement (de Rooij 2012, 457; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 457). Education is seen as a mechanism that makes the resources above, especially civic skills, easier to reach (Tillie 2004, 536; Adman and Strömblad 2000, 34). Some resources especially affect immigrants. This could be a lack of language or limited knowledge of the political system in the host country (de Rooij 2012, 458, Dahlstedt 1999, 68). The lack of language skills might lead to a feeling of exclusion, especially if the surrounding society and authorities focus a lot on language; in turn that feeling of exclusion negatively affects the ability and willingness to participate politically (Dahlstedt, 1999:72). Mental health is also a resource that affects political participation (Ojeda 2015, 1227–30). Many asylum seekers are known to suffer from mental health problems such as PTSD or depression. The situation for persons with temporary residence permit also lead to an increased level of psychological stress for the individual (Steel et al. 2006, 63).
Many immigrants lack several of the resources above, and this is expected to influence the perceptions about participation negatively. Dahlstedt shows this through interviews with immigrants in Stockholm. He concludes that his respondents perceive that if you are struggling economically in your daily life, things other than political participation use up your energy. Persons in this situation might have lots of reasons to engage politically but are unable or unwilling to do so (Dahlstedt 1999, 86-87).

Recruitment relates to the fact that people find it easier to engage in political activities if they are asked to do so by others. Having a large social network is crucial to the likelihood of being asked to join political activities, i.e. recruited. Membership in associations and work leads to such networks and generally leads to an increase in civic skills since it leads to opportunities to practise such skills. Newly arrived individuals typically have a small social network and are not targeted by organizations and parties (Adman and Strömblad 2000, 34-38 and 49 de Rooij 2012, 459). They are also often unemployed for several years in Sweden (Riksrevisionen 2015, 31). Their chances of being recruited are in other words low.

2.4 Residency permit

Here will be discussed what differences can be expected based on residency permit and what could be the expected influences to the answer of the second research question: Is there a difference in the respondents perceptions based on the type of their residency permit? The respondents have either permanent or temporary residency permits but since the regulations around temporary residency permits are new, there is not very much previous research about their effects. Nonetheless, some relevant findings exist.

Dahlstedt points out that the uncertainty of the future for newly arrived individuals affects their motivations. Their interest in politics might be low when it is unclear if they will be allowed to stay in the country or leave (1999, 68). According to Brekke it is a paradox that the Swedish authorities want the asylum period to be one to prepare both for integration and return. The uncertainty makes both options hard to prepare for (2004, 19). The temporary residency permits likely have a similar effect; they make it hard to know if you can prepare for a life in Sweden when you are only allowed to be here for 13 months or three years. Klinthäll shows that refugees with temporary residency permits also face problems with finding work in the host country since they cannot guarantee that they will stay. Even if the temporary residency permit is changed to a permanent permit there is a large risk that the uncertainty during the first years leads to negative effects on integration that are persisting.
Low levels of integration and economy make them less willing to take risks and move, even back to the homeland (Klinthäll 2008, 12-13). Trust and belonging are likely affected by temporary permits since it is hard to feel integrated and likely hard to fully trust institutions if they can expel you from the country (Anduiza and San Martín 2011, 204).

Citizenship leads both to political rights and other resources. How the respondents’ perceive citizenship likely affects how they perceive political involvement. Citizenship could be perceived as closely related to possibilities of political involvement, but it is not necessarily so. Below I will go through some reasons as to why citizenship can be considered connected to political involvement. On a daily basis the difference between citizens and permanent residency permit holders might be quite small but some components make citizenship a resource to take into account. Only citizens are allowed to vote in the national election and have specific rights bound to them as citizens. Citizens’ rights are hard for a state to suspend whereas residence permits holders’ rights are open to discussion and attached to more uncertainty. Citizenship can make the immigrants feel less vulnerable in relation to authorities (de Rooij 2012, 460).

A feeling of belonging to the political community is important regardless of the residency permit’s length but likely affected by it. If you do not identify with the community, you are not likely to be interested in “their” political issues. McNevin describes political belonging as something that “captures the connections between political community, political identity and political practice“ (2006, 135). She continues by describing that belonging encompasses the status attached to members relative to non-members of the political community (McNevin2006, 135). The state is one type of political community, which requires a citizenship for full belonging. Khosravi describe the non-citizens situation as an apolitical life were the individual is not allowed to be political, a citizen and part of the belonging (Khosravi 2006, 283). McNevin on the other hand considers political belonging as something that could exist outside the membership of the state in transnational communities (2006, 136). This thesis focuses on the community inside the state. Whether the respondents see themselves as included in the political belonging or not is a central part of how they perceive political involvement.

Citizenship is correlated with participation since it presumably creates a feeling of belonging and security (Bevelander and Spång 2017, 27; Adman and Strömblad 2000, 46). Belonging and participation are also believed to reinforce each other, to participate and influence in itself
has a “socialization” effect that can make you feel a greater sense of belonging (Wästberg 2016, 78). Khosravi shows that the borders between citizenship and non-citizenship are not always as well-defined as expected. Many immigrants with citizenship feel their rights being questioned, circumstanced and denied because of their culture, religion and appearance. They perceive that they are taken less seriously and subjected to a feeling of exclusion (2006, 287). According to some scholars, the great emphasis in Sweden on class and gender equality has led to a tendency to deny problems with structural inequality and injustice among ethnic groups. The Swedish identity of humanism has hampered the willingness to acknowledge structural racism and discrimination (Kelly 2013, 146–47). For example, native Swedes are two times more likely to win office than immigrants. Dancygier et al show that this is not due to their individual lack of education and income but rather discrimination (2015, 704 and 721). A feeling of exclusion and discrimination affects perceptions of belonging which in turn influence the perceptions about political involvement.

In summary, immigrants’ experiences from their country of origin can affect their willingness to be politically involved. The confidence in ones possibility to influence (internal efficacy) and the perception that politicians are interested in peoples’ opinions (external efficacy) are motivations for political involvement. Resources and recruitment are other important components for involvement. Immigrants in general have few of the important resources, motivations to participate are generally lacking compared to the native population and so is the chance of recruitment. Temporary residency permits seem to lead to less trust, belonging and safety according to previous research. Citizenship, on the other hand, is described as leading to increased safety and belonging in addition to the political rights it brings.

To make it clearer what can be expected based on previous research the following two hypotheses were formulated. They represent two groups the respondents can fit in to:

a) Non-involved. The respondents can feel that they do not recognise the political life in Sweden and lack belonging with the political community. They might also experience that they lack several of the resources and recruitment that are making political participation easier which can affect the internal efficacy. The lack of those resources (such as lack of money or lack of mental fitness due to mental health problems) is forcing them to focus on the daily life and not on politics.

b) Involved: The respondents can feel involvement in Swedish politics. If they for example have a background as politically active, then the democratic society might boost their
engagement. Additionally, as have been shown, new immigrants have high degree of political trust compared to the native population. Problems they encounter during their asylum process and integration might lead to increased political interests as was the case with the Afghani protest during the summer of 2017.

These hypotheses should be seen as a help to discuss the result in relation to previous research. Since temporary residency permits likely leads to less trust, belonging and safety I expect them to have a negative effect on involvement no matter which hypothesis the respondent fit in to.
3. Method

Since political perceptions and involvement among newly arrived individuals has not previously been a focus for research, there is a point in having a wide research question and be able to follow up interesting threads. To do this, qualitative methods are preferably. Another reason for using qualitative methods is that, as have been shown, political involvement is correlated with self-confidence, efficacy and identities. These aspects are “deep” and cannot be fully understood without methods that are interpretative and “thick”. Smith, who advocates the importance of political identities, states that the method needs to be deep to explain how identities are formed and changed. The researcher needs to grasp the sense of value and meaning the person possessing the identity feel (Smith 2004, 53). In other words, the subjective meaning is the point of interest. Our experience of the world depends to a large degree on the social context between individuals and how we perceive our surroundings. Attitudes are expected to affect political behaviour and outcomes of institutions, democratic stability and democratic quality (Anduiza and San Martín 2011, 198). Within the scope of this thesis, that means that newly arrived Syrians’ perceptions are valuable since it can create an understanding of their attitudes and political behaviour. In order to look at a phenomenon with this assumption, the use of interpretive methods is necessary.

The definitions and operationalization used in the thesis are not absolute but broad and imprecise. This is consciously done to open up for the respondents’ own interpretation of the concepts (see for example the discussion about the concept “political involvement” in the theory section). This broad concept use requires that I as the writer analyse the material when the concepts are discussed. Because of the broad definitions, and my influence while interpreting the material, it is extra important to be transparent with how the analysis is done, and to always be close to the material. This is in part accomplished by including a large number of quotes from the interviews in the results section of the thesis.

