Politicians Under Threat

Gender Aspects of Violence against Political Representatives

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Abstract

This thesis investigates violence against politicians and its gender dimensions. Violence targeting elected representatives in the course of their work has received scant research attention, despite the central function of elected officials in representative democracy. Moreover, attacks on representatives of marginalized groups, such as women, carry symbolic meanings and can increase political alienation and distrust in the political system among women as a group. For these reasons, studying violence against politicians as specific actors, and how this violence may be gendered, is imperative.

The thesis’ first essay fills a significant research gap by providing the first large-scale empirical analysis of gender differences in exposure to violence among politicians in general and across the political hierarchy. It demonstrates that Swedish female politicians experience slightly more violence than male, and significantly more violence than male counterparts at powerful and visible positions. The second essay shifts the perspective from the experiences of politicians themselves, to the perpetrator side, and investigates constituents’ attitudes to contacting and harassing women and men politicians in the US and Sweden. The essay suggests that gendered stereotypes of women politicians and norms on gendered leadership styles is an important driver of women’s higher exposure to political harassment from constituents. Citizens prefer to contact women representatives over men when they are angry about a political decision and want to change it, which increases the likelihood of hostility directed at women representatives. The third essay systematically theorizes representational costs of violence against politicians, and investigates how Swedish women and men politicians’ representation is disrupted by violence. This essay shows that violence has subtle but wide-ranging gendered representational costs. It enforces masculine coded candidate ideals of toughness, makes women representatives decrease their visibility, and silences debates and individuals that challenge hegemonic male substantive dominance.

All in all, the thesis shows that violence against politicians amplifies women’s political marginalization, and disrupts representation at large and women’s representation in particular.

Keywords: Violence against Politicians, Gender and Politics, Political Violence, Political Representation, Comparative Politics

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“You’re supposed to be like a statue.” One of the things I learned by talking to politicians about violence in politics is how much pressure they are under to portray stability and stamina. Politicians are leaders, and as such they must not seem vulnerable. This makes it complicated for a politician to be a target of violence. A quote from one politician about how they are supposed to be “like statues” and not let it show that attacks affect them, stuck with me and inspired the cover of this book. I want to extend my sincerest thanks to all the politicians who enable research by letting themselves be interviewed and by answering surveys. Knowledge about how politics works, and the conditions under which politicians work, would be severely flawed without your invested time and engagement.

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I came to the master programme in political science not knowing what a variable was. I came to the PhD programme never having done a single quantitative analysis. Yet, I was highly interested in large-scale patterns and explanatory and causal questions. Olle Folke and Johanna Rickne personally trained me in econometric methods with the most generous mindset. You managed to convince me that I could do it, saw me through the process, and effectively opened up a world of possibilities. I use a mix of quantitative, experimental and qualitative methods in this thesis. Thanks to the guidance and confidence I got from Olle and Johanna, combined with several methods courses and guidance and supervision from Elin and Josefina, I have been able to follow the scientific ideal of letting the research question guide the choice of method.

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Sandra Håkansson
Solna, 12 June 2023
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Introduction

The storming of Capitol Hill on January 6 in 2021, when hundreds of people forced their way into the Capitol building and seemed intent on using physical violence against politicians, marked a deeply distressing disruption of democratic processes. Displays of physical violence aimed at politicians such as this one are rare events in peaceful, consolidated democracies. A far more common, and even normalized, example of violence against politicians in a generally peaceful context is when Swedish municipal politician Alexandra Anstrell received a threatening online message stating that someone ought to go to her house and shoot whoever opens the door (Nykvist 2019). Likewise, the multiple testimonies from women parliamentarians across countries about having gotten pornographic images sent to them or comments that they themselves would be suited to pornography (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016), indicate how common such events are. Even in contexts that are generally considered peaceful and without eruptions of largescale political violence, psychological forms of violence, such as harassment and threats, are endemic in politics.

By targeting political representatives, this violence has immediate implications for democracy. Modern democracy relies on representatives acting for the represented (Pitkin 1967), and hindering representatives in that process undermines the system of representative democracy. If representatives are compelled to weigh policy goals against personal risks, or if the pool of willing political candidates is restricted based on other factors than competence and suitability, representative democracy does not fully function. By definition, violence constitutes an illegitimate intervention to democracy; it is a factor that should not influence any aspect of political representation.

Reports of increasing violence against politicians are emerging from across the world, and various policy actors as well as scholars have raised concerns that political violence is a gendered phenomenon (Acobol 2012; Ballington 2018; Bardall 2011, 2018; Bjarneård 2018; Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016; Krook 2020; Krook and Sanin 2016a, 2016b; SAP International 2008). This knowledge base highlights that women in politics are targeted with violence for distinct reasons and in distinct ways. Whereas the literatures on political violence and election violence have primarily concerned violence aiming to affect political outcomes such as elections and policy decisions, there are numerous testimonies from women politicians about attacks on them with sexist
motives (Krook and Sanín 2016a; Sanín 2020). Furthermore, in contrast to the focus on political assassinations and visible physical violence in much political violence literature, feminist activists and scholars draw attention to multiple forms of physical and psychological harms inflicted on women in politics (Bardall 2011, 2013; Krook and Sanín 2016b). The problem of gender-based violence against politicians is emerging on the policy agenda, and narratives from women from different parts of the world contain similar accounts. For example, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) has collected testimonies about gendered threats, harassment, and sexual violence against female parliamentarians from five world regions. Studying gender aspects of violence against politicians is pertinent since gender is a defining feature of political representation, and political gender inequality marks a key representation deficit yet to be overcome (Celis and Childs 2020).

Politics is, historically and presently, a male dominated affair (Bjarnegård 2013). Throughout the world, male bodies overwhelmingly inhabit political institutions (Hughes and Paxton 2018), men lead more than 90% of the world’s countries as heads of government (Paxton, Hughes, and Barnes 2021), policy created in political institutions tend to benefit men’s interests (Franceschet 2010; Homola 2019; Mackay 2014; Reher 2018), and men citizens participate more actively in politics (Kittilson 2016). Women are certainly as impacted by politics as men, and have a legitimate claim to equal political representation (Young 2000). The question of how to achieve gender equal political representation has occupied political scientists for decades. The resulting gender and politics scholarship outlines a multi-faceted problem where male norms continue to permeate politics long after formal gender equality stipulations (Krook and Mackay 2011).

Much scholarship on gender and politics has investigated how to increase women’s presence in political institutions (e.g. Krook 2009; Norris and Lovenduski 1995), followed by studies on the difference women make as holders of political power (e.g. Childs 2002; Reingold 1992; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007). Women’s remarkable inroads to politics over the last couple of decades have also brought attention to gender inequalities in the conditions facing politicians. Researchers have identified myriad marginalization and discrimination tactics deployed against women in politics that effectively restrict their political influence and preserve male dominance in politics (Lovenduski 2014). The phenomenon of gender-based political violence possibly constitutes an extreme expression of bias against women in politics.

This thesis adds to the rapidly evolving research field on gender aspects of violence in politics by investigating how violence against politicians is gendered. Rather than focusing on how to achieve gender equality in access to decision-making bodies or policy influence, this thesis hence draws attention to political gender inequality in the conditions under which politicians work.

A relatively new phenomenon on the research agenda, little has been known about violence against politicians until the last few years, let alone its
gender dimensions. Political violence research has largely been devoted to studying violence around elections and traditionally not distinguished between violence targeting voters, candidates, activists or other actors (Fjelde and Höglund 2016). Violence targeting elected representatives in the course of their work has received scant research attention, despite its several layers of inherent troublesome implications (see also Bjarnegård 2018; Norris 2013). First, violence against any individual violates their personal integrity. Second, all violence that disrupt democratic processes violate the democratic system and all stakeholders of a well-functioning democracy. Third, attacks on elected representatives imply a violation of the rights of the people who elected them. Moreover, attacks on representatives of politically and socially marginalized groups carry symbolic meanings and can depress trust in the political system and hamper political inclusion among members of the marginalized group (see Krook 2020). Against the backdrop of the central position that politicians occupy in representative democracy, studying violence against politicians as specific actors is imperative.

At the core of democratic implications of violence against politicians is the question of whether and how this violence skews political representation. Women politicians are sometimes targeted with violence for misogynist motives of limiting their political influence as women (Krook and Sanín 2016a). Even in contexts where violence against politicians seems to be a routinized part of politics, women are targeted in specific, gendered ways compared to men (Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022). For instance, harassment and threats of a sexual nature is far more common against women in politics than men, possibly leading to different consequences than the violence men politicians face. Coupled with the global political exclusion of women, the initial indications of gender differences in political violence call for studies on gender dimensions in violence against politicians.

A Growing Research Agenda
Several developments have stimulated the research agenda on gender-based political violence. Women’s rapid gains in descriptive representation worldwide since the 1990s, to a large extent due to electoral gender quotas (Krook and Zetterberg 2014; Paxton, Hughes, and Barnes 2021), has drawn scholarly attention to resistance and backlash against women’s political representation (Josefsson 2020; Krook 2016; Mansbridge and Shames 2008; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010). Ranging from the side-lining of women to less important positions in parliament (Heath, Schwindt-Bayer, and Taylor-Robinson 2005) to political institutions’ tolerance for sexual harassment of women MPs (Collier and Raney 2018), this scholarship demonstrates that politics continues to be unequal despite observable progress in terms of descriptive gender diversity. A second important development is the increased importance of digital arenas, and among them particularly social media, for political communication (Hermans and Vergeer 2013; Larsson and Kalsnes 2014). Social media such as
Facebook and Twitter have become key arenas for political debates and interactions between politicians and citizens (Larsson 2016; Larsson and Kalsnes 2014; Nulty et al. 2016). This has brought increased concerns that such tools are particularly toxic for women in political debates (Amnesty International 2018; Barak 2005; Bardall 2013).

An increasing number of reports have emerged from activist and policy communities about violence targeting women in the course of their political participation (Acobol 2012; Ballington 2018; Bardall 2011; Centre for Social Research and UN Women 2014; Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016; NDI 2016, 2019; OHCHR 2016; SAP International 2008). In her genealogy of the concept of violence against women in politics, Krook (2020) describes how several actors across the Global South simultaneously started drawing attention to violence against women in politics, or electoral gender-based violence, around the turn of the century. The political scientists that started researching the topic did so in response to calls from feminist and democracy activists.

The earliest research on the topic was devoted to theorizing and conceptualizing the issue of violence against (women) politicians that is gendered. The first essay of this thesis is one of the very first large-scale empirical investigations of the phenomenon. Since its publication, there have been more studies on the topic, but little research has gone beyond studying its manifestations. To that end, the thesis’ second and third essays bring the research field forward by studying explanations for, and consequences of, gendered violence against politicians.

**Aims and Research Questions**

The thesis spans the themes of violence, gender, and political representation, with the overarching aim to investigate how violence against politicians is gendered. While intersectional identities shape gender relations and the configuration of gendered privilege in politics, the thesis’ primary focus is on understanding violence against politicians in relation to the broad categories of women and men. I compare and contrast women’s and men’s experiences of violence in politics as a way to investigate how violence against politicians may affect political gender inequality. Three specific research questions related to the thesis’ overarching question are investigated in three respective essays. The first essay investigates gender patterns in how much violence politicians experience. It asks if, and if so under what conditions, women experience more violence as politicians than men. The second essay targets explanations for why violence against politicians is gendered in the sense that women experience more violence than men. It is guided by the research question of what drives women’s higher exposure to political hostility from constituents. The last essay focuses on the consequences of violence against politicians. It investigates gendered costs to political representation and asks how such costs manifest. The three essays together hence investigate three related components of how violence against politicians is gendered: how violence...
targets women and men representatives differently, explanations for why women are targeted more than men, and which gendered consequences this violence has for political representation.

I study these questions in Sweden, which has among the highest proportion of women in politics worldwide. The fact that women have been present in Swedish politics in significant numbers for a comparatively long time, furthermore, entails that gender dimensions identified in the thesis are not conflated with aspects of political life that are to do with a political newcomer status. Women also hold a significant share of political leadership positions. Women’s comparatively high representation historically and presently makes Sweden a least likely case for gender inequalities in politics. Inequalities found in this case are plausibly not exaggerated compared to other cases, which implies that the research questions are investigated in a setting from which findings can arguably be generalized broadly.

Summary of Main Findings and Contributions
To briefly summarize the thesis’ main results, I find that violence against politicians is markedly gendered. Although I find various similarities between women’s and men’s experiences of violence as politicians, this violence on the whole increases political gender inequality. Using a large survey data set on Swedish municipal politicians, Essay I demonstrates that women experience more violence than men as politicians, and particularly at higher levels of power. While women and men are largely targeted by the same types of perpetrators (ordinary citizens), mainly on social media, and overwhelmingly when they occupy leadership positions and are visible in media, power and visibility entails significantly higher risks for women than men. Violence against Swedish politicians hence poses a threat to democracy since it overwhelmingly constitutes an obstacle to (powerful and visible) women politicians in their roles as representatives. Both of the subsequent essays build on the findings from the first. Essay II investigates explanations for women politicians’ higher exposure to political harassment and shifts the perspective from the experiences of politicians themselves, to the perpetrator side. A survey experiment, launched in the US and Sweden, investigates how gendered attitudes to women politicians can drive citizens’ hostility against them. I find that hostility is assessed as equally unacceptable in constituents’ communication to women and men representatives, but constituents in both countries prefer to direct their complaints to women over men. Increasing the number of complaints entails a higher risk of hostile complaints. The essay hence suggests that gendered preferences for contacts and complaints directed at policymakers constitute an important driver of constituents’ hostility against women politicians. Knowing that women experience more violence as politicians than men in Sweden, Essay III turns back to politicians’ experiences and investigates gendered costs of violence against politicians for political representation. The essay builds on a mix of interviews and surveys with Swedish
politicians. I find that violence obstructs democratic representation by silencing certain topics in political debates, compelling representatives to devote their time and energy to handling violence rather than their core duties, and restricting both women’s and men’s substantive representation of women’s rights and feminism. Specifically damaging to women’s representation, violence foments male coded characteristics as ideal for candidates, silences women more than men in debates, and coerces women politicians to decrease their public visibility. As a result, the essay concludes that violence against politicians affects women and men in Swedish politics similarly in some respects, but is particularly damaging to women’s descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation.

Taken together, the findings highlight that violence against politicians is gendered in several ways. Much research on the gendered nature of violence in politics has been devoted to violence against political women motivated by a resentment of women’s political participation (Krook and Sanín 2020). I argue that it is important to study gender implications of political violence in a broader sense. In line with Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo (2020), I differentiate between different ways that political violence can be gendered, and argue that further nuances and distinctions than outlined in previous literature are needed. I present a theoretical framework in this introductory chapter on how violence against politicians can be gendered. The framework consists of seven attributes sorted into three overarching dimensions. The first dimension, *causes*, captures potential gender aspects in the explicit and implicit drivers of violence against politicians. The second dimension, *exposure*, captures whether the frequency, form and character of violence against politicians is gendered. The third dimension, *consequences*, captures whether the individual and social consequences of violence against politicians is gendered. Accounting for this range of possible gender aspects of violence against politicians gives a more thorough understanding for in what ways political violence is (and in what ways it is not) a gendered phenomenon. The essays touch upon all three dimensions, and several of their attributes. In short, the thesis’ empirical essays demonstrate that in the Swedish case, gendered implicit drivers operate to put women at specific risk of violence in politics (EI and EII); violence exposure has a gendered frequency, but mainly under certain circumstances, and there are no significant gender differences in the forms of violence used against women and men politicians (EI); violence against politicians has social consequences for descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation and costs in all three areas are particularly harmful to women’s representation (EIII). The introductory chapter elaborates on the usefulness of precision in specifying in what way(s) violence against politicians is and is not gendered.

The findings underscore the importance of studying the conditions for political representation in order to analyse and understand political inequality. The focus in most gender and politics research on women’s presence in and
influence on politics could lead us to take equal outcomes in terms of women and men’s election rates and policy influence as evidence of politics having become gender equal. For instance, some scholars argue that women and men fair equally well in politics (Brooks 2013) based on the fact that voters in the 21st century are no less likely to vote for women candidates than men (A. King and Leigh 2010; D. C. King and Matland 2003; Lawless and Pearson 2008; Sanbonmatsu 2006; Smith and Fox 2001). However, a closer scrutiny reveals that in order to be viewed as competent and viable candidates, women have to have higher qualifications and perform better than men counterparts (Anzia and Berry 2011; Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2019; Pearson and McGhee 2013). Similarly, even though women sometimes manage to significantly shape policy (Anzia and Berry 2011; Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013), they have to overcome myriad obstacles in order to do so: obstacles that do not apply to their male counterparts (Franceschet 2015; Hawkesworth 2003). Two important conclusions can be drawn. Different standards apply to women and men in politics, and these are not always directly observable in the share of women and men elected to political office or in their policy success.

A central tenet of the argument presented in this thesis is hence that equal performance cannot be taken as an unbiased indicator of equality. Attention is also needed to the processes underpinning outcomes in terms of women’s presence and performance in politics. This thesis sheds light on the gendered role of violence in shaping the conditions for political representation. If women legislators manage to get elected at equal rates as men, put forward as many bills as men, write as many opinion pieces, and so on, but do so at a much higher personal cost – this is not evidence of inequalities having been eradicated but rather of the contrary. Women may adapt to and compensate for an unfair situation in politics and muster the perseverance required on their part to obtain gender equal outcomes despite unequal conditions. Democratic ideals of equal rights and opportunities to participate in shaping political decisions remain unmet if women have to work harder and endure worse conditions in order to obtain similar political outcomes as men.

The introduction essay proceeds as follows. In the next section, I discuss two central concepts for the thesis; violence, and political violence. I then present the theoretical framework on how violence against politicians can be gendered. This is followed by a discussion on how this thesis understands and studies gender, including intersectionality. After that, I set the stage for the thesis by describing what is known about gender dimensions of violence against politicians from previous research and identifying main research gaps that the thesis addresses. I then specify theoretical expectations in relation to each essay’s research question and the dimensions of the theoretical framework that the thesis investigates based on the broader theories that the thesis builds on and relates to. Next, I present the context of Swedish politics, followed by a discussion of methods and data. I proceed to present the three essays that make up the bulk of the thesis. Last, I outline the synthesized
contributions of the thesis, its policy implications, and reflections for the future research agenda on gendered violence against politicians.

Concepts: Violence and Political Violence

The main question of the thesis relates to how political violence is gendered. Before discussing that question, two other core concepts of the thesis deserve some elaboration. Which actions qualify as violence, and what makes them political?

