A Cost, A Tweet, A Backlash

Conceptualizing the gendered violence targeting Swedish female members of parliament in relation to the election of 2022

Jessika Larsson

Abstract

An inclusive democracy is of essence to combat the changes that the world is going through seen in the trend of increasing female participation. However, attitudes towards women in the public sphere seems not as progressive as one might believe which is an understudied topic. The aim of this thesis is to examine this development through the phenomena *violence against women in politics* in the context of Sweden and the election of 2022. The theoretical framework consists of research on political gendered violence and its connection with social media and semiotic violence. The methodology uses a feminist critical discourse analysis focusing on gendered silences in experiences of violence. The material consists of semi-structured interviews of female parliamentarians' experiences and reflections on being a woman in Swedish parliament together with violence. Relevant findings of this thesis indicate that gendered political violence manifest in Sweden foremost in the common sense of gendered structures and incoherence. This is especially visible if being a young woman or having another ethnic background. Hence, influences how serious the abuse is perceived among women themselves and the public. Which leads to women being silenced in topics like gender equality, climate, migration, and crime, especially on online forums.

Key words: **VAWIP, ICT's, Online abuse, feminism, Semiotic violence**
Words: 19 362

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

MP-Member of parliament
ICT's-Information and Communication Technologies
VAWIP-Violence against women in politics
BRÅ-Brottsförebyggande rådet/crime preventing council
IPU-Inter Parliamentary Union
CDA-Critical Discourse Analysis

Table of contents

1.Introduction

The world has seen an increase in the global average of female members of parliament with above 26 % 2022 (IPU 2022). In contrast with Sweden's general representation of women in politics that has been high, with around 46% of parliament after the general election 2022(Ibid). Sweden has a so called "state feminism" that seeks to link political influence with policies aiming to eliminating gender differences. That among other things leading to higher incentives for female representation (Aalberg and Strömbäck 2011). The female political participation in politics is important due to that few parliaments in the world have gender parity. The world that is going into the direction of a more volatile political context, and the emergence of online technologies leading to involvement, but also to an increase in populism and gendered nationalism globally. The argued backlash against democracy and feminism can be seen in contrast to the increase of a more inclusive political representation. This contrast can therefore relate to the phenomena *violence against women in politics* or VAWIP for short. VAWIP is reckoned to be a category of political and electoral violence and is argued to be a global problem that is used to undermine democracy together with women's political participation, and an understudied topic (Krook 2017, 2020, 2022; Krook and Sanín 2019). It is of importance for political science in relation to democracy and concerning the shift of politics being a male power hegemony to include women and a broader variety of people. For society it is essential since resulting in barriers for women to participate in politics on the same terms as men. This thesis will focus on semiotic violence (Krook 2022) which is a type of violence seeking to delegitimize women in politics, among others. The point being that conservative rhetoric on advances in female representation could have a possible connection with the increase of gender-based violence, and violence against women in politics, especially in a post-pandemic world (see IPU., 2016:2018, Agius et al.,2020).

Set into context, Sweden is a country with a consolidated democracy with a proportional system and is considered one of the most relatively gender-equal societies in the world. In Sweden, it is reasonable to believe that female politicians should have strong support and that the gendered political violence should not be present here. Nevertheless, a new report by Håkansson and SNS lift the gendered nature of political violence in Swedish context (Lindvall 2022). As of the Swedish election of 2022, there was an intense election campaign with questions that have been considered as "male" in traditional media

(Sydsvenskan 2022). Questions focusing on crime and punishment, migration, and the rising electricity prices, hence, election result between the sexes varied immensely with the male population being more right-wing and female more left (Mellgren 2022).

*"[Regarding political climate]" We have **pseudo debates**, parallel tracks, **or different paths, worlds**...I believe that we are going to see more of that this term of office where you try to **"set the picture" of someone else** [The political opponent] (R9)"*

This thesis is taking inspiration from the recent events in Almedalen where a female medical doctor from the regions and municipalities of Sweden was killed by a potentially right-wing extremist. The deed was later suggested to be targeting the former Swedish Centre Party leader, Annie Lööf (Wikén 2022). These examples further elucidate that the phenomena of VAWIP in the context of the recent elections in Sweden. There has been a global highlighting of VAWIP based on the narrative that engaging in politics is 'dirty business' (Krook 2017, p 78). Which have resulted in national movements in Germany, UK, Ukraine, India, the US and so on, highlighting the transnational feature together with a global #NotTheCost of being in politics campaign (Di Mesco and Brechenmacher 2020).

1.1 Aim and research question

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how gendered political violence is manifested in Sweden, set into the global context of a suggested backlash of feminism. The ambition is to conduct a theory developing study by extending the framework of semiotic violence (Krook 2022). By widening the concept of violence in relation to the discourse on female experiences, one can gain more in-depth understanding of the concept. As well as the connection with online technologies and media and digging into the contemporary political dynamics in Sweden in an election context. This is based on prior research indicating an increased prevalence of political violence in times a of high-stake election (Birch et al., 2020). This leads up to the research question:

In what ways does gendered political violence manifest itself in Sweden with focus on the general election of 2022 and online targeting of female parliamentarians?

2.Context

2.1 Data on political violence in Sweden

BRÅ (crime preventing council) report of 2021 of security for politicians in Sweden.