3.1 Interviews

Based on the considerations above, qualitative interviews were chosen as the means to extract the data needed for this thesis. The interview guide is attached as Appendix 1. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes to one and a half hour. The interviews were held in a café, which hopefully was a neutral place where the respondents could feel safe. It was a requirement that others should not be able to listen and intervene.
The interviews were semi-structured. That means that the interviewer uses an interview guide but has the possibility to ask follow-up questions and change the order of the questions to adapt to the flow of the individual interview (Bryman, 2011: 206). The questions were open to make it possible for the respondents to give their answers in a flexible way. Open questions increase the validity since the respondent has a possibility to put the answer in their right context. The interview situation is close to a normal conversation and can take different turns depending on what is brought up. This kind of interview is appropriate for example when there is limited knowledge about the topic at hand or when an insider perspective is desired (Leech, 2002, 665). These requirements are met in this study: studies about political involvement among newly arrived individuals seem to be scarce and there are few studies overall where the insider perspective of newly arrived individuals is investigated.

The issue of language has to be discussed. To be able to study this group, a mix of languages was necessary. Some interviews were conducted in Swedish when the respondents were speaking it well enough. In other cases an interpreter was used. The interpreter translated from Arabic to English. Both ways – using an interpreter and conducting the interview in Swedish - have problems connected to them. While speaking Swedish, there is a risk that the respondent’s limited knowledge of the language makes them unsure and unable to describe the full complexity of their answers. Later on, the quotes were translated to English by me, which could lead to further errors due to some meaning being lost in translation. The problem with an interpreter, on the other hand, is the risk of misunderstandings in the interpretation. Summing up, there are numerous sources of error in this situation, but I have tried to compensate for this by being attentive when using quotes from the respondents and asking control questions during the interviews.

To have an interpreter from Syria would have been unwise since oppositions between different groups are strong and the interpreter’s perceived ethnic, political or religious belonging might strongly affect the respondents. The interpreter was from Eritrea, which hopefully made it easier for the respondents to express themselves freely. Still, the interpreter might affect the respondents in a way that I am not aware of. She is also a newly arrived person in Sweden and the closeness in life situation with the respondents might make them feel both more and less comfortable.

As is the case with my interpreter, I affect the respondents as well. I am a Swedish citizen, I look Swedish and I am a woman. It is hard to tell exactly how that affects the respondents but
I might get other answers than another interviewer would get. The interview situation also has a power dimension. In relation to the respondents I possess language skills, knowledge about the issues we discuss and a judicial status as Swedish citizen. Furthermore since they know I am a citizen there is a risk reinforcing a feeling of “us“ versus “them”. This distance between us is however not necessarily a disadvantage. Underlying assumptions have a higher chance to be explicitly stated when the interviewer is in another situation than the respondent.

The language issue discussed above constitutes a risk for unsystematic errors, while mine and the interpreter’s influence might lead to a systematic influence of the respondents. For example, it is possible that they describe their life in Sweden as more positive to me as a Swedish citizen than to someone who is not. The counteraction to this is to be aware about it. The method allows one to linger at such situations and trying to get a developed answer.

3.2 Sample

The sample could not be generalized to a larger group and is a purposive sample. That means that the sample is a strategic selection to find relevant answers to the research question (Bryman, 2011:392). The purpose of the thesis is to provide understanding and not to generalize to a wider population. But even if generalization is impossible because of the method, the results can be assumed to be found among people in a similar situation as well. There is no minimum or maximum of how many respondents to gather in qualitative interviews, but a common measurement when deciding what amount is “enough” is to talk about theoretical saturation. When the same aspects tend to be repeated and no new information is gathered, it is time to stop doing interviews (Bryman 2011, 395).

As has been mentioned above, there is not much research done on newly arrived individuals’ political attitudes, therefore this group was chosen. In order to make the respondents more homogenous, only persons from one country were chosen. Since the focus is on individuals who recently arrived in Sweden, the situation in their country of origin is a relevant factor to consider. It is possible that the Syrians are exposed to less negative attitudes than other immigrant groups. The war in Syria is well covered by the Swedish media and Syrians are in many cases educated from the middle class. The large number of Syrians in Sweden makes it an interesting group to look at since they affect and are affected by the Swedish society. There has not been so much research about Syrians in Sweden before. That makes it a theoretically interesting group since it now are one of the largest immigrant groups in Sweden. However,
this does not mean that the result of this thesis can be generalized to all Syrians living in Sweden.

The respondents were found through *Swedish for Immigrants* and *Swedish as Second Language* classes (SFI).³ I presented myself in classes and sent a list for interested to sign up on. Even those who are not engaged or interested in politics were interesting to interview. Therefore, I was careful not to tell them of the specific content of the interview beforehand. I said that I wanted to know about their experiences as Syrian refugees in Sweden. However, as is common in interview studies, the information from the interviews was quite varied. Some respondents were quieter than others and some talked a lot during parts of the interview but did not answer other parts. The respondents’ willingness to talk about specific issues will be apparent in the results where it will be referred to some respondents more often than to others.

The respondents were all adults; the youngest was 20 and the oldest 53. Five men and five women participated. Men and women might engage in different ways in politics and experience the adaption to the Swedish society differently, which may affect the answers. However, since this thesis aims at exploring the field it is relevant to include as many experiences as possible. When analysing the results, other characteristics should also be considered, such as level of education and time spent in Sweden. It is well known that persons with high education and wealth are more engaged in politics than others (Tillie 2004, 535–36). It is beneficial for the study that the respondents have been in Sweden for a similar period of time. If there had been large differences in time spent in Sweden it would be hard to know to which extent time influenced their view of the Swedish society and their role in it. A table below describes the respondents.

The study was conducted in Uppsala, Sweden. Uppsala is a middle size town (population 215 000 (SCB 2016)) in Sweden and has some special characteristics, such as being a student town. The university attracts foreign students which means many people from outside Sweden settle there. Because of this, it is possible that the town is more open towards immigrants than other municipalities in Sweden. The political party Swedish Democrats, usually considered as an anti-immigration party, only have 6,6 % of the municipality votes in comparison to 12,9% nationally (Valmyndigheten "Uppsala - Röster - Val 2014").

³ Svenska för invandrare and Svenska som andraspråk
Conducting research that requires people to share their personal experiences and perceptions requires ethical considerations. Several aspects make the group tricky to interview. I have already discussed the language but the respondents are also in an exposed situation as newly arrived individuals. They might be suspicious and afraid of expressing thoughts that in Syria would be punishable to express. I used the ethical guidelines from Vetenskapsrådet to handle the interviews in the most accurate way possible (Vetenskapsrådet 2002).

Before each interview I told the respondents that they could interrupt whenever they liked and did not have to answer all questions. In the end of the interviews I asked if they had any questions or wanted to add something. When I looked for respondents in Swedish classes I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Time in Sweden</th>
<th>Type of residence permit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Basic schooling 9 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Temporary, 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Basic schooling 9 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Temporary, 13 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Basic schooling 9 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>High school 12 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Temporary, 13 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Basic schooling 9 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Basic schooling 9 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Temporary, 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Ethical discussion

Before each interview I told the respondents that they could interrupt whenever they liked and did not have to answer all questions. In the end of the interviews I asked if they had any questions or wanted to add something. When I looked for respondents in Swedish classes I
clarified that it was voluntary to participate before handling out a list for the interested to sign up.

Transparency is an important rule of all types of research. In this case however the names are left out to protect the respondents. It might be hard for an outsider to find the respondents, but I had to consider that some questions might be sensitive because of the current political situation in Syria. Persons close to the respondents and religious and political groups with connections to Syria could have an interest in knowing for example their political engagement in Syria. Another reason to make the respondents anonymous was because it is possible that this made them feel more secure and open in their answers.

One important part in conducting an interview is to start with the less threatening questions and ask the harder ones when some confidence is built. Few questions were directly sensitive but sometimes questions like “Do you trust the municipality?” could lead to touching stories about mistreatment and bad living conditions that upset the respondent. The most sensitive questions were about their political engagement in Syria. This information, were it to make its way outside of the interview situation, could both affect the respondents asylum cases and be dangerous if the wrong persons were to find out their political allegiances. When asking sensitive questions, an adjustment was done to not push the respondent too much. As a general rule respondents should not feel worse after an interview than they did before (Brekke 2004, 12). Another reason for not pushing sensitive issues is that the interview is then straying away and it might be hard to find a way back to the topic of interest (Brekke 2004, 12).