*Violence* is a complex and contested concept. Public opinion polls investigating perceptions about what violence *is* find that these perceptions span a wide range of behaviors that may or may not result in physical or psychological injury (Imbusch 2003). The first question for definitions of violence is often whether it should be taken to exclusively refer to the use of physical force. In this respect, I argue that violence should be understood as encompassing physical as well as psychological dimensions. Feminist research emphasises that gender-based violence comes in various related forms. Conceptualizing myriad types of abuse as part of the same continuum clarifies how these are interlinked in practice (Kelly 1987; Stark 2009). Scholars on violence against women in politics similarly emphasise that women politicians often are attacked in multiple ways, including e.g. threats, harassment, property destruction as well as physical violence, with the shared purpose of forcing women out of politics (Sanín 2018a). Psychological and physical violence are thus not experienced as disconnected events, but as part of the same phenomenon. Furthermore, victims/survivors of violence often describe psychological violence as equally or more harmful than physical equivalents (for an overview, see e.g. DeKeseredy 2000). Research on e.g. workplace violence, intimate-partner violence, and child abuse has established that physical and psychological violence lead to similar harms among its targets (Budd, Arvey, and Lawless 1996; Coker et al. 2000; Dye 2020; Strathearn et al. 2020). Experiencing either form of violence is associated with psychological harms such as depression and anxiety, as well as physical harms such as chronic pain and stomach ulcers. This motivates studying physical and psychological violence as part of the same phenomenon. Across academic disciplines, choosing a broad theoretical definition of violence, rather than restricting it to physical violence, is more common than the opposite (Haan 2008; Imbusch 2003). This is also the case when it comes to research on political violence. While some often-used data sources may be limited to e.g. political assassinations, few political violence researchers would argue for a theoretical definition that excludes non-physical or non-lethal acts. Electoral violence is the most commonly studied form of violence against political actors. Researchers typically define electoral violence as actions or threats of action involving physical harm or psychological intimidation, with the intention of delaying or
influencing the electoral process or outcomes (Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund 2020; Fischer 2002; Harish and Toha 2019; Opitz, Fjelde, and Höglund 2013). Operationalizations often include harassing, assault, and intimidation of political actors; rioting; destruction of property; and political assassination (Höglund 2009).

I apply the widely used definition of violence from the World Health Organization (Krug et al. 2002), which extends to actions that are (1) intentional and (2) have a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. The focus on intentional acts should not be conflated with motives behind violence (see Hamby 2017). While motives cannot always be established, the conceptualization of violence in this thesis is limited to actions that are taken deliberately or knowingly. For example, the motive behind targeting a politician with online abuse can be many different things (e.g. gaining credibility among one’s peers, making oneself feel powerful, affecting public opinion). However, regardless of what the motive may be, writing an abusive online message is done knowing that it has the potential to inflict harm on the target. While we may not know the motive behind such an act, we know that it was intentional and did not happen by accident.

By following this definition, I exclude actions whose consequences may be highly damaging – or even lethal – for those afflicted, but that were taken inadvertently or due to neglect. The focus on intentionality distinguishes the operating definition of violence in this thesis from definitions that instead focus on effects (see Hearn 1998). Galtung’s (1969, 1990) theory on structural and cultural violence can represent the opposite view. He focuses instead solely on the results for the afflicted, regardless of intentions of the agent, and includes for example people dying of treatable diseases in his conceptualisation of violence. Such a definition would be ill-suited to the purposes of this thesis. In particular, investigating what drives violence against women politicians relative to men suggests a confined study of predictors of this specific type of phenomenon. There are other tactics that citizens, influential politicians, or other actors can use in order to deter women’s political participation or marginalize elected women representatives (e.g. reserving campaign donations for male candidates, questioning women’s political competence, restricting elected women’s participation in floor debates, or placing women on unwinnable ballot positions). While such practices can cause harm to politicians’ careers and may affect politicians’ emotional wellbeing negatively, they do not necessarily emanate from perpetrators’ intentions to cause harm to that politician. In order to understand when perpetrators turn to violence rather than other means, a conceptualization where violence is intentional is most useful. Likewise, a good understanding for the consequences of violence can be obtained by focusing on incidents where the perpetrator intended to cause harm to the politician. Delimiting the study of violence to intentional acts makes it possible to compare the consequences of violence to the
consequences of other harmful tactics used against politicians. For example, research can compare the gendered consequences of violence to those of discrimination in politics. Keeping these separate can provide a more refined understanding for which tactics are most detrimental to political gender equality.

Furthermore, I follow WHO as well as research on violence against women in politics/gendered political violence (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020; Krook and Sanín 2016a) and distinguish between physical and psychological violence. When relevant, I make further distinctions between e.g. various forms of psychological violence, but these two over-arching categories are useful in order to understand what type of violence politicians experience. *Physical violence* denotes all forms of physical attacks on politicians’ bodies and property damage. *Psychological violence* denotes actions aimed at harming the target’s mental state or emotional well-being (Krook and Sanín 2016a), such as threats, denigration and harassment. Such a distinction is helpful for broadly categorizing incidents of violence, although it is not always clear-cut where to draw the line between physical and psychological violence. Physical actions can cause psychological harms, such as anxiety, and psychological actions can have physical implications, such as infringements on freedom of movement. In defining the form of violence waged on politicians, I differentiate actions where the aggressor primarily uses physical resources from those where they primarily use psychological resources. Differentiating between different forms of violence in this way can for example illuminate how perpetrators’ “choice” of how to attack a politician relates to social gender norms. Norms on masculinity and femininity can guide perpetrators into undercutting men’s manliness by subjecting male targets to physical assault, and into devaluing feminine targets by subjecting them to psychological violence such as gender-denigrating slurs (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020).

Krook and Sanín (2016a) emphasise that violence against women in politics (VAWIP) come in myriad forms, and that a comprehensive violence conceptualization is necessary in order to understand women’s experiences of violence in politics. Influenced by research on gender-based violence, they define four forms of VAWIP: physical, psychological, economic, and symbolic. In a later publication, they distinguish between physical, psychological, sexual, economic and semiotic violence and harassment (Krook and Sanín 2020). Inspired by the first typology, I differentiate between bodily violence, violence with economic implications, threats, harassment, and symbolic violence in Essay I.1 Sexual violence is emphasised in some laws and frameworks on gender-

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1 My focus on intentional acts of violence with a high likelihood of resulting in harm to the target’s physical or psychological health entails that I do not apply Krook and Sanín’s typology entirely. For example, their conceptualization of economic harassment encompasses being denied office space. While systematically denying women – but not men – office space constitutes a severe form of discrimination, such an act is not compatible with the operating definition used in this thesis where violence is understood as intentionally causing harm to the target. Actions such as not providing women politicians with office space likely stems from discriminatory
based violence as a distinct category of violence. In line with Krook and Sanín (2016a), I do not consider sexual violence a distinct form of violence but rather a characteristic of violence; i.e. physical violence, threats, and harassment can be of a sexual character (see also Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022).

Stricter definitions of violence, such as political assassinations, public, physical violence or public online abuse on social media (examples of studies using more stringent definitions would e.g. be Daniele 2019; Daxecker 2012; Kuperberg 2021), offer less room for interpretation which enhances measurement reliability and stringency. Compared to such definitions, this thesis uses a more heterogenous conceptualization of violence. A stricter definition would, on the other hand, risk being further removed from theoretical understandings of violence. I opt for a comparatively broad definition of violence in this thesis in order to investigate as full a range as possible of incidents encompassed by the concept of violence.

Moreover, I broadly define violence against politicians as political if it targets them because of their roles as politicians. This implies that violence does not have to take place in a political space such as within parliament or at a political rally in order to be considered political. Testimonies of intimidation of women in the private sphere, often by family members who oppose their political activities, emerge from various contexts (Acobol 2012; Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022; Krook and Sanín 2016a). The online arena is a prominent site of psychological violence against politicians, which renders distinctions between public and private less meaningful (Bardall 2013; Eriksson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2021). Furthermore, rather than limiting the definition to acts with a political motive (c.f. Fischer’s (2002) definition of election violence described above and the definition by Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo (2020)), I argue that all violence that targets politicians because they are politicians should be considered political. I exclude criminal violence that targets politicians by chance, but include e.g. instances of violence where the motive is a desire to mock a public figure that happens to be a politician, or to affect a political outcome. In both cases, it is the target’s role as a politician that puts them at risk of violence. All violent acts can interrupt politicians’ work and affect their political representation (as demonstrated in Essay III), regardless of the motive behind the act. Attacking politicians because they are politicians hence in itself makes the attack political.

thinking and from not seeing women as legitimate politicians to the same extent as men, but are not obviously purposefully designed to cause physical or psychological harm to the target. In keeping with the emphasis on intentional acts, the acts with economic implications encompassed by this thesis’ conceptualization primarily relate to property damage. Similarly, Krook and Sanín’s conceptualization of symbolic or semiotic violence extends to the refusal to use feminized language to speak of women political leaders, e.g. presidente instead of presidenta to refer to Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff. Such actions would also fall outside the conceptualization of violence as acts intended to cause harm to the target. This thesis’ conceptualization of symbolic violence instead mainly relates to character assassination.
Theoretical Framework: In What Ways can Violence against Politicians be Gendered?

A research field on gender aspects of political violence has gradually taken shape. Krook and Sanín (Krook 2017, 2020; Krook and Sanín 2016a, 2016b, 2020; Sanín 2018a, 2020) have made crucial contributions by naming the problem of violence against women in politics, conceptualizing women’s gendered experiences of political violence, and categorizing the forms of violence waged on political women. Notably, they argue for an expanded set of violence forms to be included in the concept of VAWIP, compared to the traditional focus on physical violence in empirical political violence research. In order to build on this knowledge and expand understanding for how the violence that politicians experience can be gendered, putting women’s experiences in relation and contrast to men’s is a useful strategy. I argue in this thesis that the gendered nature of violence against politicians becomes clearer by including both women’s and men’s perspectives. Theorizing and empirically investigating how women’s and men’s experiences of violence in politics overlap as well as how they do not can illuminate how gender operates to shape violence against politicians in various ways.

Different actors use different concepts and definitions to denote violence in politics that is gendered. Researchers and practitioners use the concept of violence against women in elections or violence against women in politics (VAWIP) to centre women’s experiences of violence related to their political activities. This research explicitly focuses on women. Research stemming from this perspective has highlighted how perpetrators use gendered derogatory comments to denigrate women politicians, aiming to foment politics as a male sphere where women are unwelcome (Biroli 2018; Krook 2020; Krook and Sanín 2016a, 2016b, 2020; Sanín 2020). Another line of research instead puts women’s experiences of violence in relation to men’s, as a way to integrate gender into the study of political violence. By including both women and men (as potential victims as well as perpetrators), this research aims to shed light on gender differences and similarities in political violence (Bardall 2017, 2018; Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020; Bjarnegård 2018; Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022; Piscopo 2016). The concept of gender-based or gendered political violence (GPV) is more often used in research from this perspective.

As research on the topic has progressed, VAWIP has come to specifically refer to gender-motivated violence. Krook and Sanín (2020) compare violence against women in politics to a hate crime. VAWIP in their conceptualization denotes actions aimed at women as women that aims to deter women’s political participation. Hence, their conceptualization excludes instances of violence when women are targeted for their political views (Krook 2020; Krook and Sanín 2020). Krook (2020, 91–97) uses Anne Phillips’ (1995) distinction between the “politics of ideas” and the “politics of presence” to differentiate
between VAWIP and other violence in politics. In Krook’s conceptualization, “violence in politics” relates to violence that targets politicians because of the “politics of ideas”, such as competition over political views (Krook 2020, 64) and punishing or excluding politicians on the basis of their political opinions (Krook 2020, 93). Sanín conceptualizes attacks on politicians promoting feminist agendas as backlash rather than VAWIP, as long as attacks focus on the policy positions as such rather than the women promoting them (Sanín 2020). VAWIP instead relates to violence that targets women politicians because of their descriptive group membership, i.e. violence that targets women politicians because of the “politics of presence” (Krook 2020, 93). VAWIP seeks to exclude women, as women, from politics (Krook 2020, 65, 2020, 93) regardless of what they represent substantively (Sanín 2020). Both of these forms of violence may take on gendered expressions, such as sexual violence. Krook differentiates between them not based on how violence is carried out, but by what motivates it (Krook 2020, 65).

Gender-motivated violence against women in politics is intrinsically important because of the threat it poses to democratic equality. Nevertheless, I argue for the importance of a theoretical framework that enables analyses of how violence against politicians can be gendered in several different ways. There is no doubt about the urgency of research attention to violence aiming to dissuade women from participating in politics. In addition, there are other instances of violence against politicians where a gender perspective is crucial in order to understand when, why, how, and with what effect political violence occurs.

A few existing studies propose frameworks for analysing how political violence may be gendered in more ways than in motive. Notably, Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo (2020) present a framework for analysing political violence as gendered in three different ways: motive, forms, and impact. In addition to highlighting how political violence can exclude women from politics, they emphasise that non-hegemonic men and LGBTQ+ individuals also may be targeted for gendered reasons, in gendered ways, and with gendered effects. A gendered motive in their framework refers to violent acts whose purpose is to maintain political power in the hands of hegemonic men (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020, 923). In other words, it is very similar to conceptualizations of VAWIP as violence aimed at the politics of presence and maintaining male political dominance. By gendered forms of political violence, they mean violence that is carried out “by exploiting the gendered roles and norms at work in each context” (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020, 923), such as sexual assault. Just as Krook and Sanín (2016a) do, Bardall et al. hence underline the importance of analysing not only the number of attacks but also the forms that attacks take in order to understand how political violence may be gendered. Political violence with a gendered impact refers to how targets and the surrounding community understand and respond to violence in gendered ways (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020, 926). A key
gendered impact that they emphasise is that political violence can make women retreat from politics more than men, thus reinforcing women’s systematic exclusion from politics (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020, 923). Similarly, a central notion in work by Krook and Sanín (2016a, 2020) is that VAWIP aims to, and sometimes obtains the result of, deterring women’s political participation. Central to their argument is the idea that political violence sometimes takes on gendered forms, or has a gendered impact, even if the violence did not have a gendered motive (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020). Perpetrators may use gendered forms of violence for strategic reasons motivated by a desire to affect a political outcome such as an election result, and women may withdraw from politics as a result of political violence regardless of whether this is what perpetrators intended to achieve.

Both VAWIP and GPV literature hence bring different aspects of interrelations between political violence and gender to the fore. While they have slightly different starting points, they make similar predictions in terms of where gender might be crucial for understanding violence against political actors. Contributing to scholarship aiming to understand in what ways gender can play into violence against politicians, I argue that further distinctions than those outlined in previous research are necessary. I present a framework of attributes which I consider to be crucial for gaining a thorough and precise understanding for whether and how violence against politicians is gendered. I divide these seven attributes into three dimensions: the causes of, exposure to, and consequences of violence (see Table 1).

**Gendered Causes**

The first feature of violence against politicians that may make it gendered concerns why violence occurs; whether the violence has gendered causes. As already explained, in previous research, gendered causes mainly relates to motives and is referred to as gender-motivated political violence or violence motivated by gender bias (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020; Krook and Sanín 2020). I refer to this as *explicit drivers*. A typical explicit driver is misogynist resistance to women’s political participation. In some instances, perpetrators have explicitly stated that they do not think women belong in politics as a motivation for their attacks on women politicians (see e.g. Krook and Sanín 2016a). Moreover, the motive of resisting feminist policy is another misogynist explicitly gendered driver of violence against politicians (Biroli 2018). I argue in this thesis that other examples of gendered causes of violence against politicians can relate to gender norms, denoted *implicit drivers*. Perpetrators may not be consciously misogynist or harbour hatred of women, yet they can be motivated to direct violent attacks to women politicians based on norms for how women should act as politicians and leaders. Perpetrators may target women politicians with violence because they evaluate women negatively according to a double standard (Krook and Sanín 2020). Violence can function as a sanction for gender role violations, or be seen as a more
legitimate way to treat (certain) women than men (Eagly and Karau 2002; Glick and Raberg 2018; Manne 2017). In such instances, perpetrators may not act to exclude women from politics, but based on more subtle negative reactions to women not conforming to their prescribed gender role. Hostile attitudes and sabotage tactics particularly target women who challenge male dominance in power spheres such as politics; by their mere presence in leadership or by advancing gender equality substantively (Okimoto and Brescoll 2010; Rudman et al. 2012; Sanbonmatsu 2008; Sanín 2020).

There are two main methods for identifying gendered causes of violence against politicians. Explicit drivers such as misogynist motives can be discerned through close scrutiny of individual incidents of violence, which can e.g. reveal that the perpetrator expressed or alluded to hatred of women (Krook and Sanín 2020). Similarly, such analyses can reveal hatred of a gender minority or resistance of policy which infringes on hegemonic men’s political dominance. Analyses of patterns of attacks can also demonstrate the presence of gendered drivers, and be particularly useful for establishing implicit drivers. Such analyses can e.g. reveal an exclusive or excessive targeting of women compared to similarly situated men (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020). If the question of whether a hegemonic male politician in the same position and under the same circumstances would have been targeted is “No”, the act of violence can be categorized as having a gendered cause (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020).2

Gendered Exposure

A second set of attributes that can be gendered relate to violence exposure: who is targeted and how? The frequency can be gendered, e.g. by violence disproportionately targeting women – even if gender is not an explicit or implicit motive behind the act (Bardall 2018; Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2021). Gendered drivers are often what cause a gender pattern in violence exposure. For example, Bolivian women municipal councillors were disproportionately attacked after the country passed its parity law on gender balance which perpetrators considered to be a clash with traditional beliefs regarding women’s proper place in society (Sanín 2018b). Women can also be over-represented as targets of violence not because perpetrators wish to delimit women’s political influence as women, but because of perpetrators’ (non-gendered) policy aims. Perpetrators may chose women targets because they expect women to be more prone to back down in response to pressure (Bjarnegård 2018). Furthermore, in theory, women can be more frequent targets of violence than men because of how they are positioned in politics. Violence against politicians has been found to vary across e.g. parties, political system design, population size, and policy areas (James et al. 2016; Kuperberg 2023; Thomas et al. 2019). If women are over-represented at positions that

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2 Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo (2020) refer to this as “gendered motive”.

entail increased risks, they will experience more political violence even if perpetrators are not motivated by gender (see e.g. Collignon and Rüdig 2021; Herrick and Thomas 2022). This will nevertheless entail that violence against politicians is gendered in its frequency, and policy actors need to take women’s and men’s differential vulnerabilities into account.

Unlike Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo (2020), I hence do not conceive of frequency solely in terms of an indicator of gendered motives. Distinguishing between motive and frequency makes it possible to recognize an excessive targeting of women politicians as a gendered problem even in cases when it is not possible to determine whether similarly situated hegemonic men would have been similarly attacked. Women and men politicians are not always comparable in terms of e.g. which party they represent, their newcomer status, age, policy stances, or geographical distribution. It is possible that women could be attacked more than men in a certain political context because they are newcomers, challenge incumbents, and substantively represent other interests than the dominant view. Young newcomer men advocating similar agendas might in theory have been just as attacked – had they been present to the same degree in politics. Even so, a higher frequency of attacks on women politicians than men under such circumstances ought to be understood as a barrier to women’s political representation. For example, most women candidates in the UK run for the left and are harassed by right-wing supporters (Collignon and Rüdig 2021). This makes it difficult to determine whether women’s higher violence exposure is related to their gender or their party. Notwithstanding, violence obstructs women’s representation by affecting women candidates disproportionately. Hence, I argue that a gendered frequency of violence against politicians deserves attention in its own right and not just as a means to establish the presence of gendered motives or drivers.