The focus in the interpretation of this material is on the interviewee’s experiences. Considering this, it is important to note that the respondents give true responses to how they interpret their experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann 2014, 44). Since I am interested in the perception of the respondents I have no need to prove or question any facts that they mention. If they misremember something or have misunderstood something it does not matter, as long as they believe in it. I do however need to be aware of conscious lies and wilful avoiding of questions as that is connected to their perceptions. For example, there will be examples in the text when I suspect that they avoid expressing critique towards Sweden to not displease me.
4. Results

The table below shows the respondents’ perceptions in some main issues. Four of the respondents have temporary residency permits (2, 3, 5 and 9). Respondent 9 however got the residency permit as a wife to someone who has a permanent residency. That legally gives her more security as long as she is married. The persons with temporary residency permit are first in the table to make them easier to analyse. No clear patterns in relation to residency permits are visible. At the end of each sub-heading the relation of the theme in focus to type of residency permit will be brought forward and discussed. In the end of the result section perceptions about residency permits will be discussed in detail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Type of residence permit</th>
<th>(Perception of) Politics</th>
<th>Possibility to influence</th>
<th>Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Temporary, 13 months</td>
<td>Politics as weather</td>
<td>Good possibility</td>
<td>Does not want to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Temporary, 13 months</td>
<td>Politics as problem</td>
<td>Unclear possibility</td>
<td>Does not want to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Temporary, 2 years</td>
<td>Politics as weather</td>
<td>Good possibility</td>
<td>Does not want to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Temporary, 3 years</td>
<td>Politics as problem</td>
<td>Good possibility</td>
<td>Maybe participate later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Politics as weather</td>
<td>Unclear possibility</td>
<td>Want to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Politics as problem</td>
<td>Unclear possibility</td>
<td>Does not want to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Does not care</td>
<td>Unclear possibility</td>
<td>Does not want to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Politics as weather</td>
<td>Unclear possibility</td>
<td>Maybe participate later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Politics as problem</td>
<td>Unclear possibility</td>
<td>Maybe participate later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Does not care</td>
<td>Unclear possibility</td>
<td>Does not want to participate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A short operationalization is necessary here. The operationalization will also be further discussed as each theme is presented. Politics are perceived in three main ways, either as something that they do not care about, as a problem, or as weather, by which I mean that it affects them but are being outside of their control. The perceptions of their ability to influence politics are divided into grades ranging from good to bad possibility to influence, which correlates with the previously mentioned theoretical concepts of high or low degrees of efficacy. A respondent’s efficacy can be considered high if the respondent says something like “I think that I can influence” and as low if the respondents says “I have no possibility to influence”. The dimension of participation is divided by how the respondents in each group answered the question if they would like to participate in politics. Here, three different types of answers occurred, “I want to participate”, “Maybe I want to participate in the future” and “I don’t want to participate”.

These categories were made after conducting the interviews and are based on tendencies in the answers given but it should be noted that not all respondents talked about the same things. Some explained very clearly their perception of one theme while others were vaguer. Perceptions are not easily described, sometimes they are contradictive and sometimes they are possible to interpret in different ways. This leads to difficulty in “boxing in” some respondents. For example, one respondent said that he had a good possibility to influence politics but later he described several obstacles impeding such influence. Which category should he be assigned to? I have solved dilemmas like this by looking at the context the respondent talks about and the overall attitude in the interview. The categories should thus be seen as ideal types stemming from the main tendencies of replies given in the interviews. For the thesis is it interesting to see how these categories relate to other perceptions and to type of residency permit.

4.1 The respondents view on their life situation and future

I consider an understanding of the respondents’ life situation as important to be able to do as good interpretations as possible. This part provides that context and is not directly connected to the research questions but is needed in order to interpret their replies. As will be shown this context also gives information about several components that were encountered in the theory which are believed to affect influence and participation.
4.1.1 Asylum process

The respondents’ goal to live in Sweden has been with them for a long time. The reason to escape your home country is hard to influence but the choice of new country is something you are partly able to control. Nearly all of the respondents answered that they had planned their escape to end up in Sweden. Most of them mentioned relatives whom they wanted to reunite with and who gave them information about the situation in Sweden (1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9).

“My uncle was here, and he told me that Sweden is the best country, you can come, the income here is good, we feel safe and they respect human rights.” #6, woman, 22 years old

For some (2, 4 and 10), the main reason to come here was the Swedish society and the regulation with permanent residency permits for Syrians (until November 24th 2015). No one asserted that they came to Sweden by coincidence. Their active choosing of Sweden and their struggle to get here can be important to understand their perceptions of their own role in the Swedish society.

Most of the respondents waited around a year to get their residence permits and many described it as a hard experience.

“The situation was bad in the camp [quarters for asylum seekers]. We were four persons in one room and the room was three meters times three meters. During this time I was just waiting so I was just thinking and thinking and thinking, and it was exhausting and killing, just wait and think.” #4, man, 22 years old

The quote shows the two main problems with waiting the respondents bring up: bad housing conditions and lack of activities to fill the days with. Another problem is of course the uncertainty and inability to plan ahead. Respondent 4 expresses that waiting was “exhausting and killing”, which could be interpreted as affecting his mental health in a negative way. As mentioned in the theory section mental health problems can affect political involvement.

4.1.2 Daily life

Since the respondents were contacted via SFI classes none of them were employed but receive benefits in order to focus on learning Swedish. Some, like respondent 1, felt that they had a good life in Syria and that everything was lost by coming to Sweden:

“Life is though, life was good before, I had a good job and house but now I need to start from zero [---] I graduated from Damascus University […] and worked as a teacher. In
Damascus I owned land, house, had a car, good work. Life here is expensive, no work, no house, socially isolated. In Syria I could go on vacation and now I have not been outside Uppsala in two years.” #1, man, 40 years old

Especially those with a good living standard in Syria expressed a big loss and a feeling of beginning from zero. Their socioeconomic situation had markedly decreased. Not only material values were perceived as affected by the new situation but also social life; the same man expresses that he is "socially isolated". Many respondents talked about that they were or have been feeling socially isolated in Sweden. Common ways for getting social contacts are work and associations but, as said before, the respondents were recruited via SFI and are not working. None said that they were members in any association. Beyond the economic and social situation nearly all respondents talked about problems with housing. Many lived in crowded apartments and houses and with unsure and short housing contracts. For most respondents, problems with finding housing created stress and seemed to be a greater problem than the economic situation.

"If you don’t have a place to rest in, to sleep in, you are not relaxed and comfortable. You can’t study, you can’t work, you can’t do anything. [---] I want to be a good addition to your society and if I don’t have a place to sleep or eat, to have warmth, I can’t do anything.” #10, woman, 37 years old

As this woman expresses the housing problem is affecting other parts of her life in Sweden and I interpret that as influencing her possibility to engage politically since she does not have the energy to focus on anything besides housing. I interpret that the respondents perceive that their socioeconomic status are low and social contacts tend to be few, according to previous research that would affect political involvement.

4.1.3 Future in limbo

One common way to look at the future is described by respondent 1:

“There are two possible futures: One, to stay in Sweden at least 10 years so my child can grow up here. Two, if things get better in Syria I would like to go back and be in my comfort zone and be able to teach. In my country I had my charisma and position. In the SFI the student I am studying with now, I used to be their teacher in Syria.” #1, man, 40 years old

Others express that it would never be possible for them to return, either because of safety reasons or because of a more general feeling of having nothing to go back to. Many of the
respondents even answered that they do not follow what is happening in Syria. They find it hard to handle information about the war and are focused on beginning a new life in Sweden.

“I moved from Syria, I left my house, my job, my money on the bank I left everything and moved, the moment I moved I decided to forget everything about Syria, not because I don’t like my country, no I like it very much, but because I am very sad about what is happening there.” #10, Woman, 37 years old

Beginning a new life in Sweden might however also be a hard process with confusion and uncertainty.

“Syria is different than Sweden so I am confused about which way I will go. So I am wondering about what the shape my life will take comparing with in Turkey and Syria, I don’t know” #4, man, 22 years old

An interesting result is that all respondents with temporary residency permits say that they want to stay in Sweden while four of the six respondents with permanent permits are open for the possibility to go back to Syria if the war ends. Maybe the temporary residency permits are making people even more determined to stay, since the situation is unsure it makes you keep to one goal and the goal to stay in Sweden has been in their lives for several years. As covered in the theory section the respondent’s wishes and views of the future can affect their political involvement. It seems likely to me that persons who are focused on staying in Sweden also would be more interested in Swedish politics.

This overview of the respondents’ lives tells us something about the components discussed in the theory. Many expressed lack of socioeconomic resources and that they were without social networks. The ones with temporary residency permits all wanted to stay in Sweden, otherwise the answers did not differ between temporary and permanent residence permit holders.

4.2 Politics

To understand how the respondents look at themselves as political actors one have to understand the way in which they view politics. As shown in the table on page 25, I divided the respondents into three groups that according to my interpretation had similar perceptions.
4.2.1 Politics as uninteresting

For respondent 6 and 10, politics are not something they think or care about and they are focused on their own individual achievements. Both have a permanent residency permit which might make it easier to have this attitude; they are relatively safe compared with the ones with temporary residency.

“I’m not the person that thinks a lot about politics, I just want to do my job, to be a good addition in the society here, not to sit and wait – no. I want to work, to live the life the way I decide to live it.” #10, woman, 37 years old

The respondent considers herself affected by politics, one can see that by the comment that she does not want to “sit and wait”. She is forced into a situation of waiting but her coping with that situation is not to turn towards politics. Later on in the interview, we talk about protests and then she says:

“When I was in Syria there are people who do like that [protests] but I do not like it. I just want to accept the situation.” #10, woman, 37 years old

She wants to keep a distance from politics. As will show further on, it is not because she does not believe politicians will listen but mainly because a lack of interest. The other woman, respondent 6, expresses similar thoughts:

- “I don’t have this political interest; I can’t find myself in this area.

- Why?