Another set of potentially gendered features of politicians’ violence exposure relate to how violence is carried out. Even if women and men are attacked at similar rates, gendered scripts may influence in what way a target is attacked. Different types of resources can be considered differentially useful against women and men, and affect how they are attacked (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020). Categorizations of violent incidents is common in political violence research, where the type of violence used could e.g. be categorized as abduction, beating, car set on fire, threatening letter or assassination (see e.g. ACLED 2017; Daniele and Dipoppa 2017; Höglund 2009). Incidents are typically coded by political violence observers/election monitoring missions or based on media reports. Survey based research on violence against politicians often follows this approach and documents the forms of violence experienced by politicians. As a result, gender patterns in the forms of violence experienced by women and men respectively can be assessed (for examples, see Bardall 2011, 2018; Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022; Herrick et al. 2019; Thomas et al. 2019).
The form of violence often denotes distinctions between e.g. physical and psychological violence, or distinctions between libel and threats. The same form of violence, e.g. online abuse, can furthermore have a different character depending on the target’s gender (Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2021). Different tropes and degrees of denigration can be used against women and men. Notably, gendered morality standards make accusations of sexual promiscuity more damaging (and perhaps effective) against women than men (Bardall 2013; Bjarnegård 2021; Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022). Surveys covering a wide range of incident types, i.e. a comprehensive range of violence forms, often lack information about the character of violence. For example, the fact that women and men candidates largely experience the same forms of violence in Sri Lanka does not account for to what extent the degrading talk has a gendered content and differs in character depending on the gender of the target (Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022). Focusing specifically on online attacks, Erikson, Håkansson and Josefsson (2021) found substantial discrepancies in the character of attacks on women and men politicians.

One highly useful method for analysing the three attributes relating to whether politicians’ exposure to violence is gendered is comparisons of (groups of) women’s and men’s experiences. A gendered frequency of attacks, by definition, can only be established at the group level by aggregating and comparing the frequency of violence exposure among women and men respectively. The same applies to intersectional analyses, where comparisons in the frequency of violence across intersectional groups of politicians can be compared. Similarly, comparisons of forms of violence used against different groups of politicians can illuminate gendered or other intersectional patterns. Quantitative data is useful for analysing both frequency and forms. Qualitative data is arguably most apt to capturing gender elements in the character of violence. Comparisons of attacks on women and men, or attacks on politicians across intersectional identities, can be useful for bringing the gendered characteristics of attacks to the fore. In addition, without comparing women’s exposure to men’s, analyses of how gender identities are made salient in attacks on women can serve to generate knowledge on perpetrators’ repertoires of gendered attacks.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Causes</td>
<td>(1) Explicit driver</td>
<td>(2) Implicit driver</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The perpetrator’s use of violence is explicitly influenced by misogynist motives</td>
<td>The perpetrator’s use of violence is implicitly influenced by gender norms</td>
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<td>Exposure</td>
<td>(3) Frequency</td>
<td>(4) Forms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Violence disproportionately targets women or other gender minorities relative to hegemonic men</td>
<td>Different types of violence (e.g. bodily violence, threats, libel) are used against women/ gender minorities compared to hegemonic men</td>
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<td>Consequences</td>
<td>(6) Individual consequences</td>
<td>(7) Social consequences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Politicians respond differently to violence along the lines of gendered privilege, e.g. women respond differently to violence than men</td>
<td>Violence leads to gender inequalities in political participation and representation</td>
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Gendered Consequences

A last set of features of violence against politicians that can make it gendered concern the aftermath of violent events: the consequences of the violence. Gendered individual consequences can be observed in women and men politicians reacting and responding differently to violence (Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2021). For example, some studies investigate whether violence makes women more prone than men to consider leaving politics (e.g. Herrick et al. 2019), or more prone to restrict their usage of social media (Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2021). Other important consequences for politicians directly affected by violence encompass outcomes such as sleep difficulty, intrusive thoughts and difficulty concentrating (Herrick and Franklin 2019). Furthermore, consequences extend beyond direct targets of violence. Witnessing attacks on other politicians can e.g. generate hesitancy about remaining in office among colleagues. Violence against politicians does not have to be gendered in its drivers, frequency, form, or character for it to have gendered consequences. As violence does not occur in a vacuum, women politicians experience violence in a space that is already hostile to women in multiple ways (see e.g. Krook and Norris 2014; Lovenduski 2014; Lowndes 2014; Puwar 2004). Combined with gender-based discrimination, violence in politics can make women more likely to withdraw from politics even in cases where they do not experience more violence than men. Likewise, Herrick et al. (2019) find that violence against US mayors is gendered in frequency but not in consequence: even though more women than men experience violence they are not more likely to consider leaving office.

On a higher level of abstraction, violence against politicians can have gendered consequences on the social level. Gendered social consequences of violence against politicians principally concern impacts on democracy and political representation. If women and men’s political ambition is affected differently by violence against politicians, this has tangible consequences for descriptive representation. Another gendered consequence for descriptive representation could be that voters prefer male candidates over female in contexts where violence in politics is widespread. Citizens’ inclusion in or alienation from politics can also be affected by violence against politicians in gendered ways, for example by disproportionately increasing women citizens’ distrust in politics, worsening their sense of political efficacy and depressing their political participation. Such impacts are sometimes the explicit motives behind violence against women in politics (Krook and Sanín 2016a) but can also arise due to other institutional characteristics of the contexts where violence occurs. Women may feel more vulnerable than men in systems of widespread gender-based violence in private and public spheres coupled with impunity, corruption and inefficient judicial systems (Piscopo 2016). In such contexts, violence against politicians can depress women’s political inclusion.
and participation even if gendered motives or forms do not influence why or how perpetrators use violence (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020).

There are several suitable methods for evaluating whether violence against politicians has gendered consequences. At the individual level, comparisons between how women and men – and other intersectional groups of politicians – are impacted by violence can be used to assess potential gender patterns. Such analyses can e.g. highlight whether consequences for politicians’ mental and emotional wellbeing, investments in security, adaptations of their private lives, and choices related to their political career differ along gender lines. At the social level, analyses of gendered consequences of violence against politicians should primarily focus on consequences for political participation and the different dimensions of political representation. Some consequences at this level can become evident through comparisons between women and men politicians. For example, gendered consequences for representation may relate to whether women politicians silence themselves in debates to a greater extent than men, or whether women’s political ambition is depressed more than men’s. Analyses of gendered consequences at the social level can also relate to how violence foments gender norms perpetuating existing gender inequalities where hegemonic men are at an advantage in politics. Comparisons across women and men politicians’ experiences are not required for discerning the interplay between violence and such norms. Narratives from e.g. women politicians only may be highly useful for understanding the proliferation of gender norms and how they may be underpinned by violence against politicians.

**Seven Attributes and Three Dimensions**

The three dimensions and seven attributes described above are mutually independent. The consequences of violence against politicians can be gendered even if violence was not motivated by gender or does not target politicians in gendered ways. Likewise, violence against politicians can have gendered motives but this does not necessarily entail that violence will be carried out in a way that is clearly gendered or that a gendered consequence will be obtained. And violence can be carried out in a way that is gendered for other reasons than gendered drivers behind the violence, and with non-gendered effects. Specific instances of political violence can be, and often are, simultaneously gendered in more ways than one. An important argument in this thesis is that it is not a necessary condition that an instance (or pattern) of violence meets a specific criterion from the above list for it to be considered gendered. Meeting just one is sufficient. There has been a significant emphasis in previous research on the hate-based foundation for violence against women in politics. I instead present this as one out of several equally important attributes that may make violence against politicians gendered, and I argue for analysing when and how violence is gendered. As a result, the conceptualization of gendered violence used in this thesis is broader than common definitions of VAWIP (see Krook 2020; Krook and Sanín 2020). Restricting studies of gender
dimensions of political violence to a narrower list of criteria for when this violence can be gendered risks excluding relevant cases. Furthermore, specifying how violence is gendered – and how it is not – nuances understanding for the gendered nature of violence against politicians. For example, recognizing that violence can be gendered in more ways than in its frequency prevents misguided conclusions that political violence is not gendered unless women are targeted more than men. Likewise, it would be equally misguided to interpret a lack of a gendered motive for violence as conclusive evidence of violence not being gendered.

Policy implications vary depending on in what way violence against politicians is and is not gendered (Piscopo 2016). For example, if politicians’ violence exposure is not gendered but this violence has gendered consequences, this could indicate that violence is handled differently depending on the gender of the target and structural support systems may need revision. Addressing other aspects of how privilege is distributed in politics may also be necessary in order to mitigate violence having different consequences for women and men. If violence is gendered in character (but not in frequency or form), efforts related to the workings of e.g. social media platforms may be warranted. There are of course many cases of violence against politicians that are not gendered in any of the ways described in Table 1. The “non-gendered” violence against politicians certainly deserves as much policy attention as gendered violence, and its components will likely be configured differently than policy aiming to target gendered violence against politicians. The framework presented here can be used to gain a detailed understanding for to what extent and in what ways violence against politicians is a gendered problem in need of a gendered policy response.

The framework presented here, consisting of causes, exposure and consequences, shares some features with Bardall, Bjarneård and Piscopo’s (2020) framework, which consists of motives, forms and impact, but my framework differs from theirs in some respects. Studying causes is similar to studying motives, but the chosen term highlights that it is not only expressed motives or overt sexism that counts as a gendered driver or cause of violence. Exposure captures gendered forms of violence, but I also clarify distinctions between the form and character of violence. Furthermore, whereas Bardall et al. argue for studying the frequency of violence as a way to identify the presence of gendered motives, my framework introduces frequency as a relevant gendered pattern of violence exposure in its own right. Finally, studying gender in the consequences of violence is very similar to Bardall et al.’s impact dimension. Here, I differentiate more explicitly between consequences in how individuals respond to violence, and consequences on the social level.

The empirical essays of this thesis do not address all attributes that can make violence against politicians gendered. To recap, the research questions concern whether women experience more violence as politicians than men, what drives women’s higher exposure to political hostility from citizens, and
what the gendered representational costs of political violence are. While I touch upon several of the attributes that can make violence against politicians gendered in each essay, the primary focus is on violence as gendered in implicit drivers in Essay II, frequency and implicit drivers in Essay I, and social consequences in Essay III.

Throughout the thesis, I mainly study whether and how violence against politicians is gendered in the sense that it perpetuates male privileges in politics and reinforces women’s political marginalization. The question of how violence against politicians is gendered is complex, and further distinctions across intersectional groups and disadvantages for other groups’ political representation should ideally be given attention in future research on the topic. I focus specifically on women’s political marginalization in this thesis due to the fact that this particular political inequality is such a stark and resilient feature of politics.

Gender Comparisons as an Analytical Strategy

Aiming to investigate how violence against politicians is gendered, this thesis draws attention to gender relations. This section discusses two central aspects of the concept of gender: how it operates at different levels, and its relational nature. These aspects form the foundation of the thesis’ analytical strategy of comparing (the broad categories of) women’s and men’s experiences in order to analyse how violence in politics is gendered.

In a highly influential article, Scott (1986) argues that gender is a constitutive element of social relations which operates at several levels: through symbols, norms, institutions and subjective identities. Gender is always contextual and manifests in different ways across time and space. While I do not particularly address individuals’ subjective gender identities, and only touch occasionally on gendered symbols (in the form of slurs and tropes used in harassment of women politicians), gender norms shaping the political sphere is a highly relevant theme of this thesis. In particular, gendered norms on leadership are central to analysing how violence against politicians might be a gendered phenomenon. Psychological research defines norms as stipulating prescribed and proscribed behaviour for (categories of) individuals. A large research field on gender norms identifies norms about appropriate roles, behaviour and characteristics for men and women politicians, and political psychology literature in particular stresses the pervasiveness of gender norms associated with leadership (Bauer 2020; Lovenduski 2005; Schneider and Bos 2014; Schneider, Bos, and DiFilippo 2022). Women and men are expected to exercise leadership in distinct ways, and men are in general expected to be better leaders than women (Eagly and Karau 2002). The association between men/masculinity and leadership stems from the fact that politics as an institution historically was developed by men, currently is dominated by men, and
has been defined by the absence of women (Acker 1992). Violence against politicians thus takes place in a masculine coded sphere, which makes it highly relevant to investigate how this violence is influenced by gender norms as well as how it in turn shapes gendered norms about politics.

Scott further emphasises that gender is a relational concept: femininities and masculinities are constructed in relation to, and depend on, each other as contrasts in order to convey meaning. She argues that just as knowledge about class relations will be limited by only studying the working class, studies of gender will be limited by only studying women. Furthermore, saying something about the dominated automatically implies saying something about those who dominate. In line with this argument, I use comparisons between women and men to highlight gender aspects of violence in politics throughout this thesis. Male coded stereotypes about politicians continue to permeate politics, and women in political spheres are often perceived as deviating from the norm (Puwar 2004). It is women’s perceived difference from the male norm in politics that makes their experiences of politics gendered. A research project aiming to understand gender aspects of a political phenomenon such as violence against politicians is hence well served by including women’s as well as men’s experiences. Such an approach can shed light on how male norms distribute privilege as well as disadvantage based on political actors’ gender identities. Moreover, studying women’s experiences of violence in politics in relation to men’s experiences is a useful empirical strategy for highlighting how gender shapes women’s experiences specifically. Women may not always see their experiences as gendered, but gender patterns may emerge when they are compared to men’s. Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo (2020) propose that researchers can determine whether an attack on e.g. a woman politician was gendered by asking whether that politician would have been attacked, and in the same way, and with the same impact, if they were a hegemonic man. When I study gender in politicians’ violence exposure in this thesis, I follow the strategy described by Bardall et al. and compare the violence targeting similarly positioned women and men. As a result of this strategy, I can identify the risks and harms that uniquely apply to women (see Baldez 2010). In the study of gendered causes of violence against politicians, I theorize gendered attitudes to politicians and test these by comparing whether the theoretical mechanisms that could drive violence against women in politics apply differentially to men and women in an empirical setting. This again provides insights on the factors that specifically put women at risk of violence. The thesis’ investigation of gendered consequences compares how women and men respond to violence in politics and how violence shapes norms for politicians with gendered implications.

Intersectionality
Intersectional perspectives are relevant whenever gender is in focus. Studying how gender shapes people’s lives without also taking into account how those
experiences are simultaneously conditioned by race, class, age, and other contextually relevant identities and life circumstances will never tell the complete story (Collins 2015). For the topic of this thesis, we have good reason to believe that the attributes of the theoretical framework will differ not only along gender lines, but also along other axes of exclusion and domination. Previous research has investigated whether the character of online abuse differs across racial and ethnic backgrounds. Kuperberg (2021) finds that racial tropes are more prevalent against Muslim than Jewish women MPs in the UK. Sexist tropes target both groups and perpetrators often mix racist and gendered slurs. Given what previous research has demonstrated regarding the particular discrimination that targets women of colour in politics (Freidenvall 2016; Hancock 2007; Hawkesworth 2003; Runderkamp et al. 2022), it is likely that violence against politicians has more devastating consequences for this group. Just like Scott (1986) emphasises the contextual nature of gender, which categories of identities that are relevant to include in intersectional analysis varies across contexts (Yuval-Davis 2006).

In Essay I, I investigate intersectional identities as a potential mechanism behind the gender gap in violence exposure between women and men. While the main focus is on gender, I take into account that politicians’ combined social identities might affect the frequency of their violence exposure. I primarily analyse two factors considered important in previous research: being young, and belonging to a non-dominant ethnicity, and investigate the gender gap in violence across these groups. These analyses are important in order to put the essay’s research question on whether and under what conditions women experience more violence than men in context. The analyses aim to increase understanding for whether the impact of gender matters equally across different social groups, or if gender influences the risk of violence in politics more for some groups than others. In keeping with the thesis’ theoretical framework, the essay emphasises that analyses of the forms and character of violence deserve further attention in future research in order to gain a comprehensive understanding for the intersectional nature of politicians’ violence exposure.

Essay II makes a conscious choice of delimiting the study to gendered drivers of violence against women and men of the dominant ethnic group. Names are selected to signal this identity, and images used in the US iteration of the survey portray white women and men. This choice was based on the dearth of previous research on gendered drivers of violence against politicians and the novel research design of a vignette experiment aiming to capture attitudes to harassing politicians. The novelty of the research question and method made it necessary to restrict the study’s focus, which guided me to delimit the study to gender dimensions of drivers of violence against politicians of the dominant ethnicity. The essay recognizes this delimitation and offers theoretically founded reflections on how the results might differ for other groups or across intersecting marginalized identities. The study hence provides a foundation
for future research delving deeper into intersectional drivers of violence against politicians.

Essay III maintains the main focus on gendered consequences of violence for women’s representation relative to men’s. However, the study acknowledges that the consequences that violence has for political representation may be influenced by several facets of politicians’ identities. The study design primarily relies on interviews with women and men where respondents were recruited as comparable pairs (but gender patterns are analysed at the group rather than pair level). In recruiting respondents, I made sure to include a variety of perspectives such that the sample consists of an equal number of women and men from all political parties, of varying ages, from varying parts of the country and types of electoral districts/municipalities, with varying degrees of visibility, and with and without a visible immigrant background (indicated by name and/or physical appearance). When it comes to the consequences that violence has for political representation, the sample of respondents would have to be recruited differently in order to gather enough information about differences across intersectional identities. Being a mainly qualitative study, the number of interviewees is not large enough to analyse differences across several identities systematically. Rather, I make sure to include interviewees of e.g. both immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds in the groups of men and women included in the study. That way, their experiences feed into the analysis of gender differences even if they are not the focus of analysis. While I do not disentangle in this study how the representation of women of various groups may be affected differently by violence against politicians, gender differences do not only relate to a certain group of women politicians but encompass the experiences of immigrant and non-immigrant, young and older, rural and urban based women from all political parties. The study is hence not limited to reflecting the experiences of either the most privileged or the most marginalized women politicians.

Empirical Research on Gender and Violence against Politicians

What do we know about the gendered exposure, causes, and consequences of violence against politicians? This section provides an overview of previous research on the three themes the thesis addresses and identifies the research gaps the thesis aims to fill. Before going into these three themes in detail, I summarize established knowledge on the problem of violence against politicians in peaceful contexts. Unlike the empirical focus of this thesis, most research on political violence concerns violence against political actors in conflict and post conflict settings. In such environments, violence against politicians proliferates against the backdrop of, among other things, weak
institutions, pervasive impunity, widespread availability of weapons, and a high prevalence of various forms of violence by myriad types of actors (Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund 2020; Piscopo 2016). While gender dimensions to violence against politicians may be similar across different types of contexts, the extent and forms of political violence in general differ across contexts. In order to situate the thesis’ focus on political violence in Sweden, I describe what is known from prior research about the forms, frequency and trends of violence against politicians in peaceful environments. I also discuss the main methods used in the research field of violence against politicians and their implications for a comparative research field on violence against politicians. After that, I go on to present existing research on gender patterns in politicians’ violence exposure, gendered drivers of violence against politicians, and gendered consequences of violence against politicians.