- Because I think politics need people that are aware of that. For me all I care about is ideas that give a good impact on the society” #6, woman, 22 years old

She seems to perceive politics as an arena where “ideas that have a good impact on the society” does not have a place; however she says she could consider joining an NGO instead.

4.2.2 Politics as a problem

Several of the respondents talked about politics as something that created problems (2, 4, 5 and 8). The respondents that I have put in this category were all uncomfortable with the idea that they should participate politically; here is one example of that:

- “I don’t like politics.

- Why not?
- Because it is a headache. I like to follow but I don’t like to get involved.” #5, woman, 53 years old

It is not very clear why she does not like politics. Another respondent explains the connection between his perceptions of politics from Syria and from Sweden. Even if he is aware that the situation is different in Sweden he is still unwilling to talk about politics:

- “I have experiences of politics in my homeland, there they are bad but here in Sweden it is not like in my homeland, but I don’t like to talk about politics.

- Do you think there could be problems here if you talk about politics?

- No, no problems, here there are rules, everyone respects the rules. In Syria the dictator and police have a lot of power.”

#8, man, 40 years old

Participation seems to lead to discomfort for these respondents. Seeing how they talked about their previous experiences of politics and politicians, my interpretation is that it played a role in their attitude towards politics. Consciously or unconsciously, politics might be considered a dangerous area. The following respondents, for example, talk about politics as something that leads to imprisonment and death:

“My brother was in jail for eight years. He and his friends were just talking about politics; he was 17 years and [was] eight years in prison. But here we can talk but don’t need to.”

#8, man, 40 years old

“Very good if Sweden becomes better. I can do it but I don’t want to, I don’t like politics because in Syria there are very big problems. When I was in Turkey they called us and [told us that] my uncle is killed, so very big problems, I don’t like.”

#2, man, 26 years old

Respondent 8 says that in Sweden he does not need to talk about politics. The implication of this statement is that he thinks politics is something to care about when there is a need. Respondent 2 says that he could engage in politics, but he does not want to based on previous knowledge about what can come from political activity. At the same time he seems to think that politics is a way to make Sweden better. My interpretation is that these respondents believe that politics can be a force for good but when considering their statements and replies

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4 Translated by me
5 Translated by me
6 Translated by me
throughout the interviews I draw the conclusion that they think political activity mainly creates problems and they seem to be afraid of participation.

The quotations above show that fear are a motivation to consider. Some earlier studies have found this in other contexts as well (for example: Salamon and Van Evera 1973). Even if the respondents know that the situation is different in Sweden, they are careful and uncomfortable with being politically involved. Another example of potential fear (or, possibly of adapting to me as interviewer) is seen in this interview:

- “Is there anything in Sweden you would like to change?
- Yes, but I cannot say it. But yes, there are, but I cannot say it, I’m sorry.”

#2, man, 26 years old

It is of course possible that the lack of being able to express his wishes due to difficulties with language was the reason for the reply above, since this interview was in Swedish, but we had already talked for a long time without any language impediments. My interpretation is that he did not want to tell me because of some other reason. The component mentioned in the theory section concerning country of origin might be applicable to those respondents. If you have left a system where political activity is met with oppression, it is likely that you do not want to participate in the politics of the new country, as it may be uncomfortable and unfamiliar. The level of trust towards politicians is presumably low and the attitudes towards the government negative (Maxwell 2010, 28). The respondents’ experiences are that politics lead to conflicts and problems and interfere in their life in a negative way:

“I just wanted to do something with cloths and a sewing machine but then the war came that is 100% everything I know about politics in Syria.”

#2, man, 26 years old

Respondent 8 also says that he is not interested in international politics because one can never know what happens “under the table” by which he likely means that the international politics are not transparent. The perception of politics as deals under the table is of course discouraging for participation. It might indicate a view of politicians as not working for the people but for themselves.

4.2.3 Politics as weather

The other respondents (1, 9, 7 and 3), all perceived that politics affected them. They did not express that they were afraid of it or that they were uninterested but they saw it as an extra

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7 Translated by me
8 Translated by me
burden on their life to engage in politics and did not prioritize that at the moment. In a way they perceived politics as weather, something that exists outside of them which affects them but that they, at least at the moment, cannot influence. In contrast to the other groups they neither perceived that the weather was always bad ("politics as problem") or that there is no point in watching at the weather report ("politics as uninteresting").

Respondent 7 is the one who most explicitly talked about politics as something that affects people:

“Based on what is happening now the most important thing is decisions that affect people who are not related to it. So the people become victims of these decisions. These decisions are affecting the majority of people, like 90%. These decisions are made by few persons but they affect a lot of people.” #7, man, 35 years old

This quote comes from a discussion about international politics and not from politics in a Swedish context. Respondent 7 sees a problem with people being excluded from politics. He also says that he does not know if politicians would listen to him.

Respondent 1 was well informed and interested and more concrete in the way he spoke about the issues that affected him. On the question of what he thought was an important political issue, he talked about the Swedish government’s budget proposal (a current issue being discussed in national media at the time) and arms trade:

“I am following the news, now I am interested in the new budget and the rise of the child benefit. [---] I want to stop Sweden from selling arms to the conflict in Syria.” #1, man, 40 years old

The man sees how current political issues are close to his own life and perceives himself as being affected by politics. He also said that he believes that all parties in Sweden have good intentions. His perception of politics has to be considered to be optimistic in relation to most other respondents. However, he also mentioned that the Swedish system was inflexible and therefore discriminating. In order to exemplify, he told the story of his friend who wanted to open a restaurant where the meat would be hung outside the shop. This proposed way of handling the meat was prohibited by the municipality. This seemed to have raised a feeling of not belonging and to not be allowed ones’ traditions. It also shows that new norms and values of the host country are hard to navigate through. This story appears to have made the man think that the Swedish system contains many rules. He mentioned the need of knowing
someone who has previous knowledge of the system and who will be able to help him get through the process of “getting things done”, if he wanted to be engaged in politics:

“[I] need to go to the kommun [municipality] and get someone sponsoring the idea but not only economically. Here there are a lot of processes to get things done, not like in Syria.” #I, man, 40 years old

He is the only one that talks about politics as a set of rules and processes that you need to navigate through.

In summary: the respondents have three separate views on politics which all have in common that they place politics far away from themselves. No one talked about politics as a part of daily life (examples of that could have been recycling or discussing politics on social media), nor that the act of seeking asylum could be viewed as political. As expected, the situation in their country of origin seems to affect some of them to a large degree and leads to fear of engaging in politics. The respondents who perceived politics as a problem are mainly the ones who I interpret as being afraid of getting into politics. The results from this section lead me to conclude that they are closer to hypothesis A) non-involvement than B) involvement.

Residency permit: I fail to see any relation between perceptions of politics and type of residency permit.

4.3 Possibility to influence

The respondents’ view of their possibility to influence is a part of their perception of themselves as political actors. During the analysis the concept of political efficacy has been shown to be a useful tool to describe the respondents’ perceptions of their possibility to be political and influence. As previously stated, an example of high efficacy is when the respondent says: “I think that I can influence” and examples of low efficacy would be if the respondent says: “I have no possibility to influence”. I have divided this chapter between the ones with high efficacy and the ones with unclear belief in the same. There is no group for low efficacy in this sample because I did not consider anyone being that pessimistic about their possibility. Internal and external efficacy will also be mentioned, the respondents tend to focus on one or the other.

4.3.1 High efficacy

Respondent (2, 3 and 9) expresses belief in that people will listen to them but they are not very interested in participating. This group shows that they possess external efficacy, i.e. they
believe that decision makers are responsive to input from them and that the democratic system would let them through. On the question about what they could do if they wanted to influence politics they mentioned talking directly to the politicians. Here are some examples of that:

“I know that if I want to do something there are politicians I can sit and talk to them or with the municipality.” 9 #2, man, 26 years old

“Maybe I can talk to the Prime Minister. [...] If he not is a racist he should listen to me” 10 #3, woman, 20 years old

“Here is democratic so I don’t think that there is anyone that is listening more to. Everyone with every nationality can raise his voice or opinion and they would listen.” #9, woman, 36 years old

This shows that the respondents are confident in the possibility that they would be listened to. Even respondent 3 who is a young woman with a temporary residency permit and therefore could be believed to have low efficacy, expresses a high degree of confidence and talks about the Prime Minister as someone she could reach out to. There is, however, a significant difference in the responses given by respondent 3 and 9. Respondent 3 believes that there is a risk that if someone is a racist then they will not listen to her. Respondent 9 on the other hand does not seem to believe that there is any racism in a democracy. The fact that they, as non-citizens and newly arrived individuals, technically are excluded from voting was not mentioned by any of the respondents. Neither did they mention that their situation as non-voters could be a reason that they would not to be listened to. Respondent 9 even says that “Everyone with every nationality can raise his voice”. It is possible to interpret this statement in different ways; that non-citizens could raise their voice and be listened to do not automatically mean that they have influence but could mean that. You can also have another nationality but still be a Swedish citizen if you perceive the word nationality more symbolical. Still, the most direct interpretation of the statement is that there are no differences in political influence between citizens and non-citizens. An argument for this interpretation of the statement is that it is given as part of an answer to a question about her own political participation.

In addition to the possibility of being subjected to racism, the respondents mentioned other potential problems which could affect their possibility to influence; these were their lack of

9 Translated by me
10 Translated by me
the Swedish language and knowledge of Swedish society and politics. As previously mentioned the respondents are not always possible to put into a single category and this is an example of that. Even if they perceive some impediments, my interpretation is that the three respondents in this category (2, 3 and 9) believe to a great extent that they have a possibility to influence politics and therefore I choose to keep them in this category. The quote below for example shows that one respondent feels that as soon that he talks Swedish he can do whatever he likes:

- “It is easier for them [citizens11] maybe. Because when I want to talk to them [politicians] I don’t know so much Swedish. They [citizens] can talk for five minutes, if I want to say what I mean it might take one hour.

- *Is there something more that hinders you?*

- No. When it comes [to the point] that I can talk Swedish and understand everything, I can do whatever I like.”12 #2, man, 26 years old

Here the respondent talk about citizens but my interpretations is that it is not the citizenship as such that makes it easier for citizens but the language. When these problems are mentioned they seem to reflect the respondent’s internal efficacy; he does not possess the language and knowledge which he perceives as useful to be able to influence. This kind of argumentation will appear again below.

### 4.3.2 Unclear efficacy

The respondents I have put into this group are more hesitant about their possibility to influence. A typical answer from this group would be “I think I can influence when I have learned the language or when I have more knowledge”.

Some respondents said that they did not know if they would be listened to or not. They explained that they had lacking experience of talking with politicians and could not tell how they were going to be treated. In many cases this was the first answer but after I asked them to guess what they thought would happen most of them had at least an idea of a likely scenario. Respondents 4 and 7 however, continued to say that they did not know. The other respondents believe that they have a possibility to influence but that there are obstacles in the way. In many cases this hesitant attitude is related to their perceived internal efficacy, in other words

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11 This quote is an answer to the question if citizens are more listened to.
12 Translated by me
their own knowledge and skills which they are aware are limited. Although this reasoning is not that different from the group described above, the difference is the respondents’ focus. This group focus more on the obstacles for political influence than the other group.

The importance of language was highly acknowledged by most respondents. Since I recruited them in SFI classes, it is likely that they thought more about language’s importance than they might have done otherwise, simply because they study it every day. The knowledge of Swedish was seen as the biggest difference between them and native Swedes when they compared their possibility to influence politics. The lack of fluency in the new language was mentioned by a couple of respondents as to why they did not follow Swedish news, in other words this lack of language also affected their possibility to stay informed. Some respondents said that they would face difficulties being listened to, not only because of their lack of language but also because they would not know how to express themselves correctly. Here is a respondent answering to the question “Do you think that politicians listen more to citizens than to you?”

- “Yes, because I will talk like I did in Syria but here a Swedish person know what he needs to say, not like I think.
- It is something more than just knowing the language?
- It’s not only the language, because they know how to speak.” 13 #10, woman, 37 years old

My interpretation of this answer is that the woman thinks that cultural differences are the main obstacle in the way of getting Swedish politicians to listen to her. She is probably right in that matter. Dahlstedt has conducted interviews with immigrants that are engaged in Swedish political parties. According to him it is important to be able to behave in a special way in the Swedish political culture. To speak “correct” and know the “right codes” are important to be met with respect and to gain influence (2004, 74). This is identified by the respondents. Respondent 5 has a similar thought; she says that she does not think there is a difference between Swedish persons and immigrants but that some are more listened to than others:

“People who know how to do these things, who are familiar with changing [things], people in media and in general youths.” #5, woman, 53 years old

13 Translated by me
She is not pointing out the cultural differences but that you need a more general political knowledge of “how to do these things”.

Summary: In general, all respondent have a surprisingly good belief in their possibility to influence compared to what could be expected based on previous research. It is also surprising considering that some of them have negative views of politics. My interpretation is that the ones who express that it would be easy to influence also focus more on external efficacy while the sceptical respondents focus more on internal efficacy. The respondents who believe they have a good possibility to influence politics fit into hypothesis B) involvement, while the hesitant respondents are harder to place.

Residency permit: Another unexpected connection is that the three respondents who have high efficacy also have temporary residency. It is hard to find an explanation to why the temporary residency permits would correlate with high efficacy, based on the theory, temporary residency permits could be expected to affect efficacy negatively. The correlation can just be a coincidence; if not however, it could possibly be traced to their focus to stay in Sweden, similar to what was showed in the first section, and therefore need to justify the good in the Swedish society and their own place in it.

4.4 Participation
Political participation is a part of political involvement and, as previously described in the theory section, how one looks at one’s political involvement is another phrase for how one looks at ones role as a political actor. I can see three attitudes towards participation from the respondents of this study: “want to participate”, “maybe later” and “do not want to participate”

4.4.1 “I want to participate”
Only respondent 1 answered that he wanted to participate in Swedish politics to a larger degree than just voting. He even knew which party he would like to be engaged in but said that he did not have time to be engaged now. As described above he was interested and seemed to have more knowledge about political issues than the others. His confidence in his own possibility to influence, however, was limited and among the lowest in the group. In this quotation the exclusion from citizenship is mentioned:

“Depends on the politician [if I am listened to]. But probably citizens and party members would be more listened to. I just arrived.” #1, man, 40 years old
I interpret that he perceives himself as lacking belonging in the political community since he just arrived. That leads to a perceived lack of legitimacy to express political opinions in contrast to citizens and party members. As the quotation on page 34 shows, he realized that there are lots of rules that you need to know about to be able to affect the political situation, he also knows that he does not possess the necessary knowledge about the rules. This perception of both the external efficacy – “politicians might not listen to me,” and internal efficacy- “I do not have necessary knowledge” could be what is stopping him from engaging in political activity.

4.4.2 "Maybe in the future"

Respondent 2, 7 and 8 said that they could consider participation in the future. Respondent 2 is a little puzzling: he sees politics as a problem and as such it would be reasonable to think that he does not have any interest in participation. But he also expresses high efficacy, and said that he wanted to be engaged in politics later. At the time of the interview he wanted to focus on his own life, to learn Swedish, get a job and bring his family to Sweden. A reason for this apparent inconsistency might be that he separates politics in Syria and Sweden to a larger degree than the other respondents; his general view of politics as “bad” could come from his experiences in Syria but in any case his view of Swedish politics does not seem to be so affected by that.

Like respondent 2, respondent 7 and 8 said that there was no place for politics in their life at the moment but might be in the future. They did not express that politics was a big interest of theirs however. It is worth to keep in mind that it is possible to be against some types of participation but not others. Respondent 7 for example says that:

“I don’t like to protest, I don’t like the way that people are protesting, there are cases, but I don’t know, I don’t like it.” #7, man, 35 years old

He would, however, like to vote and could consider other ways of participating.

Concerning age, respondent 1, 7 and 8 are between 35-40 years old. According to previous research higher age is in general related to political participation. Among immigrants, on the other hand, are persons that arrived at a young age seen as more likely to participate in politics, but that does not seem to be the case among my respondents.
4.4.3 “I don't want to participate”

Most respondents would like to vote; even if they in some cases said that they needed more knowledge first. The respondents’ mainly discuss other forms of participation however. Respondents 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 were clearest in their statement not to participate politically. None of the women were interested in participation, as could be expected based on the theory. Respondents 6 and 10 were not at all interested in participation which follows logically from their view of politics as something they do not care about and since they doubt their possibility to achieve influence.

Respondent 4 and 5 are not interested in participating either and they both are in the category with respondents who perceive politics as a problem and they doubt their possibility to influence. They do not give any reason not to participate other than that they have no interest to and do not want to.

“My brothers were teacher and nurse so in our nature we don’t love politics. It is in my family that we stay away from politics.” #4, man, 22 years old

Respondent 4’s reason not to engage is his family’s habit and their “nature”. Since the reasons are vague and their perception of politics is negative, I think that fear could be a reason this respondent has to stay out of politics. Considering the earlier descriptions of politics as leading to imprisonment, jail and creating problems it is quite natural to conclude that political participation is connected to fear.

Respondent 9 answered that she had been participating politically in Syria, but that this participation was required of her from above:

“In Syria you are automatically a member of the Ba’ath party, so when you are in first year of high school you automatically join the party and a lot of people do that because you can get good job opportunities after. So if someone decides to leave they do it quietly, not open, [by] not getting to the meeting, not participating.” #9, woman, 36 years old

This is closer to a perception of politics as a problem and these kinds of experiences are possibly influencing the respondents’ perception about political parties. According to Lifos report on the Ba’ath party in Syria, every fifth Syrian is a member of the party (Migrationsverket 2015, 10). Considering this together with the response from respondent number 9, I am surprised that not more of the respondents mentioned the Ba’ath party. Since
this quote was in one of the last interviews, I asked the respondent why she thought that no one else had talked about the party with me. She answered that:

“They have a fear inside them and they cannot let it go even if they are not in Syria now. They have suffered a lot.” #9, woman, 36 years old

That supports my hypothesis that fear might be a reason not to engage. This presumed fear can also explain why some respondents only spoke about political involvement reluctantly.