Patterns of Violence against Politicians in Peaceful Contexts
Cross-national survey based research from the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and Norway has found that 80—90% of MPs have been exposed to some form of violence from citizens at some point of their political careers (Bjelland and Bjørgo 2014; Every-Palmer, Barry-Walsh, and Pathé 2015; James et al. 2016; Pathé et al. 2014). Herrick et al (2019) find similar rates for US mayors. However, studies on lifetime victimization to violence give limited possibilities for drawing more detailed conclusions regarding the variation or intensity of prevalence. For example, measuring victimization during a more confined time-period makes it possible to investigate whether violence against politicians increases over time. Collignon and Rüdig (2021) find that about half of the candidates faced harassment or intimidation during the 2019 UK election campaign, whereas about a fourth were targeted in the 2017 campaign (Collignon and Rüdig 2020). Time-restricted data has also been able to demonstrate that just as in contexts marked by political violence (Höglund 2009; Mueller 2011), violence commonly intensifies around elections in peaceful contexts (Alesina, Piccolo, and Pinotti 2016; Wallin and Command 2015). Political harassment has furthermore been found to increase in relation to contentious political debates such as Brexit (Ward and McLoughlin 2020).

Online abuse of politicians has been identified as the most common type of violence against politicians (Thomas et al. 2019), which motivates the multiple studies specifically devoted to this topic. Studies demonstrate that out of the proportion of all communication that politicians receive online, abusive messages do not appear to dominate. Mechkova and Wilson (2021) estimate that 3% of tweets directed at political candidates in the US (i.e. tweeting at the candidate’s Twitter handle) are angry. Rheault, Rayment and Musulan (2019) estimate that 11% of tweets directed at high-profile politicians in Canada and 15% in the US are uncivil. At the same time, a high proportion of politicians experience online abuse. 62% of UK MPs received abusive tweets during a
2.5 month period in 2016-2017, and the average MP received 18 abusive tweets during this period (Ward and McLoughlin 2020).

As this overview demonstrates, it is unfortunately difficult to make comparisons of prevalence rates across countries due to methodological issues. First, studies use different definitions and measures of violence against politicians, hence including and excluding different types of incidents. Second, another main difference is whether the study uses lifetime victimization or prevalence during a specific time period. Third, the type of data also impacts on what outcome is captured. Studies on violence against politicians in peaceful contexts primarily use either politician surveys or social media data. These sources of data complement each other, but do not provide comparable estimates of the extent of violence across studies since they use vastly different conceptualizations of the outcome of interest. As a result from all of these factors, it is so far not possible to draw conclusions regarding e.g. whether more politicians experience violence in the US than in Sweden.

A few studies analyse patterns of exposure to violence within countries related to other factors than politicians’ gender. For example, online abuse has been found to target well-known, visible politicians more often than lesser-known politicians (Gorrell et al. 2020). Women representatives of parties furthest to the ideological right and left experience more online harassment than those from mainstream parties (Kuperberg 2018). A study from the UK showed that younger and newer MPs were exposed to stalking more often than other politicians (James et al. 2016).

**Previous Research on Gender Patterns in Politicians’ Exposure to Violence**

By now, there are a couple of studies that investigate gender differences in the frequency of violence against politicians. Building on surveys with political candidates in the UK, Collignon and Rüdig (2020, 2021) find that women experience more harassment (defined as inappropriate behaviour, harassment, or threats to their security) than men. Thomas et al (2019) find the same based on their survey to US mayors where they ask about lifetime victimization to any form of physical violence, psychological abuse, or threats. Contrarily, Erikson, Håkansson and Josefsson (2021), also using survey data, find that women and men MPs are equally likely to report having experienced at least one form of online abuse (direct threats, offensive comments, or comments linked to gender or sexuality) at least once during their political career. No significant gender differences in the overall exposure to violence was found in a survey with Sri Lankan candidates either: if anything, men were slightly more likely than women to have experienced violence during the 2018 electoral campaign (Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022).

The mixed findings in previous studies indicate that more research is needed. The samples used in previous survey-based studies are rather small, ranging from a few hundred in the US, Sri Lanka and Sweden, to 1 500 in the
UK (with response rates of e.g. 20% in the US to 36-53% in the UK). Studies with better data that can make use of more advanced statistical methods requiring larger samples are needed in order to complement these studies.

Studies based on Twitter data likewise have mixed findings regarding whether women experience more harassment than men in politics. Rheault et al. (2019) analyse tweets directed at 200 Canadian federal and provincial cabinet members and 100 US senators and categorize tweets as uncivil if they contain swear words, vulgarities, insults, threats, personal attacks on someone’s private life or hate speech. They find that women on average receive somewhat fewer uncivil tweets than male counterparts, and that having a high number of Twitter followers increased the risk of uncivil tweets. When they interacted gender with the follower count, they found that women with many Twitter followers receive far more uncivil tweets than men counterparts. Mechkova and Wilson (2021) operationalize angry tweets based on sentiment analysis; i.e. identifying the dominant emotion of the tweet. In other words, they do not distinguish between tweets that are angry at the politician it is directed to and tweets that are angry about e.g. a political issue. They find that angry tweets are more often directed at women candidates, and particularly from men Twitter users.

Another set of studies analyse gender differences the form of violence against politicians. In the context of voters, physical political violence has been found to be more common against men, and psychological political violence more common against women (Bardall 2011, 2018). Contrary to such findings, psychological violence, and particularly the sub-category of degrading talk, was the most common form of violence against both men and women candidates in Sri Lanka (Bjarnegårds, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022). Psychological abuse on social media has been identified as the most common form of harassment of both male and female US mayors (Herrick et al. 2019; Thomas et al. 2019).

Other studies focus on the gendered character of violence against politicians. The Sri Lanka study mentioned above finds that while women and men experience similar rates of violence overall, women were far more likely than men to experience violence with sexual connotations (Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022). Ward and McLoughlin (2020) use sentiment analysis to categorize tweets sent to UK MPs as abusive or as containing hate speech. They use a more conservative operationalization than Mechkova and Wilson (2021) and only categorize tweets as abusive if abusive language is directed at the receiver of the message. They find that men MPs receive a higher share of abusive tweets (tweets using abusive, profane language directed towards an MP) than women. They also find that hate-based tweets (tweets using profane or derogatory language which relates to a characteristic the MP belongs; language which implicitly or explicitly implies or encourages threats towards an MP) are more common against women. They conclude that the online abuse women receive is more severe in character. Erikson, Håkansson and Josefsson
(2021) study lifetime victimization to online abuse based on a survey with Swedish MPs (N=290). Similar to the study by Bjarnegård et al. (2022) as well as the one by Ward and McLoughlin (2020), they find that women and men experience about as much direct threats and offensive comments online, but that women receive far more gendered and sexualized online abuse. Their interview data furthermore demonstrates that attacks on men often focus on their political incompetence, whereas attacks on women target their personal identities and their gender.

In a study that is mainly based on 34 qualitative interviews, Bjarnegård (2021) finds that psychological violence such as threats and libel is a normalized experience for candidates in the Maldives. While libel is the most common type of violence against both women and men candidates in this context, libel about women is of a different character than the same about men. It often portrays women candidates as sexually loose and unfaithful, and undeserving of political office. Libel about men candidates in the Maldives is more about political rumours such as alleged disloyalty to the party or to voters. The findings of these studies align with Ward and McLoughlin’s (2020) conclusion that the Twitter abuse women politicians receive is much more personal and hate based. Taken together, the studies, based on a variety of data sources and methods, demonstrate that there is a qualitative difference in the character of violence used against women and men politicians. Just like the studies that analyse gender differences in the overall prevalence of violence, however, these studies build on relatively small samples of politicians.

Although the Twitter based studies rely on millions of tweets, they still do not contain more than a couple of hundred politicians (e.g. 300 politicians in the study by Rheault et al, and 570 politicians in the study by Ward and McLoughlin), which indicates that more largescale analyses of gender patterns in violence against politicians are still warranted. Furthermore, previous studies mix politicians of various types of offices and profiles. As a consequence, there is no previous investigation of whether gender matters differently for the likelihood of experiencing violence as a politician depending on for example the politicians’ position in the political hierarchy or their issue profile. Moreover, previous studies often compare women and men in politics who are not de facto comparable. For example, both Gorrell et al. (2020) and Ward and McLoughlin (2020) compare women’s and men’s exposure to violence in bivariate models without taking the fact that men hold more frontbencher positions in British politics than women, or the fact that women and men are differently represented across British parties, into account. Finding that men receive more abuse on Twitter than women is to be expected against the backdrop of their more prominent positions (c.f. Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan 2019).

Several scholars argue for the importance of an intersectional analysis of gender dimensions in violence against politicians (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020; Kuperberg 2018; Ward and McLoughlin 2020). Kuperberg
analyses online abuse directed at women of various ethnicities in the UK and Israel, and finds that perpetrators mix racist and gendered tropes in abuse targeting ethnical minority women. Young women MPs in Sweden experience worse treatment (e.g. harassment) from colleagues than all other MPs, whereas young men MPs experience the best treatment from colleagues (Erikson and Josefsson 2019a). These few empirical studies suggest that the impact of gender for the risks of violence politicians face may be contingent on, or affected by, other personal characteristics. Large-N empirical studies on to what extent gender intersects with ethnicity, age or other personal characteristics to affect the gendered prevalence of violence against politicians can make an important contribution to knowledge on this topic.

Previous Research on Gendered Drivers of Violence against Politicians

Compared to the literature that investigates gendered exposure to political violence, significantly less research has been devoted to studying what drives it. Peace and conflict scholarship provides ample knowledge on what makes societies vulnerable to violence. The interest in this thesis, however, is on the individual level: what makes perpetrators select women as targets of political violence rather than men? One study outlines perceived motives and drivers of violence against politicians. James et al. (2016) find that attacks on politicians in the UK typically are motivated by personal grievances. They do not study the possibility of different factors influencing violence against women and men in politics respectively.

Some studies investigate individual level factors in order to understand who becomes a perpetrator of political violence. For example, literature on participation in violent protest has found socioeconomic factors such as education to be influential (Hall, Rodeghier, and Useem 1986). Male gender has been identified as a strong predictor of the propensity to participate in collective political violence (McDoom 2013) and violent protest (Zlobina and Gonzalez Vazquez 2018). Men also hold much more accepting attitudes than women towards political violence as a way to express disagreement with the government (Armaly and Enders 2022). Not only are men more prone to use political violence than women, but masculinity ideals matter. Honour ideology, defined as patriarchal values and masculine toughness ideals, has been found to predict participation in political violence in Thailand (Bjarnegård, Brounéus, and Melander 2017). In other words, while existing scholarship points to gender as an important factor in explaining who perpetrates political violence, no previous empirical studies investigate what may drive a gendered selection of targets of political violence.

Most studies on gendered violence against politicians and violence against women in politics assume that this violence is driven by biased attitudes against women politicians (e.g. Birolı 2018; Herrick et al. 2019; Krook and Sanin 2016a; Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan 2019). However, few studies specifically investigate attitudinal drivers. To my knowledge, no previous
studies investigate how or which gendered attitudes matter for violence against women politicians relative to men.

**Previous Research on Gendered Consequences of Violence against Politicians**

There is also a scarcity of studies on the gendered consequences of violence against politicians. A couple of studies have investigated whether violence against politicians affects candidates’ exit and entry decisions, without focusing particularly on gender. Daniele (2019) finds that the most qualified individuals select out of mayoral races in Italian cities where mayors have experienced violence. Similarly, of US mayors exposed to violence, 16% had considered leaving politics (Herrick and Franklin 2019). Collignon and Rüdig (2021) find that harassed candidates adjust their campaign styles and avoid e.g. rallies and canvassing. One of the most commonly raised concerns in the gender literature on the topic is that gender patterns in the prevalence and forms of violence against politicians will depress women’s political ambition. A few studies have investigated impacts on gendered political ambition, with mixed findings. Neither women’s nor men’s political ambitions were depressed by experiencing violence among candidates in Sri Lanka (Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022). Men’s, but not women’s, political ambitions are negatively correlated with experiencing online abuse among Swedish MPs (Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2021). In a working paper, Anlar (2022) finds that young women’s political ambition is depressed more than men’s by violence against politicians in Sweden and Norway. In other words, it remains unclear whether, or in what way, violence in politics has a gendered impact on political ambition.

In addition to the focus on ambition, a few studies also find negative impacts on representatives’ mental health (Herrick and Franklin 2019; James et al. 2016). About 20% of violence-exposed US mayors had intrusive thoughts, and 40% experienced irritability, sleep difficulty, or difficulty concentrating following violent incidents (Herrick and Franklin 2019). Large portions of UK MPs subject to intrusive behaviour experienced fear, some experienced concerns about being home alone, and many have strategies in place for how to decrease the risks of violence against them when they go about their everyday lives (James et al. 2016).

No previous studies focus on consequences of violence against politicians for other aspects of political representation than ambition and self-selection into politics. This leaves a significant research gap in terms of how violence might affect politicians’ substantive and symbolic representation.

**Summarizing the Research Gaps Addressed by the Thesis**

The question of whether women experience more violence than men in politics needs more thorough investigation. I address this question in Essay I by studying gender differences in exposure to violence using extensive high-
quality data. The essay compares women and men that are plausibly comparable and takes other relevant factors into account such as women’s and men’s positions in the political hierarchy. In relation to gendered drivers of violence against politicians, Essay II takes on the challenge of theorizing testable hypotheses on why women face more violence as politicians and testing these causally. The research field on the gendered consequences of violence against politicians needs a more comprehensive approach in order to understand the implications of this violence for democracy. Essay III theorizes and empirically investigates consequences for descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation.

Theoretical Expectations: When and How Should we Expect Violence against Politicians to be Gendered?

The previous section situates this thesis’ research questions in relation to the existing literature on GPV/VAWIP. I draw on several theories from political science, psychology and sociology to formulate theoretical expectations related to each of the research questions. First in this section, I discuss broader theories that are useful for understanding the possibility of gendered causes of violence against politicians: role congruity theory and sexism theory. I mainly focus on implicit rather than explicit gendered drivers in this section as well as in the thesis’ empirical chapters. Next, I outline expectations related to gendered violence exposure. The thesis primarily investigates a gendered frequency of violence related to gendered drivers and hence draws on the same over-arching theories as the ones presented in relation to gendered drivers, but also considers other possible sources of such a pattern. I outline expectations related to gender patterns in the frequency and forms (but not character) of violence against politicians, as this is what the thesis investigates empirically. Last, I discuss how theory on political representation can inform the study of gendered consequences of violence against politicians, and briefly outline expected consequences. While there are many other important consequences of violence for politicians at an individual level, I focus on individual consequences with implications for political representation. Consequently, I summarize theoretical expectations on both individual and social consequences in the same section. The more thorough theoretical and empirical study on the topic, found in Essay III, distinguishes in more detail between individual and social consequences and describes the relationship between them.

Gendered Causes of Violence against Politicians

*Implicit Gendered Drivers: Role Congruity Theory, Backlash, and Sexism*

Gender-biased attitudes have been identified as principal obstacles for gender equality in politics and society at large. In particular, negative attitudes to
women who challenge the gender hierarchy have been theorized and investigated empirically as impediments to gender equality at positions of power. Role congruity theory is a social-psychological theory that posits that stereotypes about women are incongruent with stereotypes about leaders (Eagly and Karau 2002). Stereotypes about women stipulate that they are expected to display communal traits; i.e. be sensitive, caring and oriented towards what is good for the collective. As leaders, women are expected to have a nurturing and inclusive leadership style. Stereotypes about men expect them to display agentic traits; i.e. be dominant, ambitious, and assertive, and take individual executive decisions as leaders. Women and men receive social rewards for conforming to the stereotypes about their gender, and social punishments for failing to do so. Stereotypes about leaders are essentially the same as those about men. As a result, men tend to be seen as better leaders than women, and women leaders face a dual risk for social punishments. They are either perceived as unfit for leadership as women, or considered to be violating feminine role stereotypes if they adapt to a masculine coded leadership style (Bauer 2020; Eagly and Karau 2002; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010).

In a foundational piece, Rudman et al. demonstrate that punishments for violating one’s gender role is contingent on whether one simultaneously violates the gendered status hierarchy (Rudman et al. 2012). In other words, women and men are not only expected to be different, but masculine coded behaviour and characteristics are given higher status compared to female coded activities and traits. Men can behave communally without incurring punishment, because agency is linked to high status more than communality is linked to low status. When women exercise agentic leadership, e.g. take individual decisions and behave in a dominant and assertive way, they undermine the presumed differences between the genders. In violating the gender status hierarchy, agentic women discredit the legitimacy of a system whereby men hold more power and resources than women.

Negative attitudes to women leaders in politics and elsewhere have been widely established in political psychology research (Bauer 2020; Brescoll, Okimoto, and Vial 2018; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010; Rudman et al. 2012). Backlash theory furthermore suggests that hostile reactions to women’s political representation is rooted in women challenging male hegemony on power (Mansbridge and Shames 2008), and particularly targets women who exercise agentic leadership, occupy male coded roles in politics, and re-direct policy priorities away from men’s interests to women’s (Sanbonmatsu 2008). Applied to the field of gendered violence in politics, these theories suggest that hostile attitudes and actions might not target all women in politics equally, but be specifically directed at women who challenge male hegemony in politics. Similarly, VAWIP theory emphasises that political women challenge male political hegemony. Any political woman can hence be expected to be at a heightened risk of violence as a result of this
gender norm violation. In addition, role congruity theory and backlash theory suggest that some women in politics likely face greater risks than others.

I draw on these theories in order to formulate theoretical expectations about whether, and when, women politicians face more violence than men counterparts. Essay I empirically tests the assumption in VAWIP theory that hostile attitudes to women who challenge male hegemony drives violence against them. Moreover, the essay operationalizes agentic traits and agentic leadership as leadership positions in the political hierarchy. My theoretical expectation is that women at leadership positions should face more violence than equally positioned men, as men are rewarded for agentic leadership whereas women are punished. Based on the same rationale, Essay II specifically studies violence against mayors. Theories on backlash and negative stereotypes towards agentic women draw attention to executive offices such as this one. More violence can be expected against women in this type of office, making it particularly motivated to increase the empirical and theoretical understanding for what drives it.

The theories discussed above predict that agentic, rather than communal, women will face violence. Hostility against agentic women aligns well with what we might expect based on research on hostile sexism. Research in psychology characterizes hostile sexism as negative attitudes to women, and a view of gender relations where women seek to control men (Glick et al. 2000; Glick and Fiske 1996). This is contrasted against benevolent sexism, which is defined as (superficially) positive attitudes that see women as wonderful, but weak (Glick and Raberg 2018). Phrased in positive words about women as purer and of better characters than men, with chivalry seen as men giving women advantages, benevolent sexism might appear as good for women. However, benevolent sexism in itself circumscribes women’s opportunities to advance in society since it emphasises women’s dependence on men (Glick and Raberg 2018). Furthermore, benevolent sexism reinforces hostile sexism. Attitudes aligned with benevolent and hostile sexism often overlap empirically (Glick et al. 2000), but are activated under different conditions. Women that conform to expectations on their roles as carers, nurturers, and moral supporters of men are adored, whereas women who fail to meet these expectations are strongly disliked (Glick and Raberg 2018; Manne 2017). As Manne (2017) puts it, under the logic of misogyny, women are expected to take on the role of an “attentive and loving subordinate” in relation to men. Hostile consequences are justified against the women who fail to conform to these expectations, such as women who are in positions of power and authority over men, opt out of male-oriented service roles, are outspoken, and express feminist views (Glick and Raberg 2018; Manne 2017).

In this thesis I argue that hostile as well as benevolent sexism constitute plausible drivers of violence against women politicians. It is easy to see how hostile sexism can spur violent reactions against agentic women, since powerful women activate hostile sexism. At the same time, another plausibly
important driver of hostility from citizens to women politicians can stem from expectations on women as nurturers, motivated by benevolent sexism. In situations when citizens are angry about politics, they may feel more entitled to voice that anger to women politicians. This would also align well with gendered expectations on women’s communal leadership style (Eagly and Karau 2002). Benevolent sexist attitudes, and expectations on women politicians as nurturing and inclusive in their leadership roles, constitutes an alternative theoretical explanation for violence against women politicians that has not been considered in previous research. Essay II formulates hypotheses related to how different gendered norms about leadership as well as sexist attitudes to women leaders can drive violence against women politicians in different ways.

**Gendered Violence Exposure among Politicians**

**Gendered Frequency of Violence**

The frequency of politicians’ exposure to violence is investigated in Essay I. I do not have strong theoretical foundations for expecting that women will experience more violence than men counterparts for other reasons than perpetrators’ gender biases, and hence predict a gendered frequency of violence driven by gendered causes. Essay I primarily builds on role congruity theory. In addition, I investigate alternative explanations. First, I investigate the impact of women’s and men’s distribution across policy committees. Women are higher represented in committees responsible for social issues in Sweden as well as internationally (Baekgaard and Kjaer 2012; Gilljam, Karlsson, and Sundell 2017; Murray and Sénac 2018; SCB 2016; Yule 2000). At the municipal level in particular, these committees make decisions of a highly sensitive nature with direct consequences for municipal inhabitants. For example, they decide on access to social support such as housing, interventions in families at risk, and children’s school placements. This puts women representatives at a high risk of violence since the decisions they are overrepresented as being involved in often make people very angry. Men are instead overrepresented in policy areas dealing with more abstract and technical issues. Some of these may also make people upset, such as planning and building decisions and permits, but the committees more men than women serve on typically involve fewer decisions of a directly sensitive nature for individuals. If women politicians have a higher violence exposure than men which is driven by their high representation in policy committees that make sensitive decisions for citizens, there would be a gendered frequency of violence which does not per se have directly gendered causes. Even though there are gendered root causes of women’s and men’s distribution across policy areas, perpetrators would not primarily be motivated by politicians’ gender when they wage violence on politicians.
Another alternative explanation I investigate relates to politicians’ personalities. It is in general more difficult for women than men to become nominated to political office, and particularly to top positions (Bjarnegård 2013; Folke and Rickne 2016; Kenny and Verge 2016; Murray 2015; Niven 1998; O’Brien and Rickne 2016). A possible implication is that the women and men who reach electable slots and the highest placements on ballots differ in their personalities. If that is the case, perpetrators may be more inclined to target women political leaders than men counterparts because of systematic gender differences in the personal traits of politicians. Even though such a selection of personalities plausibly also might have gendered drivers at its root, perpetrators would not primarily be motivated by politicians’ gender when directing more violence against women than men.

**Gendered Forms of Violence**

Essay I investigates gender differences in the forms of violence used against women and men politicians. The main purpose of these analyses is to understand what women’s violence exposure relative to men’s consists of, and whether a possible gender gap in overall violence exposure is driven by any particular form(s) of violence. However, I do not have any hypotheses in this regard. Recognizing that research on violence against voters has found more physical violence against men and more psychological violence against women, I first differentiate between these two broad categories of violence. Second, I investigate gender differences in politicians’ exposure to five forms of violence, inspired by Krook and Sanín’s (2016a) typology of different forms of VAWIP: bodily violence, violence with economic implications, threats, harassment, and symbolic violence.

**Gendered Consequences of Violence against Politicians**

**Individual and Social Consequences: Gendered Consequences for Political Representation**

The core importance of violence against politicians stems from these actors’ unique role in representative democracy. Studying gender aspects of violence against politicians hence brings questions regarding implications for gender and political representation to the fore. VAWIP theory mainly focuses on the gendered intention – and possible consequence – of deterring women’s political participation. Accordingly, a main concern relates to women’s presence in politics; i.e. their descriptive representation. Symbolic impacts, such as negatively affecting attitudes to women politicians in society and discouraging potential women candidates from entering politics, and substantive implications such as attempts at restricting women’s political influence, are also mentioned (e.g. Krook and Sanín 2016a; Krook 2020). However, most research on VAWIP and GPV focus on how such violence can affect women’s descriptive representation. I extend the valuable insights that this focus has brought about
in my broader conceptualization of gendered impacts on representation, and integrate more of lessons learned from the rich research field on gender and representation.

Research on women’s representation has converged on considering four dimensions of representation, building on the theoretical arguments by Hanna Pitkin (1967) and Anne Phillips (1995). Formal representation relates to the rules and procedures for choosing representatives, whereby women’s political rights may be circumscribed. Descriptive representation refers to women’s presence in political institutions. Presence in political institutions is a fundamental question of democratic equality: representatives should mirror the represented in relevant demographic aspects (Phillips 1995; Pitkin 1967; Young 2000). Substantive representation considers the congruence between women citizens’ preferences and the actions of (women) representatives. It relates to how representatives “act for” and are responsive to their constituents (Pitkin 1967). Mansbridge (1999) contends that representing the substantive interests of the represented is the primary function of representative democracy. Symbolic representation refers to gendered attitudes to women and politics in society. It is particularly important for politically alienated groups in order to foster trust in politics and enhance the alienated group’s legitimacy (Mansbridge 1999). As few countries continue to formally exclude women from politics, by e.g. reserving the right to vote or hold elected office for men, the last three are often the ones included in contemporary studies of gender and political representation. Representation research demonstrates that substantive and symbolic representation do not necessarily follow from descriptive representation (Htun 2016). Furthermore, substantive representation of women’s interests can come about even in cases with limited descriptive representation of women (Weldon 2002).

Acknowledging that descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation are all important indications of political gender equality, and that they do not always covary empirically, I argue that studying the gendered consequences of violence against politicians ought to include attention to all three dimensions of representation in their own right. We cannot assume a priori that the main gendered consequences of violence will relate to women’s descriptive representation. Nor can we assume that consequences for all dimensions of gendered representation will stem from the same mechanisms of violence in politics.

Compared to previous VAWIP research, I focus on a broader category of gendered violence and a broader set of gendered consequences. Since the consequences of violence against politicians cannot be assumed to be driven by the perpetrators’ motives (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020), I do not only study the gendered consequences of hate-based violence against women politicians. Instead, I argue that an understanding for the gendered consequences of violence for political representation is best obtained by studying (1) all forms of violence that target politicians because they are politicians,
and (2) analysing how and to what extent the consequences have gendered implications post hoc.

There are several reasons to expect that violence against politicians will be harmful for descriptive gender diversity in politics. First, even though existing evidence is mixed, as described above, it is theoretically plausible that women’s political ambition will be more severely impacted than men’s by violence in politics. Women politicians’ higher exposure to violence, as demonstrated in some studies, would predict that women are more likely than men to withdraw from politics because of violence. Their higher exposure to particularly damaging forms of violence such as gendered, personal attacks and sexual violence would predict the same. The fact that some violence waged on women politicians explicitly has the motive to exclude women from politics likewise suggests that such an impact can be expected (Krook and Sanín 2020). Second, representation research suggests that the demand side of political recruitment is at least as important as the supply side for understanding how descriptive gender diversity comes about or is hindered (Bjarnegård 2013; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Kenny 2013; Krook 2010; Niven 1998; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). When politicians experience violence, this can reinforce the emphasis on male coded characteristics often applied in political recruitment. For example, previous research has found a strong preference for male leaders in contexts associated with violence and external threats (Barnes and O’Brien 2018; Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2011).

The substantive representation of women and feminism can also be expected to be negatively impacted by violence against politicians. The substantive representation of women and feminism implies challenging status quo, since hegemonic men’s priorities and perspectives have long dominated policy agendas (Franceschet 2015; Mackay 2014). Representation research outlines myriad obstacles to women’s policy influence, such as side-lining of women to legislative positions of limited influence (Heath et al. 2005), a tendency to view women’s priorities as particularistic and men’s as neutral (Franceschet 2015), and the active resistance against gender friendly reform from powerful hegemonic men benefitting from status quo (Krook 2016). It is likely that violence against politicians will follow the same logic and be used as a means to suppress feminist policy. For example, political violence aiming to silence feminist agendas have been found in Brazil (Biroli 2018). We might hence expect violence to be specifically directed at actors substantively representing feminism. Furthermore, having to handle violence, and devising strategies to protect oneself from violence, takes time and energy. For political representatives, this means that they have less time and energy available for the core of their roles as policymakers. Many women subjected to violence in their roles as politicians describe this as something that depletes them of energy and affects their ability to work normally (Krook 2020, 249ff). If such demands on time and energy are differentially distributed between women and
men (regardless of whether women are targeted for gendered motives), this can skew substantive representation. Based on the finding in previous research that women experience more violence as politicians than men, women politicians’ policymaking efforts can be expected to be more hampered by violence than men’s.

The symbolic gender diversity can also be expected to be harmed by violence against politicians. A concern of many women politicians is that violence against them will discourage other women’s political participation (Krook 2020, 255). Moreover, in order for the empowering impacts of women’s political presence to be realized, women politicians must function as visible cues of the fact that politics is not only for men; in other words, women politicians must be visible (Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020). Some studies find cases where women’s descriptive presence in politics has not led to an increased connection to politics among women citizens. Several scholars argue that this might be due to citizens not noticing women’s increased numbers in legislatures because they are not visible, and that women politicians need to be seen in order for them to inspire women citizens’ political engagement and affective connection to politics (e.g. Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Liu and Banaszak 2017; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005; Zetterberg 2008). A key harm to women’s symbolic representation that violence can inflict is hence to coerce women representatives into decreasing their visibility. The gendered frequency of political violence as well as the personal and gendered nature of attacks on visible women politicians can be expected to lead women politicians to decrease their visibility. Ultimately, if women politicians are not visible to the same extent as men, this sends messages to the citizenry about who politics is for, who should and who should not “be interested in, attentive to, and confident in their assessments about politics” (Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020, 127).

In its conclusions, Essay I lists possible implications of the gendered frequency of violence for different aspects of representation. Essay II discusses how gendered drivers of violence against women politicians can impact on how they use their time as representatives. Essay III theorizes how violence against politicians can affect descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation, keeping gendered consequences of violence separate from gendered drivers, frequencies, forms or characters of violence against politicians.

The Swedish Case

Studying gender aspects of violence against politicians in Sweden has the advantage of being able to compare women and men that are similarly situated in the political system. Unlike many other countries, women are not a numerical minority in Swedish politics. Women’s descriptive representation in Swedish politics increased incrementally over several decades (Dahlerup and
Freidenvall 2005; Freidenvall, Dahlerup, and Skeie 2006), much thanks to voluntary party quotas (Freidenvall 2018). As can be seen in Figure 1, women have enjoyed a high descriptive representation for at least three decades, and have also held a substantial portion of leadership positions in Swedish politics for about as long. For example, cabinets have been about gender balanced since 1994, and there have been many years with at least 30% women party leaders since the mid-90’s. As such, the country is a case where women’s presence in politics is well-established and where women arguably hold similar levels of political power as men. In many contexts, studying gender aspects of political representation entails the challenge of understanding gender dimensions in relation to women’s newcomer status in politics. These dimensions can be separated in the Swedish context due to its comparatively high political gender equality over the last decades.

Sweden’s high descriptive gender equality in politics has several theoretical implications. Gender differences in exposure to violence or consequences for representation cannot be attributed to a numerical minority status. Nor can they be expected to automatically disappear over time as people get used to the idea of women politicians (i.e. their newcomer status wanes). The Swedish citizenry have been exposed to many women politicians and political leaders for a long time. Nevertheless, Swedish politics has historically been male exclusive and heavily male dominated long after women’s suffrage was introduced in 1921. Just as in other political systems, male norms are ingrained in Swedish politics and continue to shape expectations and opportunities for women and men politicians in gendered ways (Erikson and Josefsson 2019b).

In relation to the research questions of this thesis, the Swedish case can be considered a laboratory from which results have a high external validity. Its comparatively high political gender equality makes Sweden a least likely case for gender differences in the frequency, drivers, and consequences of political violence. According to this logic, extrapolating from this thesis’ findings from Sweden would imply that we expect at least the same, or even larger, differences between women and men in relation to all aspects of violence against politicians in cases featuring a lower level of gender equality in politics. At the same time, there is some evidence suggesting that women who constitute a small minority (“tokens”) are sometimes positioned to be treated well in politics (Bratton 2005; Karpowitz, Mendelberg, and Shaker 2012). For example, women may face less discrimination from peers under some circumstances if there are just a few of them than if there are many women. This suggests that problems facing women politicians found in Sweden are not necessarily worse in countries featuring very few women in politics. Moreover, newness in politics may also sometimes put women in a beneficial position. Women political newcomers are often dynastic (Baker and Palmieri 2021; Folke, Rickne, and Smith 2021), which in theory could be expected to grant some protection against violence. It is also possible that not all gendered drivers of violence against politicians investigated in Essay II are transferable to
any context. Preferences for directing complaints to women representatives over men may work differently in cases where women politicians hold less de facto decision-making power than they do in Sweden and the US. It is hence not certain whether all of the gender dimensions of violence against politicians investigated in this thesis will be the same or worse in every other context compared to the Swedish one. Still, the development in most countries goes towards a higher female political representation (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2022). This makes it important to investigate possible differences in how women and men are treated in political systems featuring a high female representation, such as the Swedish one. Gender norms are often expected to become less adverse for women as their presence in organizations and at leadership positions improve (Eagly and Karau 2002; Kanter 1977, 1993). From this perspective, the Swedish case should not be expected to feature differences in how women and men fare in politics that are exaggerated compared to contexts where fewer women hold elected office or leadership positions in politics.

In one of the essays (II) I investigate the research question in Sweden as well as the US. Swedish and US politics differ on a few key traits of relevance for studying gender dimensions in harassment of politicians. Politicians in the US are elected in majoritarian elections and individual candidates are emphasized to a great extent in election campaigns. In Sweden’s party-centred system, politicians are instead elected in proportional elections where the party plays a much more significant role. Based on the higher attention to individual politicians and their policy accomplishments in the US case one could expect a more agentic leadership role, resulting in higher punishments for women political leaders. Women’s representation is also much lower in the US than Sweden: women make up about 27% of Congress and 22% of mayors (Center for American Women and Politics 2019, 2022), and hence constitute more of a political minority in US politics than in Swedish. Consequently, any commonalities found regarding gendered attitudes to politicians in these vastly different contexts have a high degree of external validity.
Methodological Reflections

The thesis spans a wide range of methods and data, which has several advantages for advancing understanding of the overarching research question. I use survey data in order to investigate the quantitative differences in exposure to violence among women and men politicians. The question of drivers of harassment of women politicians relative to men requires the type of causal evidence that an experiment uniquely can provide. The extensive qualitative material on consequences of experiencing violence in politics provides a unique opportunity to theorize on this unexplored question. The mix of methods, where the research question has guided the choice of method, enables the thesis to make important contributions. Including this range of methods in the same research project demonstrates how different types of data and analysis techniques can be combined in order to answer key questions related to a relatively new research topic. The backdrop of just a handful of previous studies on gendered violence against politicians motivates the usage of different types of studies that take the research agenda forward in distinct ways.

Figure 1: Share of women at key political positions over time in Sweden

Notes: Author’s calculations based on data from party records, Statistics Sweden, and Baumann, Bäck, and Davidsson (2019). Party leaders refers to leaders of parties with parliamentary representation.
Using Quantitative Survey Data to Study the Gendered Frequency of Violence against Politicians

The question of whether women experience more violence as politicians than men is arguably best answered using a large dataset of representative quantitative material. When it comes to assessing violence exposure, self-reported data is likely the most reliable source (Håkansson 2023), even though self-reported data always contains an intrinsic risk that respondents interpret concepts and questions differently (Groves et al. 2009). Often-used third party data sources on violence, such as media reports, hospital records, and observer reports, are wrought with bias (Bjarnegård 2021; Borzyskowski and Wahman 2021). In particular, such reports over-emphasize publicly visible acts of violence (Bjarnegård 2021). Posing an open ended question on whether respondents have experienced violence would likely give an inexact measure of violence exposure, since there is a large variation in how different people define violence (e.g. Haan 2008; Hamby 2017). Asking precise questions is advisable in order to minimize this problem (Groves et al. 2009; Håkansson 2023). In relation to this research question, I use the Politicians’ Safety Survey (Politikernas Trygghets-undersökning, PTU). It is collected biannually by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Bråttsförebyggande Rådet) and targets all Swedish elected politicians. In order to obtain large samples of comparable women and men in politics, as well as a plausible operationalization of hierarchical levels (see Folke and Rickne 2016), I focus my analyses on municipal politicians. Using three waves of PTU data (2012, 2014 and 2016) – all of which have a response rate consistently above 60% – I get about 8 000 observations per wave and 20 000 observations in total.