The information about the Syrian political context in the quote above also opens for another explanation; to not be a member in a political party might in itself be a political statement. In a context, where participation is forced, the decision not to engage might be a way to express independence. Respondent 9 says that increased safety means you do not need to follow politics:

- “Would you be more interested in Swedish politics if you become a Swedish citizen?
- Maybe I would feel more safe, so I don’t need to follow the politics” #9, woman, 36 years old

She connects safety with citizenship as expected but then she connects lack of safety with an increased need to follow political developments. According to previous research, citizenship and safety should increase interest in following politics. Here the opposite is expressed: That you do not have to care if you are safe and a citizen. Not having to participate in politics and to not follow political developments seems to be desirable, according to this respondent. This reasoning might also explain respondents 6 and 10’s perceptions of politics. Respondent 10 expresses a wish of independence from politics when she says she want “to live the life the way I decide to live it.”

Respondent 3 and 9 on the one hand believe in their possibility to be listened to and on the other hand have no willingness to participate. That might seem like a discrepancy. The other respondents also show quite good confidence in their ability (internal efficacy), and in the democratic system’s process to include everyone (external efficacy), so I believe that it is fair to talk about a discrepancy among them as well. I have mentioned some reasons to not want to participate: freedom and independence in non-participation, fear of repression and a perceived lack of their own legitimacy to influence. Another common reason is that the respondents do not feel the need to engage. When asked what they would change if they governed in Uppsala and Sweden, many respondents answered that they did not know, and that they thought everything was good, except the difficulties with getting good housing
which was mentioned several times. It is possible that they do not find reason to change anything. My role as interviewer can also play a part here. Since I am a Swedish citizen they could perceive that I represent Sweden and they do not want to seem ungrateful after being allowed to stay in the country. Further explanations can be found in dissecting the meaning of “being listened to” i.e. the respondent can see no reason to why they would not to be listened to and addressed by politicians but still believe that it would not make an actual impact.

I had expected more and clearer connections between types of residency permit and perception of political participation especially since the temporary residency permissions holders expressed such a positive view of Swedish politicians. However, with the exception of respondent 2, the respondents with temporary residency permits are unwilling to engage politically.

- “Could you participate in a protest like that? [The Afghanis’ protest against deportations during summer 2017]”
- No, I don’t want to. […] They give me 13 months residency permit but I don’t do anything, just wait for a second [residency permit].” #3, woman, 20 years old

The respondents were unwilling to say much about their type of residency but one reason that temporary residence permits correlate with a lack of willingness to engage politically could be that the uncertain future for those with temporary residency permits makes them avoid attention in fear that it could affect their asylum cases.

In summary, only respondent 1 is interested in participating politically, respondent 2, 7 and 8 could consider participation while the others do not wish to participate. Among some respondents non-involvement seems to be desirable, among others seems fear of repression be holding them back.

Residency permit: Three of four respondents with temporary permits did not want to participate politically. It is hard to say that it depends on their residency permit since several of the others answered similarly as well.

4.5 Residency permit

Now will I focus more on the second research question, if there seems to be a difference in their perceptions based on type of residency permit? Whether or not residency permit is perceived by the respondents to influence their political involvement will also be discussed in this section.
4.5.1 Residency permits in general

The limitations of a residency permit compared to citizenship can lead to a feeling of frustration. This respondent for example felt restrained by his residency permit:

“…the law is affecting us in a way that makes you limited, unlike the ones that have citizenship. If you have citizenship you will be focusing more on one goal and you will work to [get to] it. But if you are an immigrant you are under some regulations that you have to follow, and those regulations will be applied to you, forcibly.” #7, man, 35 years old.

The conditions for the residency permit were also seen as unsure and the regulations were hard to trust.

“Like now with the residency [permit] you have the right to study in Sweden and you don’t need to pay. And if you have a residency [permit for] three or five years, it depends, you can apply for citizenship. But what if the regulations changes?” #6, woman, 22 years old.

As described in the theory, citizenship can be considered a resource because of the safety it leads to, and the quote above is a good example of citizenship being perceived as a source of safety. However, the same respondent, number 6, also stated that citizenship is not that important for her and she did not seem to care about her asylum status at an earlier point in the interview.

“Sure, I will be a citizen, I don’t know about things but what matters to me is to stay here and work here and be successful. This is what matters to me and not papers and citizenship and such.” #6, woman, 22 years old.

This attitude also seems to correspond to her lack of interest in politics. It is a big difference from respondent 7 above who feel very constrained by not being a citizen.

4.5.2 Temporary residency permits

The respondents with temporary residency permit cluster together in a number of cases. They have high efficacy, want to stay in Sweden and do not want to engage in politics. Respondents 2, 3 and 9 (with temporary residency permits) also expressed critique towards the Migration Agency, here is one example:

“When I arrived here there are permissions that are valid the whole life, then 13 months, but I don’t know why. But as I think, I don’t know, it is right for the Swedish society
maybe. [...] Maybe they know what they are doing. My younger brother he has 13 months, then he changed to two years more. That is right maybe, I don’t know.”

#2, man, 26 years old

Maybe the temporary permits make the respondents more critical toward the Agency, I interpret that the answer from respondent 2 makes that a likely conclusion. When he arrived in Sweden he believed that he would get a permanent permit and only getting a temporary must have been a disappointment. That disappointment is possibly affecting his view of the Migration Agency but at the same time he says that it might be right for the Swedish society. It could be interpreted as that he thinks that the regulations might be correct in a general level for the society as a whole but at the same time negatively affecting him. In contrast to the ones with permanent residency permits these respondents must renew their contact with the Agency and once again put their cases forward when their previous permits expire. Knowing that could make old disappointments harder to get past. In the theory one expectation was that the temporary residencies would make the respondents less trusting of institutions. In this case that seems to be correct.

However, respondents did not talk a lot about their type of residency permit. They say that they will apply to renew their permit when needed and they all count on staying in Sweden. Only respondent 5 talks about the possibility that the residency permit is not renewed:

“…they can say that they will not renew the residency one more time, so this is injustice. I arrived before the regulation of temporary residency but [because of] waiting to get the interview I got the temporary residency, so this is injustice.” #5, woman, 53 years old

Among all respondents there seems to be a wish not to think about and talk about the possibility that they would have to leave Sweden. I asked respondent 10, with permanent residency, if she was worried she would not to get a residency during here time as an asylum seeker, and she answered:

“I did not think about it because I was fleeing from war. I was only thinking that I was safe and that for my children this is a good place to continue, for their future. I just want to see them happy so in all situations here are better than Syria.” #10, woman 37 years old

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14 Translated by me
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She says that she did not think about if her family would not get residency permit but at the same time she is expressing that she wants her children to continue their life in Sweden. The residency permit must in other words have been very important. Brekke draws the conclusion from his respondents that they supress the possibility of returning even for themselves (2004, 30). I draw the same conclusion for my respondents based on these replies.

**4.5.3 Residency permits effect on belonging**

Political belonging is important for political involvement. Since the right to take part in the Swedish political community to a large degree depends on if you are a citizen, much of the discussion about belonging concerns citizenship. There was a difference in how much the respondents saw citizenship as a part of belonging, some, like respondent 4, thought that it was important to achieve a sense of belonging and that it also meant independence from the Migration Agency:

“I would love to work and be a good, productive citizen. And I am honoured to be that. This country gave me residency; this country gave me protection so at least I want to pay back by working and to be able to pay tax.”

“I think that if I became a citizen I will be like concrete in this country, I will be like one of them; it is not like when I am a PUT [permanent residency permit] holder. Now my destiny is in the hand of the Migration Agency, so it is not like being independent and to be in the country with citizenship.” #4, man, 22 years old

To “be like concrete” seems to refer to both that he would feel like he is a part of society, a fundament, and that the decision that he has the right to stay and belong is final. Respondent 3 had another view and when I asked her if she would like to become a Swedish citizen she answered:

“That would feel nice but other people [would still] look at me and think ‘no she is not a Swedish person’” #3, woman, 20 years old

For her, her appearance was something that hinders her from feeling a sense of belonging. When the respondents compared their own possibility of political influence to that of citizens many of them found the largest difference to be those of language and knowledge. Those things seemed to be perceived by many as more important for belonging than the judicial status as citizen. Considering that previous research points out that many citizens feel that

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16 Translated by me
their belonging is questioned based on their origin (Khosravi 2006, 287), the respondents might have an understanding of that and instead focus on the things that can make them appear more Swedish.

In other cases the attitude of public case workers leads to a feeling of exclusion from society. One example of that was on page 33 when respondent 1’s friend was not allowed to open his restaurant due to health and safety regulations. Below is another example from a woman who wanted to be able to pick up her daughter early in kindergarten until the daughter had learnt some Swedish. The officer at the Public Employment Agency required that the mother went to SFI for eight hours a day and therefore she could not pick up her daughter early. The woman was angry since she felt that the case worker assumed that she just wanted to skip her Swedish lessons.

“But my case worker she does not understand, she said ‘this is life in Sweden, this is life in Sweden, this is life in Sweden’. Ok, I know that this is life in Sweden but not for us that are new here, my daughter needs me […] I become angry at the caseworker, I am not a lazy person, in my home country I worked and then I came here and worked as an interpreter for 8 months and then I have done an internship for four months […] and study.”

#10, woman, 37 years old

The feeling of not belonging and being met as an outsider are possibly increased in situations like this. The woman perceives that the case worker views the difference between the woman and the Swedish society as greater than the woman herself views it. Stubbergaard writes that in Swedish society, immigrant women are sometimes assumed to be oppressed and without agency (Stubbergaard 2010, 231). This is a good example on when immigrant women are met with the perception that they are not used to a life as independent and working. It is probable that asylum seekers’, as well as citizens’, trust in institutions are affected by their experiences of public officers (Esaiasson, Sohlberg, and Andreasson 2017, 5)

The residency permits can make you feel constrained, unsafe and excluded compared to being a citizen. It is therefore not surprising that all respondents said that they would like to be citizens. I wondered if they considered the citizenship as a way to political rights and therefore something that they thought would affect their political behaviour. But none of the respondents explicitly mentioned the political rights attached to citizenship as a motivation for attaining it, even if they were aware about that they did not have the right to vote in the

17 Translated by me
national election. Respondent 1 was the only one who mentioned that citizens would be more listened to by politicians just because they are citizens.

*In summary,* this part of the thesis has shown that the residency permits feel unsafe and constraining compared to citizenship. Belonging was by some connected to citizenship and by others attributes such as language and appearance was highlighted. None mention citizenship as a way to gain political rights. Previous research lead to the expectation that the respondents with temporary residency permits would have a more negative view of political involvement than the ones with permanent residency permits. It is hard to see that they have a very negative view or to see any differences at all. The persons with temporary residency permits do not talk much about the effects of the time restriction of their permits. Since this has implications for the answer to the second research question it will be more discussed in further detail now, when we turn to the final discussion.
5. Final discussion

The aim of this thesis was to explore how newly arrived individuals perceive their role as political actors and to see if they perceive that their type of residency permit influences their role as political actors. The research questions were:

- How do newly arrived Syrians in Sweden perceive themselves as political actors?
- Is there a difference in the respondents perceptions based on the type of their residency permit?

There are multiple reasons for this being a relevant study. One such reason is that newly arrived individuals perceptions and attitudes towards politics have not been sufficiently studied. Neither are there many studies about Syrians in Sweden or the effects of temporary residency permits on political perceptions. Moreover, Syrians without Swedish citizenship are a significant and growing group in Sweden. They will likely continue to be so, partly because of the temporary residency permits, which do not enable them to be citizens, combined with the continuing war which makes it impossible for them to return. This new field of research motivated an exploratory, qualitative interview study. The respondents’ perceptions have been the main point of interest. Important aspects such as fear of repression would be hard to see with another approach that lacks the focus on individual perceptions.

5.1 Residency permit

I will begin by discussing the findings related to the second question since its results require less explanation than those pertaining to the first question. I expected that the temporary residency permit holders would have less trust, safety and belonging and therefore would be more sceptical toward political involvement. But I must draw the conclusion that based on my material; there are no significant differences in these perceptions based on whether the respondent held a temporary residency permit or a permanent one. At times the respondents with temporary permits seem to cluster together but that could just as well be a coincidence since they do not express that their attitudes are connected to their type residency permit. One possible reason can be that they see the temporary permits merely as a formality and nevertheless expect to be able to stay, as many of the respondents with temporary residency permits says. This interpretation is supported by the fact that several respondents also express that the citizenship is not very important; if citizenship is not perceived as important then the length of the residency permit might not be either.
Even though that I am unable to find any differences based on type of residency permit, I would recommend further research to look at the effects of varying temporary residency permit. I think that my results may stem from that it could be hard for the respondents to talk about having to leave and that they instead just deny those thoughts. Acting as if they had a natural place in Sweden might be a psychological strategy to be allowed to stay and make it real, like the attitude behind the expression “fake it ‘til you make it”. This could also explain the result that the respondents with temporary residency permits to a larger degree are determined to stay in Sweden and have a good efficacy than the ones that have permanent residency. Previous research shows that temporary residency permits might lead to individuals staying in the host country since it puts the individual in a lower socioeconomic status, which in turn affects their possibility to return, but the results of this study also point to that it might affect the individuals motivation to return. The reason being that temporary residency permit holders might become more determined and motivated to stay. While there is no strong evidence for this conclusion in my material it seems to have some validity at first glance based on the results of the interviews and thus it would be interesting to see further research based on this hypothesis.

5.2 Political actors

Now will the first research question be discussed, how do newly arrived Syrians in Sweden perceive themselves as political actors? Two hypotheses were formulated at the onset of this study:

a) Non-involved. A lack of recognition with the political life in Sweden, a lack of belonging with the political community and a lack of several resources and recruitment make the respondents non-involved in politics.

b) Involved. An appreciation of democracy, a high degree of political trust and a perception of problems that encourage them to take political action make the respondents politically involved.

I constructed the different themes (politics, possibility to influence and participation) to make a coherent view of each respondent that fitted into a single hypothesis. This matches the respondents’ perceptions in some cases, but not for everyone (as is illustrated in the table on page 25). Some perceive politics as a problem or an impediment to their lives but still want to participate or hold the perception that they have good chances of influencing politics but still do not want to participate. The operationalization could of course influence this lack of
cohesion since the respondents in some cases were hard to place into the two hypotheses i.e. with different operationalization the result could be different. However, since I looked at the whole interview when I placed the respondents into the hypotheses and themes it would presumably make a coherent view more likely. The pattern that respondents are inconsequent in their attitudes is not surprising, especially since they normally are not confronted with these kinds of questions. However, this makes it hard to give a clear answer to the research question.

The most coherent responses are given by respondents 4, 5, 6 and 10. They could be summarized as perceiving themselves as without political action, they see politics as distant from them, they doubt their possible influence and they lack the required interest to engage politically. They believe that they could be political but at the moment they seem to perceive themselves as apolitical. They fit into hypothesis a).

Respondent 1 is the most politically interested and engaged and he clearly does not perceive himself as apolitical. He is, however, aware that he lacks essential features that he believes to be pre-requisites and is therefore critical towards his possibility to be political engaged. Despite his low confidence I interpret that he fits in hypothesis b).

The perceptions of respondents 2, 3, 7, 8 and 9 are trickier to fit into the groups created by the hypotheses. Since the hypotheses are based on two opposite assumptions it is natural that some respondents would fall in between. In the cases of respondents 2, 3 and 9 much of the inconsistence stems from the fact that they perceived themselves as having a higher degree of efficacy than could be expected from a group belonging in hypothesis a). The high degree of efficacy does not contradict the hypothesis of non-involvement. They might be sceptical towards political involvement but still have a perception of good external efficacy. Additionally, they have temporary residency permits which in itself are a factor that might increase the unwillingness to participate and draw attention to them even if they have a positive view of political involvement. The interview with respondent 8 was conducted in Swedish which turned out to be a problem at several occasions during the interview, therefore am I not surprised that the interview was hard to analyse and no clear analysis could be made.

It could be worth to mention that the respondents’ daily life is quite demanding and might leave little energy left to involve in political issues. The respondents have problems with housing, arranging for children in new schools and kindergarten, managing their own SFI education as well as in some cases preparing for their own and their relatives’ applications to
renew their residency permits. They also have to bear the cognitive load of having to find their own role in a new situation they have been forced into and deal with an uncertain future. Furthermore, everything has to be done without speaking the language or understanding the system of the host country which makes this even more demanding.

The most unexpected result based on previous research was the high efficacy the respondents expressed as even the ones who are hesitant about their ability to affect change still believes that politicians would listen to them. The high external efficacy among the respondents might be explained by their recent arrival to Sweden; they do not have very many experiences of Swedish politics and have no experiences of trying to influence Swedish society. This could be in line with the results of the study of trust among immigrants done by Strömblad and Adman, where at first the immigrants demonstrated a very high degree of trust in the Swedish institutions but with time this level of trust is decreased to match the average level of the native population. Maybe the respondents of this study similarly have a high belief in the external efficacy of the system at the point in time these interviews were conducted and will gradually lose this over time.

Another aspect that possibly affects the high efficacy rating compared to what could be expected is that the respondents in many cases had a different understanding of democracy and presumptions about politics than I had. An interesting question to ask them would be how they believe a democratic society works and how they perceive the relationship between politicians and voters. The respondents of this study do not seem to be aware of the connection between voting and influence. Most respondents know that the politicians are elected but they do not talk about politicians as acting according to what garners them votes. An expected view would be that without a right to vote the respondents do not really have something to offer to the politicians who want to be elected. This is however not alluded to by any respondents of this study. Neither do they suggest mobilizing as a way to influence decision makers. It is possible that the respondents are used to powerful individuals being able to get what they want and circumvent regulations and politics; therefore they are more focused on individual contacts. It can be worth to keep in mind that all respondents have gone to school for at least 9 years and several have higher education, and they come also from cities in a relatively modern society. Immigrants without education and from rural areas far away from governmental involvement could likely perceive the Swedish politics as even more different.
The discussion above brings us to a limitation that can be found throughout the thesis. When using some very broad-stroke concepts, such as politics, there is no guarantee that the respondent and I mean the same thing. Another limitation is my own influence over the results. It is possible that my presence influenced the respondents to express gratitude and to not be critical. They may therefore have exaggerated how much influence they thought that they had in an attempt to show such gratitude.