The survey was designed by criminologists as a result of the Swedish governments’ efforts to understand the extent of violence and crime that Swedish politicians experience in their roles as elected representatives. It captures a wide range of violent behaviours, including both physical and psychological forms of violence, as well as attempts at bribery (which I do not include in my study). In addition to its high representativity of Swedish politicians, an important advantage of the PTU survey is that it has a list-based question on exposure to violence. Respondents are presented with a list of concrete types of violent incidents (e.g. punching, threatening email, etc.) and tick off the ones they have experienced. Asking about exposure to concrete incidents, rather than about “violence” in general, reduces risks of low reliability entailed to respondents having different understandings of what constitutes violence. Furthermore, the survey asks about violence during a confined time period (the previous year). The PTU data is the most comprehensive quantitative data in the world on politicians’ exposure to a broad range of forms of violence, and also the one that by far has the highest response rate. Despite it being the most reliable, and highest quality, data available on violence against politicians, this thesis is the first to use it for academic purposes.
By using this data, it is possible to compare women and men that are plausibly comparable. The reliance on smaller samples in previous research entails the risk that for example newcomer women will be compared to well-established men in politics, or that less influential women will be compared to more influential men. Since violence is most likely to target visible and powerful politicians (Gorrell et al. 2020; Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan 2019), there are evident risks of obscuring gender patterns in violence exposure unless such factors are accounted for. Furthermore, the PTU data allows for comparing women and men from the same municipalities and from the same parties, which are factors demonstrated to affect violence rates (Kuperberg 2018; Thomas et al. 2019) as well as the share of women in power (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Gruneau 2022; Sanbonmatsu 2002). It is also possible to analyse differences in other individual characteristics than their gender, such as politicians’ age and whether they have an immigrant background. Moreover, I can take variations over time into account, which previous studies that rely on other types of data have not been able to do. The survey is not in a panel format, but repeated cross sections. Hence, I cannot analyse differences at the individual level over time. Nevertheless, I can compare violence exposure among women and men during the same year within each wave by using fixed effects for years. By including both controls at the individual level for characteristics such as age and immigrant background and fixed effects for group characteristics such as parties and municipalities I am able to contribute with well-substantiated knowledge on how gender affects the propensity for a politician to experience violence. Clustering standard errors at the municipal level, furthermore, decreases risks that the precision of the relationship between gender and violence exposure will be over-estimated.

A shortcoming of the PTU data is that it is not able to account for nuances in the character of attacks on politicians. The data can show which forms of violence that are most prevalent against women and men, but there is no further information about the nature of attacks. As a consequence, understanding for the gendered character of violence against politicians cannot be enhanced using this data. However, since it covers both physical and psychological forms of violence, it is well suited to the purpose of analysing the gendered prevalence of violence where violence is understood to encompass both. Compared to studies that restrict their analysis to online abuse on Twitter or physical violence recorded in media outlets, the PTU data provides a more theoretically valid measure of violence exposure.

All in all, using the PTU data entails that I can give a well-founded answer as to whether, and when, women experience more violence as politicians than men.
Using Survey Experiments to Study Gendered Drivers of Violence against Politicians

The next step of the thesis is to develop theory on why women politicians experience more violence than men counterparts. In Essay I, I draw on theory on hostility against agentic women and find convincing evidence that such mechanisms influence the gender pattern in violence against politicians. However, due to the data and methods used, the evidence is descriptive rather than causal. In order to evaluate the causal effect of theoretically well-motivated explanations, I use experimental methods in Essay II and design a survey experiment.

The survey contains a sequence of vignettes that portray a hypothetical situation. The respondent is asked to imagine that their child was assigned to a low-performing school. First, they are asked which politician, either the mayor or the chair of the school board,\(^3\) that they would be most likely to contact if they would try to change the situation. Next, they are presented with a hostile email sent to the mayor by another parent that was similarly badly affected by the school policy.\(^4\) Respondents report to what extent they find the hostile email to be understandable and acceptable, and whether sanctions should be applied to the email sender.

In order to disentangle potential drivers of politicians’ gender gap in violence exposure, I focus on what seems to be the most common type of violence that women politicians experience. I investigate hostile citizen contacts due to the high prevalence of this perpetrator category in Sweden and other comparable contexts. The essay investigates possible gendered drivers of violence that is not gendered in its form: without gender-denigrating language and connected to the target’s policymaking role rather than being purely hate-based. This type of violence likely constitutes a significant share of the hostility that women receive in their roles as politicians. Even though women experience far more hate-based attacks than men, this is not the only type of attack they experience (Krook and Sanín 2020; Piscopo 2016). According to Ward and McLoughlin (2020) and Gorrell (2020), women experience more non-gendered abuse than hate-based attacks in online environments. The fact that the focus is not on a type of attack that is expressed in a sexist way does not rule out the relevance of gendered drivers behind it (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020).

The study’s experimental design entails that respondents are randomized into viewing one out of two versions of the vignette. In one version, the mayor is a man and the chair is a woman, and in the other their roles are switched. An advantage of experimental designs compared to analysis of observational

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\(^3\) In the US version of the survey, the chair is described as being “chair of the school board”, and in the Swedish version as being “chair of the committee on education”.

\(^4\) As a robustness check, some respondents are assigned to a version of the vignette that portrays a building policy instead of the school policy.
data is that randomization eliminates all possible factors that might bias the relationship between the independent and dependent variables; observable as well as unobservable factors. Due to the fact that respondents are randomly assigned to one out of the two versions of the survey, the mix of respondents assigned to either version will be equal on average (see Gerber and Green 2012). In other words, the risk that a group of respondents that e.g. hold more feminist attitudes than the rest of the population will be assigned to the survey version featuring a woman mayor is eliminated. Granted effectively executed randomization (and large enough samples), there will be an equal share of feminists assigned to each survey version. Designing a vignette experiment, furthermore, has the advantage that factors that differ between representatives in real-world settings also are cleansed away. The same information about the imaginary mayor is provided in both survey versions, other than the mayor’s sex. Differences in the propensity for respondents to direct their contacts to the mayor, or rate hostility against the mayor as more acceptable, in one survey version than the other are consequently attributable to gender since this is the only thing that was varied between the survey versions. The survey experiment was launched on Lucid in the US, and LORE in Sweden.

A shortcoming of survey experiments such as this one is that they record people’s attitudes and hypothetical behaviour rather than their actual behaviour. However, vignette experiments have been shown to effectively capture actual behaviour (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015). Moreover, the principal aim of the essay is to identify attitudinal mechanisms behind constituents’ harassment of politicians. The advantages of hypothetical scenarios outlined above, i.e. the possibility for causal inference that a survey experiment provides, arguably outweigh the shortcomings in this case. Causally analysing explanations for why women politicians experience more violence than men from constituents marks a significant contribution to the research field where no previous tests of assumed drivers of this pattern have been made.

Using Qualitative Interview Data and Mixed Methods to Study Gendered Consequences of Violence against Politicians

In order to investigate the gendered consequences of violence against politicians, I primarily rely on interviews with politicians. A suitable approach to theory building on this aspect of violence against politicians, where previous research is most scarce, involves explorative data collection and thick conceptualization. Both aspects are addressed well through semi-structured interviews. While it was pre-defined that I aimed to investigate impacts on all aspects of representation, my understanding for how gendered representational costs of violence manifest empirically was limited prior to carrying out the interviews due to the scarcity of previous research. This made explorative data collection with opportunities for detailed description suitable in order to understand what manifestations can look like in practice. Semi-structured
interviews with politicians is suited to providing a description of a range of impacts violence has for political representation. I interviewed 46 politicians (23 women and 23 men) from all political parties with the purpose of understanding how politicians experience being affected by violence. Interviewing comparable women and men (in terms of e.g. age and prominence) was used as a strategy to discern in what ways perspectives and experiences are shared by women and men, and in what ways they differ. Aiming to include a variety of perspectives, I furthermore included politicians with experiences from both national and local politics. As a complement to enhancing understanding for how violence impacts political representation, I use PTU data to investigate the frequency of some of the impacts among the general population of Swedish politicians. The quantitative analyses generate additional knowledge about the extent and distribution of the gendered representational costs first identified in qualitative data. Combining semi-structured interviews with survey data thus provides in-depth understanding for the processes at play as well as their propagation.

The aim of the interviews was to understand how politicians experience the impact of violence on their roles as politicians. To carve out what the impacts are for various aspects of political representation as well as the processes underpinning these impacts, the interviews aimed to understand how politicians think, feel and act in relation to violence in politics. In this respect, seeing the world through the eyes of the respondents is an advantage of interviews compared to quantitative data (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). For example, I was interested in whether violence against themselves or others made politicians consider leaving politics, and what might affect their reasons for remaining in politics despite worrying about violence. Likewise, I was interested in how violence might silence debates. Interviews illuminate how violence can affect how politicians feel and think about raising certain topics, and the processes of deciding whether, when and how to raise topics likely to attract violence. Qualitative descriptions of these topics are complemented by quantitative demonstrations of the share of politicians that have considered leaving politics and avoided debating certain issues in public.

An advantage of semi-structured interviews for this study is that elites in general prefer being able to explain and qualify their point of view rather than “being put in the straightjacket of close-ended questions” (Aberbach and Rockman 2002). Hence, a better rapport between the researcher and elite respondents such as politicians is obtained by allowing them to expand on their perspectives. Moreover, semi-structured interviews, by design, allow for unexpected themes to emerge. It was through asking about how violence was handled by their parties that I realized that violence is something politicians rarely discuss in-depth with colleagues. While some previous research recognizes the stigma attached to sexualized and gender-denigrating violence against politicians, no previous research considers the possibility of stigma attached to experiencing forms of violence that are not in themselves
stigmatic. The mere exposure to violence as a politician risks them appearing as weak in front of competitors (e.g. their party colleagues) and hence becomes a potential vulnerability. Such a mechanism would have been difficult to discover without talking to politicians, or allowing them to elaborate freely on various aspects of violence in politics.

The interviews were coded and analysed in NVivo in order to systematize the material and most crucially, be able to systematically compare women’s and men’s perspectives on violence in politics. This was useful for identifying how norms for politicians’ behaviour are shaped by violence against politicians and how those norms relate to gender norms. This way, I was able to triangulate gendered norms fomented by violence by accounting for both women’s and men’s perceptions of how violence affects them. This sometimes revealed that violence had a fundamentally differential impact on women and men based on their gender. In other instances, comparing women’s and men’s descriptions revealed that they experienced highly similar reactions to violence, but that more women than men mentioned some of those reactions. In those cases, quantitative survey data served an important complementary purpose of investigating whether there was a systematically higher frequency of certain consequences, although equal in character, for women than men.

**Ethical Considerations**

Violence can be considered a sensitive topic, warranting specific ethical reflection and consideration. Methodologies for how to research experiences of violence, including gender-based violence, emphasise the importance of not pressuring respondents into discussing personal experiences that they would rather keep to themselves, or retraumatizing respondents by prompting them to reflect on painful experiences (see e.g. Campbell, Goodman-Williams, and Javorka 2019). On the other hand, including the perspectives of victims/survivors of violence in research ensures that they are granted the opportunity to tell their stories. Excluding victims/survivors in violence research on account of ethics by effect censors their experiences and voices in knowledge production (Skjelsbæk 2018).

Using the PTU survey data for statistical analyses obtained ethical permission from the Uppsala Ethical Review Board. Ethical considerations related to the survey data include not reporting findings in a way that make respondents identifiable. The survey experiment carried out in the US obtained ethical permission from Michigan State University’s IRB. The survey experiment carried out in Sweden went through LORE’s review process, and no ethical permission was considered necessary since I did not collect personal information of a sensitive nature.\(^5\) Informed consent to participate in the survey-

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\(^5\) For example, the Swedish survey does not collect information on respondents’ political opinions.
based studies was obtained by the survey distributors (i.e. Brå, Lucid, and LORE).

The interviews followed widely accepted ethical methods for interviews outlined in e.g. the Swedish Research Council’s guidelines for research ethics (The Swedish Research Council 2017). For most of the interviews I obtained informed consent in writing. A few interviews were carried out by phone or Skype, where consent was given verbally. The informed consent included information about the fact that participation was voluntary, that respondents could chose to end the interview at any time without providing an explanation, and that the respondent could decline answering any question without explaining. I always gave this information verbally, and many respondents commented that they had been interviewed for research purposes before and were familiar with what it entails. No respondents ended the interview early or indicated a problem with carrying out the interview. Many asked to see the results and expressed an interest for the research project.

A key feature of this thesis is that it focuses on politicians, which are elites. The power asymmetries between me as a junior researcher and them as elites is not to their disadvantage (Aberbach and Rockman 2002; Harvey 2011). The risk that they would experience pressures to participate in the research project are hence comparatively small. Furthermore, they are used to being interviewed, many of them have received media training, and they are highly skilled at avoiding answering questions that they do not wish to answer. This reduces the risk of pressuring respondents into discussing personally distressing experiences against their wishes.

During the interviews, I used careful judgement to ensure that the interview situation and the questions asked did not make respondents uncomfortable. Interviewees seldom became emotional or showed signs of discomfort during interviews. Without hesitating, they answered questions about whether people had been unnecessarily aggressive towards them or tried to scare them in their political roles. Respondents often gave examples of such occasions without being prompted to do so. Although experiencing violence as a politician can make individuals highly distressed, it is a fairly common experience. At the same time as affirming that violence against politicians is unacceptable, interviewees described seeing it as a part of political life. Even the ones who had not personally experienced violence would describe adjusting their behaviour to the risk of violence through e.g. what they posted on social media or how they made plans around releasing controversial statements. This indicates that violence is perceived as a common and integral part of being a politician in Sweden. While violence can entail a stigma in relation to colleagues and voters (as I demonstrate in Essay III), it does not seem to be seen as something shameful to talk about in a context where they remain anonymous. The same

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6 The last few interviews were carried out during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.
respondents who described unwillingness about going public with their violence exposure did not seem to have any problems describing their experiences of violence to a researcher for the purpose of an academic study where they will not be identifiable. The former is, by some, seen as something that potentially can be negative for their political career and give them a negative public image. Their anonymity in this research project was hence crucial in order to decrease the potential risk of stigma related to violence exposure. Furthermore, I did not ask respondents to elaborate in detail about violent incidents. I sometimes asked superficial questions about the incidents themselves for context (e.g. “Without going into details, can you describe what kind of message that was?”), but the questions mainly focused on the consequences of violence against politicians rather than the violence itself. Respondents would often describe events even if I did not ask them to do so (e.g. as a reply to a question of whether someone had at any point tried to scare them), indicating that they saw it as important to tell their stories. On a few occasions, respondents would emphasise the necessity of omitting certain details of their accounts in publications to ensure their anonymity. This again underscores that fact that they seemed to consider it important to contribute with detailed and accurate knowledge on the topic, at the same time as they considered it important not to reveal their individual experiences to the general public. Many emphasized the urgency of the topic, in order to increase support for those who are badly affected.

Presenting the Essays

**Essay I: Do women pay a higher price for power? Gender bias in political violence in Sweden**

Guided by the research question of if, and if so under what conditions, women politicians experience violence more frequently than men, the first essay analyses empirical patterns of violence against women and men politicians. As such, it takes the research field forward from previous studies which had largely focused on conceptualizing the issue theoretically (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020; Krook 2017; Krook and Sanín 2016b, 2016a, 2020), or studied gender differences in electoral violence against political candidates using fairly small samples (Bjarnegård 2018). It provides a large-N analysis of gender differences in exposure to violence among elected politicians in general and across the political hierarchy.

The essay investigates VAWIP theory on gendered violence against women politicians by focusing on the frequency of violence women politicians experience. By comparing women’s frequency of violence exposure to men’s, the essay aims to establish empirically whether women face specific gendered risks in politics. Building on theory on negative attitudes to agentic
women, I furthermore hypothesise that women will experience increasingly more violence relative to men the higher the hierarchical position in politics.

Using survey data on municipal politicians in three waves, I find that women only experience marginally more violence than men at the rank-and-file level. At higher hierarchical levels, women experience significantly more violence than men, and women mayors experience far more violence than any other politician. I furthermore demonstrate that self-reported visibility in the media is much more strongly associated with experiencing violence for women than men. Power and visibility constitute increased risks of violence for all politicians, but more dramatically so for women. The essay hence demonstrates that women politicians do face specific gendered risks of violence in politics, and that this is particularly the case for agentic women. An important contribution of the essay is that it establishes that violence becomes increasingly gendered with the political hierarchy, rather than constituting a constantly gendered risk.

Descriptive statistics indicate that there is no significant difference in the types of perpetrators that target women and men: both report “aggravated citizen” or “querulant” as being behind the majority of violent events. Women as well as men also report threats and attacks on social media as the by far most common type of violence they experience in Swedish politics, followed by other forms of psychological rather than physical violence. Aggregating the violent incidents into five forms of violence, I find that men experience more property damage while women experience more threats and harassment.

Further analyses demonstrate that women’s and men’s sectorial distribution across municipal committees and women’s and men’s substantive representation of minorities is not what drives the gender gap in violence. Nor are there any differences in politicians’ or political leaders’ personalities across genders. Rather than the gender gap in violence stemming from how women and men differ as politicians, there are strong indicators that it stems from perpetrators’ bias towards targeting women. Moreover, I show that other identities such as politicians’ age and their ethnic backgrounds do not drive the gender gap in violence against Swedish politicians in general or Swedish mayors in particular. Perpetrators appear to actively select women targets to a higher degree than men, independent of other characteristics of politicians.

**Essay II: Explaining citizen hostility against women political leaders: A survey experiment in the US and Sweden**

The second essay also draws on political psychology literature on biased attitudes to women politicians. It investigates how such attitudes can drive violence against women in politics causally. Based on literature on gendered attitudes to women political leaders, I formulate two main theoretical mechanisms that can explain why women politicians experience more hostility than men from constituents. The first would suggest that the stereotypically nurturing female leadership style leads constituents to prefer to direct their
complaints to women politicians over men (the *contact preferences hypothesis*). The second theoretical explanation for how gendered attitudes can drive hostility against women politicians focuses on hostile attitudes to agentic women. It suggests that hostile attitudes to women political leaders lead constituents to have more lenient attitudes to hostility directed at them (the *hostility lenience hypothesis*).

The two hypotheses are tested in a survey experiment disseminated in the US and Sweden, which randomizes the sex of a mayor and committee chair behind a controversial policy. I find that when the mayor is a woman, respondents are much more likely to report that they would contact the mayor regarding the policy in question. When the school board chair is a woman, respondents are much more likely to report that they would contact the chair. This finding offers support for the contact preferences hypothesis. Constituents are indeed more likely to direct complaints to women than men in politics, which increases the likelihood of hostile contacts from constituents to women representatives. I find that respondents are no more likely to find a feigned hostile email sent to the mayor to be acceptable or understandable when sent to a woman mayor than when the recipient is a man mayor. These results fail to support the hostility lenience hypothesis. Constituents in general do not seem to have more lenient attitudes towards hostility against women than men politicians.

Finding support for the hypothesis that citizens prefer to direct complaints to women political leaders over men as a possible driver behind gendered political violence marks a novel contribution. According to VAWIP theory, women politicians face specific risks of violence due to perpetrators’ biased attitudes (Krook and Sanín 2020). This study contributes new insights into how such biases may manifest. Even in the context of an aggrieved citizen – as opposed to e.g. an overtly misogynistic online activist – and hostility with non-sexist language, gendered double standards operate subtly to increase women politicians’ vulnerability to violence. This can guide future research to look beyond directly misogynistic attitudes and widen the scope for which gendered norms and attitudes that contribute to understanding why citizens treat women hostilely. Moreover, finding that people in general do not think that hostile treatment of women politicians is more tolerable than hostile treatment of men counterparts is in a way good news for gender equality. This result suggests that the gender gap in hostile citizen contacts does not seem to be driven by people instinctively accepting that women are treated badly. Nevertheless, the higher number of aggrieved contacts directed at women politicians suggests a higher likelihood among the general population to treat women politicians hostilely even if they do not see hostility against them as justified per se.