_Fear of repression_ is a little studied part of political participation in stable democracies, in previous research. The group who perceive politics as a problem to a large degree connects politics to fear of negative effects for the individual. The influence of fear as a component in the decision to become politically involved or not is usually not taken into account and especially not in stable democratic states. I think that my result shows that for some groups of newly arrived individuals in Sweden it can be an influence on motivation to participate in line with trust or efficacy. After all, whatever resources and motivations a person has, it is not likely that you chose to participate if you connect participation with imprisonment and death. This result, that fear influences attitudes toward political participation could come from the fact that I look at newly arrived individuals and they have not let go of their past fear of politics as much as they might have had if they had been here longer. The temporary permissions might make this fear linger since they could mean that they do not want to express critique here and then be deported back to Syria. The significant number of Syrians present in Sweden could also have an impact on fear since subjects of conflict in Syria could be sensitive issues for Syrian immigrants in Sweden. A recommended future study is the aspect of fear and its impact on motivation to participate in politics, by aiming at answering questions like e.g. “Will fear lose importance with time”?

Another issue that I would like to see further research handle is the view that to not be a member in a political party might be a political statement and sign of independence. It is an understandable goal if they perceived that political participation was required from above in Syria and they want to be free from that now. Some of the respondents seemed to think that the safety in Sweden (especially if they would be citizens) was something that would allow them to care about other things than politics. It is understandable that they think they have to follow political decisions as residency permit holders, considering that the Swedish laws regarding asylum seekers and newly arrived immigrants have changed drastically since they arrived here.
A thought well worth considering is that the theories that have been used in this thesis are made to be applicable to stable societies. The newly arrived individuals have recently gone through extensive changes in their lives. Trust, confidence and resources could be drastically changed. The discrepancy that I found between efficacy and participation in some of the answers given by the respondents might depend on the dramatic changes in the respondents’ life which could make the theories inaccurate. Another thought is that resources often are measured in absolute numbers, like socioeconomic status or education, but I want to point out that the decrease and loss of status that the respondents feel seems to be worse than the judicial situation they’re in. This is clear for respondent 1 who talks about a drastic decrease in socioeconomic status, knowledge and social capital, for example when he says that the students he used to teach now are his classmates. Respondent 1 lost both his financial stability and his education and has to start over. As a middle-aged man with higher education the possibility to start over and replace what has been lost might seem hopeless. The socioeconomic situation could therefore feel worse for respondent 1 than for someone who started on a relatively low level. For future studies I would therefore recommend to contextualize the concept. Especially when attitudes are the point of interest, it seems logical that the relative changes are of importance.

In the introduction it was stated that this study is relevant for two perspectives: power and policy. For the power perspective’s sake, newly arrived immigrants are commonly used in the Swedish debate about immigration and integration. The public debate often includes talking about immigrants but rarely includes talking with them. The results of this study shows us that some of the respondents are interested in becoming politically engaged. If these findings represent all newly arrived individuals that could lead to them being spoken for by other groups to push political decisions. It is likely that many Syrians will stay in Sweden, and if we do not want a divided democracy where some haves the resources and motivations to engage while others are in a vicious circle of powerlessness, there should be arrangement to affect the democratic inclusion from an early stage. Perceptions of powerlessness lead to frustration which increases the risk of political and religious extremist movements and criminality (Wästberg 2016, 142). Because of these reasons immigrants’ perceptions of politics and themselves as political actors is a question that should be taken seriously by decision makers and the general populace alike.

The results of this study have implications that are worth taking into account when formulating policies for newly arrived immigrants. The SFI education could contain more
lessons about the Swedish political system and democracy. The fact that many political rights are attached to citizenship, for example, seem to not to be understood completely by some immigrants. This type of education might also decrease the fear factor since it makes it easier to do a realistic risk assessment for the individual. Additionally, the respondents mentioned that their daily life was required all of their energy, but by gaining knowledge about the political systems in society the day-to-day challenges of their life might be easier to handle.

Finally, the results show that despite harbouring high levels of political efficacy, trust and a friendly political climate for immigrants in Uppsala (compared to other Swedish cities) the respondents are still not interested in participating in Swedish politics. Previous research shows that immigrants in Sweden have a lower degree of political participation than the native population while this thesis confirms that finding and points out that it seems to be the case even among newly arrived individuals. Is the main obstacle for turning the perceived efficacy into actual political participation a feeling of exclusion from Swedish society? Is it an occupation with daily life, fear of repression or something else? This study has provided some starting points but further research is needed in order to disentangle the potential answers to this important question.
6. References


### 6.1 Electronic references


Appendix 1
Interview guide

Date:  Respondent:  Age:  Place:  Interpreter:

Introduction

*How long have you been in Sweden?*

*Why did you come to Sweden and not to another country? (Plan or coincidence?)*

If planed: *Why?*

*What do you think about your life in Sweden?*

*How do you live?*

*Are all you family with you? (If not, how does that feel?)*

*What kind of life did you live in Syria?*

*Did you work?*

*How much have you studied?*

*What kind of family life did you have?*

*Do you have a resident permit? What kind? (13 months, 3 years, permanent)?*

*If temporary: when will you need to apply for a new permit?*

*Did you get the resident permit before you travelled to Sweden (family reunion) or after you reached Sweden?*

If you got it after entering Sweden: *How long time did it take from the time you reached Sweden until you got your resident permit?*
Did you think it took too long time to get your permit? How did it feel to wait? Do you think it was easy or hard for you to get your resident permit?

What do you think about your future? Where do you think you will live in 10 years? What do you think your legal status there will be (residence permit/asylum seeker/citizen)?

Will you stay in Sweden or will you go back to Syria if there is peace?

Do you want to become a Swedish citizen? (In that case: why?)

Political trust

Do you think that people in general (in Sweden) could be trusted? (That they tell the truth, don’t try to take advantage of you)

Would you say that you trust the Swedish government?

Swedish police?

Swedish media?

The municipality?

The migration office?

Is there any organization or person in Sweden that you trust a lot?

Is there any organization or person in Sweden that you don’t trust at all?

Do you feel that you have been badly treated by any public officer?

Political efficacy

Is there anything in Uppsala that you would like to change? (if you were deciding, what would you change?)

How would you go about it if you wanted to make that change?

What knowledge/ability/persons do you have that would help you?

What things would be a challenge and obstacles?
What would a person that is a Swedish citizen do to make that change? Would there be a difference?

Is there anything in Sweden that you would like to change? (if you were deciding, what would you change?)

How would you go about it if you wanted to make that change?

What knowledge/ability/persons do you have that would help you?

What things would be a challenge and obstacles?

What would a person that is a Swedish citizen do to make that change? Would there be a difference?

Do you think that politicians would listen to you if you tried to affect them?

Do you think there are others that the politicians will listen more to? Who in that case?

**Political participation**

Would you say that you are interested in politics in Syria? Why/why not?

Would you say that you are interested in international politics? Why/why not?

Would you say that you are interested in politics in Sweden? Why/why not?

Would you be more interested in Swedish politics if you became a Swedish citizen?

Have you done anything to affect politics in Sweden?

You might have heard about the asylum seekers from Afghanistan who are protesting in Stockholm? They protest against the threat of being sent from Sweden, what do you think about that?

Would you take part in a protest like that?

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Do you think that you could get engaged in an organization in Sweden?

If no: Why not?

If yes, what kind of organization would you like to get engaged in? Why?

If you would know that you could stay in Sweden would that affect your answer?

Are you allowed to vote in Sweden?

If you were allowed to vote in Sweden next time there is an election do you think you would vote?

Would you consider joining a political party in Sweden?

If you knew that you could stay in Sweden would that affect your answer?

**Attitudes towards political important issues**

What are the most important political issue for you and your future? Why?

What do you think are the most important political issues in the world right now? Why? (if you were deciding, what would you change?)

If you had a child, what can you do for the child’s future to be as good as possible? Would it be different if you and the child where citizens? Why?

**Politics in Syria**

Were you politically interested when you lived in Syria?

Were others close to you interested in politics and society? Where questions like that discussed in your vicinity?
Were you politically active when you lived in Syria?

In what way were you active? (For example during the Arabic spring.)

Were you engaged in a party or organization in Syria?

**Knowledge about the political system** (to get a view of their political involvement)

Do you know the name of the prime minister? Do you know how he reached that position?

Do you know the political parties in the Swedish parliament? Do you know the difference between them?

Do you know how Uppsala is governed? How are things decided in the municipality?

Do you know how Sweden is governed? How are things decided in the country?

**Addition**

Is there anything you would like to add?

Would you like to ask something?