The essay also makes a methodological contribution. I design the first experiment aimed at causally testing possible drivers of gendered political violence. I develop a method for operationalizing and testing gendered attitudes
to contacting and harassing political leaders that plausibly may explain why women are targeted with more violence from constituents than men as politicians. The methods developed in the study can be used for testing attitudes to hostility against politicians in other contexts and among other groups of respondents.

Moreover, descriptive statistics indicate that attitudes are not very lenient towards treating any politician, regardless of their gender, hostily. Coupled with the fact that many Swedish politicians are harassed by citizens every year, this suggests that the propensity for harassment of politicians may not be equally distributed across the population. While ordinary citizens are the most common perpetrators of violence against politicians in Sweden, all citizens likely do not have an equal propensity for this type of harassment. In addition to analysing the two hypotheses, the essay provides descriptive statistics on the segment of the population that is most likely to have accepting attitudes towards hostility against politicians. The “profiles” of the people that are the most accepting of hostility against politicians look the same regardless of whether the target of hostility is a woman or a man. Notwithstanding, future studies can use that description to test gendered attitudes to hostility against politicians in a more narrowly defined group of respondents.

**Essay III: The gendered representational costs of violence against politicians**

Building on representation theory, Essay III investigates the gendered representational costs of violence against politicians. While previous research has investigated impacts of violence against politicians on political ambition, much has remained unknown regarding the consequences of this violence for political representation more broadly. I first develop a typology of costs for descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation. I then demonstrate empirically, primarily based on 46 interviews with elected women and men politicians, in what ways gendered costs manifest in each of the three dimensions of political representation as well as in what ways women and men representatives are similarly affected by violence.

I find that violence has subtle yet wide-ranging impacts on the three dimensions of gendered representation. In terms of descriptive representation, more women than men consider leaving politics as a result of violence, although very few actually leave. Notably, violence shapes informal ideal characteristics for political candidates. Toughness and indifference emerge as highly valuable characteristics for political candidates in relation to the occurrence of violence against politicians. This increases the cognitive dissonance between stereotypes about women and ideal political candidates, which implies that women can be seen as less suitable for politics than men. Hence, while it does not make women (or men) leave politics on a large scale, violence impedes women’s descriptive representation by prescribing male coded ideals such as toughness as vital for political representatives.
Furthermore, violence circumscribes women’s and feminist substantive representation in several ways. While neither women nor men politicians let violence influence how they vote in e.g. roll call votes, violence hampers policy processes by making politicians refrain from debating certain contentious issues publicly. In particular, respondents mention migration and feminist issues. Women’s as well as men’s substantive representation of women and feminism is hence delimited by violence. Some policy areas, particularly issues that are important to women and ethnic minorities, risk being forgotten as politicians refrain from debating them. As a consequence, the policy areas might be given lesser priority, less demand for action from the public, and less development. Women representatives are also silenced more than men by violence, making them under-utilized in opinion and policy formation processes. Some policy areas, such as migration, risk becoming increasingly male dominated as women seem to experience significantly more violence than men when raising such issues publicly and refrain from doing so as a consequence. In addition, politicians’ time and energy get consumed by handling violence, and this applies to more women than men. This also threatens the quality of their policy related work, as they are compelled to re-direct their time from policy work to violence mitigation.

Last, women’s symbolic representation is harmed by violence coercing them to decrease their visibility to the citizenry. Women and men seem to decrease their direct availability to constituents to an equal measure as a result of violence. However, the public sees political women less than they otherwise would as a result of more women than men selecting out of public visibility as a consequence of violence. For example, violence pressures women to adjust their campaigning activities so that they are less visible during election campaigns, and several high-profile political women such as MPs (but no men) have opted out of social media entirely as a consequence of violence. While I do not capture citizens’ responses to women’s level of visibility, previous literature demonstrates that symbolic representation hinges on it (Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020). This makes women’s decreased presence in media outlets, social media, and publicly visible roles a plausibly severe consequence of violence for symbolic representation.

Several of the consequences appear in narratives by both women and men politicians, such as avoiding debating certain issues publicly, considering leaving politics, decreasing the opportunities for citizens to interact with them directly, and having to devote time and energy to handling violence rather than their core policy related activities. This indicates that women and men are in many ways affected similarly by violence in politics. While similar in character, many consequences are not similar in frequency, however. Considering leaving politics, silencing oneself in public debates, and devoting excessive time to violence is far more common for women representatives than men. There are also directly gendered implications of some of the phenomena that manifest among both women and men politicians. The emphasis on male
coded candidate ideals and the silencing of feminist perspectives, while experienced by both women and men, is specifically detrimental to women’s political representation.

Synthesized Contributions of the Essays: How is Violence Against Politicians Gendered, and How is it Not?

The theoretical and empirical contributions of this thesis constitute new knowledge on in what ways violence against politicians is (and is not) gendered. The next few sections describe the synthesized contributions of the thesis in the areas of gendered causes, exposure, and consequences related to violence against politicians. Gender similarities as well as differences are highlighted in each area. I describe the thesis’ theoretical contributions to GPV/NAWIP literature as well as to other strands of literature that the thesis draws on and has implications for.

Gendered Causes: Gender Norms as Drivers of Violence against Politicians

Women and men in Swedish politics share several risk factors for violence. Holding a prominent position in terms of power and visibility (Essay I), and certain policy areas and topics (Essay III) attract violence against both women and men. Whether directed at women or men, hostility against politicians spearheading a controversial policy is seen as somewhat understandable and not deserving of sanctions (Essay II). Neither women nor men perceive partisan ideology to be motivating attacks on them to a substantial degree, and politically motivated extremists such as left- or right-wing extremists, anti-feminist groups, and environmental/animal right groups are not perceived as being behind the bulk of attacks (Essay I).

The thesis also identifies important gender patterns, however, in the drivers of violence against politicians. Advancing women’s rights or feminist agendas substantively attracts violence, and this is the clearest example of an explicitly gendered driver of violence found in this thesis (Essay III). Furthermore, the thesis finds two streams of gender norms that function as implicitly gendered drivers of violence against politicians. First, citizens have a marked preference for directing messages regarding policy grievances to women politicians (Essay II). While hostility as a reaction to unpopular policy is perceived as equally (un)acceptable against both women and men, the likelihood is still higher that women will receive a hostile message since citizens prefer to vent their grievances to women representatives. An implication is that even though women and men mention the same issues (e.g. migration and feminism) as policy areas that attract excessive violence when raised in public debate (Essay III),
men likely experience less violence in relation to these issues than women do. Second, the excessive targeting of agentic women politicians suggests that hostile attitudes to women political leaders motivates a significant share of violence against politicians in Sweden (Essay I). Perpetrators are more prone to select women than equally positioned men (e.g. in terms of their party identity, issue profile, and degree of social media activity) as targets. It is unlikely that this is entirely driven by constituents’ propensity to direct policy complaints to women over men, and likely also indicates that perpetrators are influenced by negative attitudes to women political leaders.

One contribution of the thesis relates to how to understand a gendered motive for political violence. Theory based on narratives from other contexts suggests that a different set of perpetrators, e.g. political colleagues and family members might be salient in attacks on political women as opposed to political opponents and rivals which dominate as perpetrators of attacks on men (Bardall 2011, 2013; Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020; Krook and Sanín 2016a, 2016b). Contrariwise, a gender analysis of violence against Swedish politicians suggests that the same types of perpetrators dominate in violence against women and men politicians. Ordinary citizens are perceived by politicians to be behind the majority of attacks on women as well as men (Essay I), and the same political and socio-demographic characteristics are associated with accepting hostility against women and men politicians (Essay II). These similarities between women and men suggest that gendered motives in the form of explicit resistance to women’s political participation may not be widespread in Swedish politics. The presence of other types of perpetrators such as private acquaintances or party colleagues might have suggested a proliferation of negative attitudes to women participating in politics. The absence of such discrepancies in the perpetrators of violence against Swedish women and men politicians instead indicates that women’s political participation as such is generally accepted. However, that does not mean that women participate in politics on the same terms as men. Politics is more violent for women than men, and the thesis suggests that women are targeted for distinct, gendered reasons compared to men (Essay I; Essay II). The thesis emphasises the importance of a broad understanding for what constitutes a gendered driver behind violence against politicians. Rather than a desire to erase women from politics, perpetrators of gender-motivated violence against politicians in Sweden seem to be influenced by gendered attitudes regarding what women should do and how they should act as politicians. Compared to contexts where leading political actors explicitly state that women do not belong in politics, and perpetrators overtly refer to anti-feminist agendas in their attacks on women in politics, gendered drivers behind political violence are often more subtle in Sweden. The thesis finds that gender role violations as well as demands on a stereotypically female leadership style put women politicians at a risk of violence (Essay I; Essay II). Additionally, the thesis finds that gendered
motives can appear in attacks on men as well when they act substantively on behalf of women and gender equality (Essay III).

In relation to implicit gendered drivers of violence against politicians, the findings of the thesis have implications for role congruity theory. The thesis suggests that role congruity theory is highly relevant for understanding the context of violence against politicians in Sweden. Holding power and being visible can be understood as agentic behaviour, and such behaviour demonstrably entails higher risks of violence for women than men in Swedish politics (Essay I). Citizens’ differential treatment of women and men politicians in Sweden, where dealing with citizens’ complaints is demanded to a higher degree from women representatives, further aligns with role congruity theory (Essay II). It suggests that citizens expect a communal – rather than agentic – leadership style from women. While role congruity theory primarily concerns workplace and recruitment discrimination (Eagly and Karau 2002; Rudman and Glick 1999), this thesis shows that violations of gendered leadership ideals have more severely hostile implications than normally considered in role congruity literature. At agentic leadership positions, the discrimination women experience goes beyond aversions against recruiting them, sabotaging and feelings of dislike (Brescoll, Okimoto, and Vial 2018; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010; Rudman and Fairchild 2004; Williams and Tiedens 2016). The thesis shows that women are also violently harassed at such positions, to a substantially higher degree than men counterparts.

Another implication for role congruity theory is the application to elected politicians. Typically applied in literature on candidate recruitment, including numerous studies on gendered political recruitment and vote choice (e.g. Bauer 2017; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010; Schneider, Bos, and DiFilippo 2022), role congruity theory predicts that men will be preferred over women for agentic leadership positions. The thesis contributes to this literature by highlighting the discriminatory treatment of women relative to men already recruited to such positions (see also Baumann, Bäck, and Davidsson 2019 and Yildirim, Kocapinar, and Ecevit 2021 for discrimination in re-nomination and cabinet recruitment among elected politicians). Women’s perceived lack of congruence with the typical agentic leadership role does not only lead to them being less preferred for political leadership, as demonstrated by previous research. It also entails that they face more harassment once present at political leadership positions. The thesis hence illustrates how role congruity theory goes beyond explaining preferences for men for leadership positions, and can be extended to studying the treatment of women at leadership positions.

Combining theory on role congruity with literature on sexism marks another theoretical contribution of the thesis. This combination has been fruitful for theorizing on which aspects of gendered leadership norms that increase the risks of violence for women. The thesis demonstrates the usefulness of theory on ambivalent sexism (e.g. Glick and Fiske 1996; Glick and Raberg 2018), misogyny (Manne 2017), and backlash (e.g. Mansbridge and Shames 2008;
Rudman et al. 2012; Sanbonmatsu 2008) for understanding violence against Swedish politicians. As suggested by these theories, the risks of violence are not equally distributed among women politicians but particularly pertain to those who challenge status quo. Male political dominance is challenged descriptively, substantively, and symbolically by politicians advocating feminism, women holding high leadership positions and being active and visible in political debate. Such aspects of women’s political representation are associated with experiencing more political violence (Essay I; Essay III). At the same time, this thesis uses a combination of sexism theory and role congruity theory to demonstrate that it is not only gender role transgressions and gender hierarchy violations that entail gendered risks of violence. Conforming to gender role expectations as a woman also implies risks. The finding that citizens prefer to direct their (sometimes hostile) complaints to women (Essay II) is likely explained by gender norms outlined in theory on communal leadership and benevolent sexism. This underscores the conclusion from Essay I that it is not what women do as policymakers that makes perpetrators select them as targets to a higher degree than men counterparts. Women probably cannot avoid experiencing violence by exercising political leadership in a stereotypically feminine way. The explanation for why women face more violence in politics than men is about the perpetrators rather than about the women targets of violence. More specifically, gendered attitudes and norms among perpetrators seem to play a vital role. Combining these theories marks a novel contribution of this thesis which expands knowledge on how gender norms put political women at risk of violence.

The results of essays I and II may appear somewhat contradictory. According to Essay I, agentic women – i.e. leaders and high-profile politicians – experience more violence relative to comparable men. The finding that people do not hold more lenient attitudes toward hostility directed at agentic women than agentic men (i.e. mayors) (Essay II) can appear puzzling against this backdrop. Do the findings of Essay II invalidate Essay I? Should we take it that people in fact do not treat women politicians more hostilely than men? I would argue that the answer is no, for one main reason. Essay II is not designed to investigate whether constituents act more hostilely against women than men, but why they do so. In order to detect the frequency of actual behaviour, data that records people’s behaviour is arguably preferable over survey experiments. For example, politicians’ self-reported exposure on violence from constituents, records of constituents’ online interactions with politicians, or other data on how constituents behave likely provide the most accurate estimates of to what extent constituents are violent against politicians. In Essay II I aim to get at attitudes, which is something behavioural data is less apt at capturing. Whereas Essay I investigates politicians’ exposure to violence (from constituents, amongst other actors), the survey experiment in Essay II is designed to assess attitudinal drivers behind violence. It is also important to keep in mind that Essay II investigates a specific subset of violence against
politicians: a case of harassment with a non-gendered character from a citizen spurred by a specific, unpopular decision. Investigations of other types of violence are needed in order to account for what explains the entirety of women political leaders’ higher exposure to violence than male counterparts. Essay II finds that this type of violence is not seen as more acceptable against women than men mayors, but it also finds that this type of violence is still more likely to be directed at women than men due to constituents’ contact preferences. Hence, Essay II nuances the theory that Essay I builds on. Essay I builds on hostile reactions to norm-breaking agentic women as a theoretical foundation for why we should expect more violence against women than men in politics. Essay II adds that benevolent sexism and expectations on a communal leadership style also may drive some of the violence against women in politics. These findings confirm VAWIP theory by empirically showing that women are uniquely targeted with violence because of their gender. They also expand knowledge by showing that this is not only the case in instances of violence that are motivated by misogyny, but that there are additional risks of violence in politics that uniquely apply to women. Sexism is multi-faceted and even seemingly benevolent expressions of gendered attitudes can have violent implications for women.

**Gendered Exposure: The Frequency, Forms and Character of Violence Targeting Women and Men Politicians**

As described in the previous section, gender differences in the frequency of violence against Swedish politicians are primarily found among politicians holding prominent positions. The impact of rising in the political hierarchy has not been given much attention in previous literature, and the thesis is hence able to provide new knowledge regarding the fact that the heightened risks women face primarily manifest among the most powerful segment of politicians. Such a conclusion would have been difficult to draw based on an analytical strategy solely including women’s perspectives (see also Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020; Bjarnegård 2018; Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022).

Furthermore, there are striking similarities in what women and men politicians’ violence exposure consists of in the Swedish case, i.e. the forms of violence they experience. While men experience slightly more property damage than women, and women experience slightly more threats and harassment than men, the similarities across genders dominate. Both women and men experience mostly psychological violence, and primarily online (Essay I). In line with VAWIP/GPV theory, I find that women in Swedish politics are targeted in a variety of ways and their experiences of violence in politics is best understood by using a conceptualization of violence that comprises several forms of physical and psychological violence (Bjarnegård 2018; Krook and Sanín 2016a). This is not unique to women. Like women, men are also attacked in multiple different ways in Swedish politics. Consequently, differences in the
forms of violence waged on women and men does not seem to be a principal component of gender differences in Swedish politicians’ violence exposure. A conclusion from this thesis with implications for GPV/VAWIP literature is that perpetrators rely on psychological rather than physical resources in attacks against women and men politicians alike in the Swedish case.

Even though I do not directly measure the character of violence against politicians in this thesis, previous research coupled with some of the thesis’ findings make it possible to speculate on possible gender dimensions in this regard. Essay I provides evidence of negative attitudes to agentic women as a driver of (some of the) gender-based violence against them. Previous research would suggest that violence against political women rooted in hostile gendered attitudes often consists of attacks with a sexist character (Krook and Sanín 2020). For example, while I identify online harassment as the most common form of violence for both women and men, their experiences of online attacks may still differ significantly. Other research indicates that Swedish women politicians experience far more gender denigrating and sexualised harassment online than men do (Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2021). Descriptions of how attacks on women politicians affect women’s political representation negatively often mention sexist and gender-denigrating language in these attacks (Essay III). Essay II furthermore suggests that even violence against politicians that is not gendered or hate-based in its character, and clearly spurred by policy-based personal grievances as opposed to general antipathy towards the target, can be more prevalent for women than men. Together, the essays would hence suggest that the violence directed at women politicians in Sweden likely consists of a mix of violence of different characters, some of it with sexist content and some of it without such content. Furthermore, it is also likely that the additional violence women experience relative to men as political leaders consists of both violence with and without a gendered character. Distinguishing between the frequency, forms, and character of politicians’ violence exposure, as this thesis’ analytical framework does, is useful for understanding how these attributes may be mutually independent and make political violence gendered in distinct ways.

Gendered Consequences: How Political Violence Disrupts Gendered Political Representation

The focus of this thesis is on violence against political representatives, and the most important consequences of this phenomenon arguably relate to political representation. The thesis contributes to representation research by demonstrating theoretically and empirically how violence against political representatives can hamper representation at large, and women’s representation in particular. Further, I argue that violence disrupts gendered political representation by several distinct means and mechanisms. My findings stress the importance of specifying various and mutually independent representational costs, as well as considering the possibility of different pathways leading to each one.
Many infringements on political representation are mentioned and described similarly by both women and men. For example, women as well as men representatives are silenced in debates by violence, mention the same topics as the ones they refrain from debating publicly, consider it stigmatizing (under some circumstances) to be a victim of political violence, and decrease their visibility and availability to constituents due to violence (Essay III). These disruptions of political representation from violence against politicians have not been theorized in previous representation research, nor have their gender dimensions been considered in a comprehensive framework. For some negative consequences, such as when it comes to politicians restricting their availability to constituents, there do not appear to be any gender differences in how politicians’ representation is affected by violence. Other negative consequences for political representation, such as politicians restricting their participation in public debates on account of violence, are present among both women and men but much more common for women than men representatives. In such cases, violence does not have a qualitatively different impact on women and men politicians but has a gendered impact for political representation at the group level. In other cases, violence has a directly gendered impact stemming from conscious targeting of feminist perspectives. Encompassing and comparing women’s and men’s experiences hence enables the thesis to identify how harms to representation may be gendered (or not) in several different ways.

The implications of violence against politicians for gender diversity in descriptive representation are analysed in Essay III. To sum up, these implications emanate from the gendered frequency and character of violence as well as the mere presence of violence in politics. First, the gendered frequency and character of violence makes women consider leaving politics to a higher extent than men – including women who have not themselves experienced violence but perceive violence as targeting women particularly intensively. Second, independent of a gendered frequency of violence, the mere occurrence of violence against politicians foments male coded candidate ideals as highly desirable for politicians. The fact that violence reinforces male coded traits as desirable for political candidates underscores that violence can be detrimental for women’s representation through various mechanisms. The enforcement of such ideals makes politics less welcoming to women even were it not for the fact that women leaders experience more political violence than men. Although women as well as men perceive toughness and indifference in relation to violence as important for political representatives, these ideals have different implications for women and men. Just like previous studies have demonstrated that the mere presence of a perceived threat against one’s nation increases the demand for men political leaders (Barnes and O’Brien 2018; Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2011; Rudman et al. 2012), this thesis shows that the mere presence of violence in politics fuels the perceived importance of characteristics for which masculinity often functions as a cognitive
shorthand. Whereas men are assumed to possess the qualities of bravery and stoic ism by nature, women are assumed to be emotional and weak. Since violence increases the perceived importance of strong candidates who are not easily scared or get emotionally affected by violence, it increases the burden of doubt placed on women to prove their belonging in politics (see Alexander and Andersen 1993; Eagly et al. 2020; Eagly and Karau 2002; Hentschel, Heilman, and Peus 2019; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Murray 2015; Puwar 2004). This harm to women’s representation hence does not hinge on a gendered frequency, form or character of violence, or on gendered drivers of violence. The mere fact that politicians face violence in Sweden puts women at a political disadvantage in this respect, and threatens gender equality in descriptive representation.\footnote{On a side note, it is also worth mentioning other potential negative implications of the emphasis on toughness, risk acceptance and stoic ism for political candidates. In addition to increasing barriers for women, this norm risks making it harder to recruit a wider range of personalities to political offices. It is not necessarily a good thing to have an over-representation of risk accepting political representatives as this may imply accepting significant risks against the citizenry.}

The thesis furthermore investigates how violence harms women and men politicians’ possibilities for substantive political work that represents the interests of the represented at large, and women and feminism in particular. I find that this aspect of representation is mainly affected by gendered motives (i.e. explicit drivers) and a gendered frequency of violence against politicians. Independent of a gendered frequency, violence silences feminist perspectives of both women and men (Essay III). In this respect, the explicitly gendered driver of targeting feminist voices is the force that disrupts gendered representation, even if both women and men who advance feminist agendas experience violence as frequently. The substantive representation of women and feminism would likely be threatened even if there was no gendered frequency in violence against politicians. On the other hand, the gendered frequency of violence also hinders women’s substantive representation independent of explicitly gendered drivers. Demonstrated by Essay II as well as Essay III, violence leads to women having less time available for their core policymaking roles as politicians than men and having to perform their representative work under a higher mental pressure. This gender inequality in the conditions for politicians’ work does not depend on violence being explicitly motivated by misogyny. The simple fact that men face less violence than women means that they can both feel more comfortable proposing controversial policy without fearing hostility (Essay II), and spend more time on policy related work (Essay III). The gendered frequency of violence thus impedes not only the specific substantive representation of women’s interests or feminism, but women’s substantive policy work at large.

Last, gendered symbolic representation is mainly harmed by the gendered frequency and character of violence. Women select out of visibility due to the massiveness of violence and its sexist character facing themselves and other
women when they are publicly visible (Essay III). Men do not face the same amount or character of violence as a “cost” for their visibility (Essay I), and are also less likely to select out of visibility due to violence. As a consequence, citizens get to see fewer political women than they otherwise would and women’s presence in politics is hindered from communicating to the citizenry that politics is not a predominantly male game but that it is for everyone.

Theoretical Implications from the Swedish Case

Sweden can be considered a least likely case for violence as an impediment to gender equal political representation due to its numerically high gender equality at key political positions. Against this backdrop, the thesis suggests that as violence against politicians threatens democracy by hampering political equality in Sweden, it likely does so in other contexts as well. The fact that violence targets more women than men political leaders in a country with among the most gender equal numerical representation in the world, and that women’s representation is more severely affected (descriptively, substantively and symbolically) than men’s, implies that political violence is an intrinsically gendered problem not just in Sweden but globally.

The findings of the thesis as a whole suggest that gender norms influence the perpetration as well as consequences of violence against politicians, and that such norms prevail despite Sweden’s longstanding comparatively high political gender equality. Institutional theory explains how norms do not automatically change with the configuration of formal institutions (Franceschet 2017; Mahoney and Thelen 2009; Waylen 2017). Measures taken to re-configure the gender distribution of political representatives in Sweden have demonstrably not eradicated gendered attitudes to politics or negative treatment of women political representatives. Perpetrators seem to be tangibly shaped by gendered attitudes to women and politics in Sweden, which can be seen as unexpected in a country featuring such a high share of women politicians and political leaders. Similarly, gendered consequences of violence against politicians might be less expected in such a context. For example, role congruity theory predicts that prejudice will diminish and the conditions for female leadership will improve as women make up a higher share of organizations and leadership roles (Eagly and Karau 2002). Contrary to such predictions, gender norms that disadvantage women seem to continue to shape Swedish politics. According to this thesis, women representatives’ room of manoeuvre is limited by violence more than men’s even in this least likely case (Essay III). This again underscores that unequal norms may prevail despite equality stipulations such as the wide support for gender equality across Swedish political parties and the voluntary adoption of gender quotas among a majority of Swedish parties. Just as in other countries, the stark historical male dominance in Swedish politics has fomented an association between politics and maleness (see Koenig et al. 2011). The thesis suggests that citizens continue to be influenced by stereotypes about women politicians and that such stereotypes make
them more prone to treat women political leaders violently (Essay I, Essay II). The thesis furthermore suggests that violence implicitly reinforces associations between masculinity and leadership among politicians themselves. Presenting as feminine or demonstrating stereotypically feminine traits such as emotionality or fear is seen as a weakness for politicians brought to the fore by political violence (Essay III). Substantively representing women’s interests, gender equality or feminism is still considered controversial by some in the Swedish context, and is met with violence (Essay III). Feminist political scientists have long argued that gender norms are ingrained in political institutions (Lovenduski 2005, 2014). This thesis suggests that violence against politicians follows the logic of institutionalized political gender norms.

**Concluding Discussion on the Thesis’ Synthesized Contributions**

Violations against politicians is a severe phenomenon with implications for the core of representative democracy. Any undue infringement on processes of representation poses a risk to the functioning of the democratic system. This thesis demonstrates that Swedish politicians experience psychological violence as a normalized part of their roles: the majority of Swedish higher-level politicians such as MPs or municipal executives experience violence each year.

The thesis also demonstrates that violence in politics is something that women and men Swedish politicians to a large extent experience similarly. Violence against Swedish politicians is not gendered in the sense that women experience violence from other perpetrators or of a different form than men, that they frequently experience violence where perpetrators overtly express misogynist ideas, or that it makes women politicians drop out on a large scale. A significant factor that makes this violence gendered, however, is its frequency. Consequently, even though violence against women and men alike is mostly psychological, mostly comes from citizens, and mostly takes place on social media, it is a problem that concerns women more than men. Furthermore, the thesis demonstrates that women sometimes face violence for distinct reasons that do not apply to men: due to gender norms, perpetrators are biased towards targeting women. Attacks that explicitly allude to hatred of women or overt resistance to women’s political participation may not be as common against women in Swedish politics as in other contexts. Nevertheless, a significant share of the violence women in Swedish politics experience seems to be rooted in gender bias. Moreover, even though several infringements on politicians’ representation activities and career decisions apply to both women and men, women’s representation is more affected than men’s by violence. Men in Swedish politics can relate to many of the impacts that violence has on women representatives’ representation, because many men experience similar consequences. Women do not uniquely decrease their participation in public debates, consider leaving politics, or decrease their availability to constituents because of violence against Swedish politicians. Men do as well.
Nevertheless, several key infringements on representation are significantly more present in the group of women representatives and women’s representation suffers more than men’s as a result. For example, the thesis simultaneously demonstrates that women and men politicians reason similarly in terms of how violence can make them withdraw from certain policy debates, and that such consequences of violence are far more prevalent for women than men. In addition, there are some consequences of violence against politicians that specifically apply to gender diversity in representation (male coded candidate ideals and a specific targeting of feminist substantive representation).

All of this means that violence is a reality of politics to a higher degree for women than men. When planning for a political career, considering whether to take on leadership roles, and deciding what issues to focus on, women do not do this on equal terms as men. Violence is a more relevant consideration in such decisions for women politicians. This thesis hence finds that while women and men in Swedish politics share many experiences related to what increases the risk of being targeted with violence, the kind of violence they experience, and the consequences that violence has for political representation, violence against politicians is a gendered problem. To a greater extent than for men, women’s political representation is conditioned by violence.

A main contribution this thesis makes to the research field on GPV/VAWIP is studying various aspects of how violence against politicians can be gendered in the same project. The thesis contributes to research that outlines the ways in which political violence can be gendered and how to determine to what extent it is (such as Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020; Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2021; Krook and Sanín 2020). In relation to this debate, I propose that more nuances and distinctions are necessary than considered in previous literature, and define three dimensions with seven attributes that can make violence against politicians gendered. There are several examples in the thesis on how different attributes co-occur and likely strengthen each other. For example, gendered frequencies and drivers often interplay. Nevertheless, the thesis effectively demonstrates that it is not necessary for violence to be gendered in a specific attribute (or in every attribute) for it to constitute a problem for gender equality in politics. For instance, Essay II shows how violence that is not ostensibly motivated by resentment of women’s political participation or carried out in a way that makes gender salient can target women more than men. Essay III demonstrates that violence can impede women’s representation more than men’s independent of a gendered frequency of political violence. Agreeing with Bardall et al. (2020), the importance of specifying how political violence is (and is not) gendered is further highlighted by this thesis.

The research strategy of this thesis makes precision possible in specifying how violence against politicians is gendered, and how it perpetuates gender inequalities that privilege men and disadvantage women. It is strategically designed in order to compare the experiences of women and men politicians that
are as comparable as possible, and complements qualitative with quantitative evidence. The thesis suggests that future GPV/VAWIP research can make use of similar strategies in order to understand gender patterns in the causes, exposure and consequences related to violence against politicians.

Lastly, a few reflections are warranted regarding how severe the problem of violence against politicians is in Sweden. From Essay I we learn that most of the violence waged on Swedish politicians consists of events that are not directly harming the targets’ physical integrity. Furthermore, from Essay III we learn that few Swedish politicians drop out due to violence or let violence affect how they vote in e.g. rollcalls. As long as politicians are not physically harmed, elections are held without direct disruptions, and formal governmental and parliamentary procedures remain intact, is psychological violence against politicians harmful for democracy? Questioning whether violence is a problem simply based on such a limited set of indicators would, however, be misguided. A better understanding for the severity of the problem is provided by Essay III. The third essay outlines the concrete costs for representative democracy that violence against Swedish politicians lead to, and how, precisely, this violence skews gendered representation. Finding that violence threatens women’s descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation in one of the most egalitarian countries worldwide underscores the seriousness of psychological violence against politicians. Consequently, Essay III accentuates the importance of Essay I and Essay II. Together, these essays show that women not only face worse conditions as political representatives, but that these conditions also have tangible impacts in restricting women’s representation and jeopardizing the democratic principle of equality of political participation. The political influence and scope of action awarded to political representatives is not solely determined by election results. Violence ensures that representatives’ gender grants them less voice, influence, visibility, and perceived legitimacy than they would otherwise enjoy.

**Policy Implications**

In short, this thesis establishes that violence against politicians in Sweden is harmful to democracy, and constitutes a source of gendered inequality in politics. Consequently, policy on violence against politicians should be based on these premises.

Policy actors need to be aware of the particular risks facing women in politics. Women representatives experience more violence than men, and risk factors that in one way are universal (rising in the political hierarchy, raising controversial topics, and being visible to the general public) are more acute for women than men. Women’s representation is disturbed more than men’s by violence, which implies that violence particularly threatens democratic equality. This suggests that security work can play a key role for equalizing
the conditions for political representation. Efforts to prevent and mitigate violence against politicians need to be gender sensitive, take gender differences in this area as their starting point, and make sure efforts minimize gender inequalities rather than leaving them unchanged or increasing them.

Any policy on protecting politicians from violence ultimately ought to be aimed at protecting their ability to function as political representatives free from undue interventions. Functioning as a political representative requires more than a protected physical integrity. Threats against politicians’ mental state and emotional well-being should also be taken seriously.

The thesis demonstrates the urgency of psychological violence against politicians. In the Swedish context, about 3% of Swedish politicians experience physical violence in a year. Psychological violence is significantly more common and targets at least 25% of Swedish politicians each year, with violence taking place online being the most common. It is hence primarily psychological violence which has impacts that are harmful for democracy in Sweden. Psychological violence against Swedish politicians leads to silenced debates and decreased freedoms for representatives in deciding what issues to raise and how to use their time. Policy development is risked by hindering certain issues and perspectives from being debated publicly, and representatives are hindered from forwarding the agendas their voters have elected them to represent. The thesis hence demonstrates that policies on violence against politicians should incorporate multi-dimensional conceptualizations of violence.

One concrete implication of this thesis is that policy attention is needed to how citizen contacts are channelled towards women and men representatives. Making sure women politicians do not receive an excessive share of complaints, including hostile complaints, can ensure better equality for political representation.

Moreover, functioning as a political representative entails descriptive, substantive as well as symbolic representation. For instance, politicians decreasing their visibility in order to be able to remain in politics is harmful for democratic representation as it hinders their voices from being heard as well as their capacity to send symbolic cues about who politics is for and enhancing citizens’ connection with politics. Protecting democracy from violence against politicians hence needs to be based on analysis of how violence threatens various aspects of political representation.

Reflections for a Future Research Agenda

The thesis demonstrates the importance of the topic of gendered political violence, and contributes extensive insight into how violence against politicians is gendered in its causes, exposure, and consequences. Yet, many pressing research questions in the field of gender and violence against politicians remain in need of further investigation. Below, I outline suggestions for how to
continue research on this topic, and some of the questions that need more scholarly attention.

A main shortcoming of the research field on violence against politicians in general and gendered violence against politicians in particular is that virtually all studies measure violence differently. This severely hampers comparative research and increases the difficulty of drawing conclusions based on multiple studies or meta analyses. A task for comparative politics scholarship is to develop measures of violence against politicians that can be used across contexts, and to collect data from a variety of contexts. More knowledge is needed on how, precisely, violence against politicians differs as well as commonalities between e.g. peaceful and post-conflict contexts, and how gender might shape these experiences differently depending on contextual factors.

In order to be theoretically valid and encompass all relevant experiences, measures of violence exposure among politicians should ideally include a variety of violent acts. Having comparable data across countries on politicians’ exposure to various forms of physical and psychological violence would make it possible to make highly interesting analyses that would enhance understanding for politicians’ experiences of violence. For example, this would allow scholars to investigate to what extent different forms of violence covary, possibly in gendered ways, across contexts. It would also be most beneficial for such data to include measures of the character of violence. This would allow researchers to go beyond investigating gender patterns in the forms of violence and for example understand more about whether violence is gendered in its character in offline environments to the same extent as it has been demonstrated to be on Twitter. Understanding if certain environments, such as Twitter, foster particularly gendered attacks on politicians would be an important contribution.

The PTU data used for Essay I in this thesis is so far the most comprehensive data available on violence against politicians, and captures a broad range of physical and psychological violence. Collections of similar data in other contexts would be highly beneficial for comparative research. However, the PTU survey provides limited information on the character of violence, which is something that ideally could be included in future iterations.

Another ideal form of data would be individual level panel data. Such data could enable analyses of for example the causal effect of rising in the power hierarchy or changing policy portfolios for the risk of experiencing violence as a politician, and what the impact is for women compared to men.

Comparative gender politics research is needed on all aspects of how violence against politicians can be gendered. For example, the same gendered frequency of violence against politicians does not necessarily entail that consequences will be gendered in the same way as they are in Sweden. Such comparisons could illuminate new insights regarding the wider institutional environment where politicians experience violence.
An important task for future research is to do more intersectionality analyses. This would include more studies along the lines of Kuperberg’s (2021, 2023) comparisons of women of various ethnical identities in order to conceptualize intersectional gendered experiences of violence. It would also include more largescale quantitative analyses of how for example racial identities or age might matter differently for women and men. This thesis shows that ethnicity and age do not seem to affect the gender gap in violence exposure among Swedish politicians. However, more research is needed on how such intersectional identities might affect the form, character, and consequences of violence against politicians, as well as on how intersectional identities affect the frequency of violence in other contexts than the Swedish one.

A fruitful combination of findings from Essay I and Essay III as a basis for further research would be investigating how different forms of violence can lead to different representational costs. Essay I identifies psychological violence as dominating in frequency, and property damage, threats and harassment as sub-categories of violence where gender differences are particularly pronounced. The importance of further details regarding the form and character of attacks are highlighted in previous research (Bardall 2013; Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2021; Ward and McLoughlin 2020). Building on this knowledge, future research could use the framework for analysing gendered representational costs of political violence developed in Essay III to connect specific forms (and characters) of violence to specific outcomes.

The findings of the thesis related to the consequences that violence against politicians has for political representation, and women’s representation in particular, point to the importance of future research on violence mitigation and prevention efforts. It is vital to establish as much knowledge as possible about the manifestations of a problem in order to be able to adequately address it. This thesis provides a thorough account of the problem of violence in Swedish politics and gendered violence against politicians. A natural next step is finding out more about how to minimize the problem. Collaborations with policy actors – governmental or non-governmental – in order to design and evaluate interventions would make an important contribution in this respect. Another key area for future research concerns analysing how political parties and parliaments tackle the issue of violence against politicians, divide and share responsibilities between them, and effective ways of integrating a gender perspective in their efforts.
References


A doctoral dissertation from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Uppsala University, is usually a summary of a number of papers. A few copies of the complete dissertation are kept at major Swedish research libraries, while the summary alone is distributed internationally through the series Digital Comprehensive Summaries of Uppsala Dissertations from the Faculty of Social Sciences. (Prior to January, 2005, the series was published under the title “Comprehensive Summaries of Uppsala Dissertations from the Faculty of Social Sciences”.)