The report by BRÅ states that a politician's safety is important from a democracy perspective and with the mission to map out how it is changing over time to prevent insecurity (BRÅ 2021, p 16-17). The recent report was released 2021 consisting of compiled survey data of safety for politicians in municipalities, regions, and parliament. The experience of insecurity has increased from 38 % in 2012 to 47 % in 2020 and in the years of 2018 and 2020 more women than men stated that they have experienced violent behavior (Ibid, p 37). The data shows that younger politicians experience more abuse together with politicians with another background than Swedish. Considering the increase in insecurity since 2012 with an increase during the election year of 2018 one could assume an increase in connection with the election of 2022.

The experience of insecurity is higher among the parliamentary politicians than the municipality ones, higher in the bigger cities and higher if participating on social media and are known by the public (Ibid, p 8). Among the social media users, a higher percentage of the women stated that they felt exposed to violent behavior (Ibid p 58, 59). The perpetrator is generally not known to the politician and is usually an angry citizen, often middle aged, and male. Almost half of the cases relate to an external group, often stated as right-wing extremism (Ibid, p 9). The motives that were brought up were primarily affect the decision-making process and secondarily to show discontent (Ibid p, 82). Consequences of this behavior are argued to be that politicians choose not to engage in certain topics based on insecurity. These questions can be racism, integration, and migration as well as Covid-19 and vaccination, feminism and equality, climate or closing of specific schools or similar (Ibid, p 11, 12). In addition, only 16 % of the violent situations have been reported, men reporting stating it as not being a big thing and women claiming that as something one must count with when being a politician (Ibid, p 13).

2.2 Context of the online media platform Twitter

Many of the female Swedish MPs interviewed provided experiences and as discourses indicating that the climate on Twitter is intense and hostile. It was also stated that there is an increase in social media usage during elections as well as common in research on gendered online abuse (Bolin and Falasca 2019; Rheault et al. 2019).

When looking into previous research on the public online sphere, there is focus on the platform of Twitter due to the compact character of text format and popularity when commenting on politics. Research in other countries for example the UK and the US has used an analysis of Tweets tagging relevant names and accounts (Ward and McLouglin 2020) as well as one study in Sweden (Erikson et al., 2021). Thus, Petrarcha et al,. (2019) analyze the impact on social media as a campaigning strategy and state that Twitter is popular in Sweden and that people are using it frequently. In contrast to Bolin and Falasca(2019) whom indicates that Twitter use among citizen are on decrease. Despite that there has been increased attention the popularity of using social media for political purposes as the MPs are freer to write about their thoughts and connect to the people without the centralized party message (Ibid).

One main takeaway for this thesis is that because of the gendered features of the platform, usage between the sexes could be affected in their political life. Rheault et al., (2019) state that being politically active is without any exception nowadays often linked to online violence. One example lifted are that with Hillary Clinton received twice as many abusive tweets then Berny Sanders 2016 (Ibid). As Gorrell et al., (2020) studying this online abuse in a UK context highlighted that some factors are highlighted as the politicians becoming more targeted for online abuse and have effects on wiliness to become re-elected. Others are related to attention and visibility of the politician together as the number of abusive Tweets increase with the number of overall Tweets. Some personal characteristics are crucial in noting potential risks for abuse as sexism and racism (Ibid).

For providing context, some of the most visible female MPs as Annie Lööf(C) and Ebba Bush(KD) and Märta Stenevi(MP) have received different comments on Twitter in time of the election.[1] These sample of comments could consist of references to become silent,

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[1] For example: [Own translation of sample of Tweets from accounts before the election]
"That was not what she said, trash, listen you hysterical aunt "-Ebba Bush
"We will introduce new abortion laws where redhaired could be aborted after the age of 20"-Annie Lööf

incompetence or labels of being hysterical and a witch. Slurs that have been considered gendered harassments on Twitter (eg Gorrell et al.2020). This picture will be set in contrast with political discourse of female MP's stories and experiences in section 6.

3. Literature review

3. 1 General on gender and politics

There is argued still a *gender lacuna* in political science based on the attitude that gender is not political seeing it as a subfield that has grown in importance but remains separated (Baldez 2010). Which Pateman (1988) highlight with her sexual contract about society stating the patriarchal order. Together with Pateman we have Phillips(2012) on political representation which connects with the increase of females and minorities in politics. Phillips uses Hanna Pitkin notion of on the difference between symbolic, numeric, and substantive representation, relating representation with political influence.

The political institution as gendered has importance on the persistence of gender structures, as the binaries create the "logic" and climate of the institution (Krook and Mackay 2011, p 5-6). Gendered organization structure was contextualized in a Swedish context by Acker (1990). She claims in similar order that the embodied nature organizations are underpinned by the logic of sex difference. By acknowledging organizations as gender neutral, the norm is then the hegemonic masculinity which women's bodies must adapt to. The goal with a feminist agenda is then argued to create a more inclusive democracy by acknowledging the sex difference logic of organization.

Furthermore, turning to the concept of political violence towards female politicians and females in the political public arena around the world is something that has increased in scientific research in recent years (see Bardall et al., 2020; Krook 2020). The acronym of

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"*One should not comment of people's appearance not politicians either. But with her stinging eyes and jarring voice she reminds of another apocalyptic minister, let it be from the Middle Ages Florens: Savaranarola. He was finished as known hanged and burned. Let this not be her destiny*" -Märta Stenevi

VAWE(violence against women in elections) or VAWIP(violence against women in politics) was firstly coined by Gabrielle Bardall(2011) in a paper by The International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Bardall draws on feminist security studies as well as theory of domestic abuse. Reflecting on that the standard definition of electoral violence in reference to the *male* is not valid when examining *women* in electoral processes. The area of gender and electoral and political violence belongs somewhere between conflict studies and political science which have resulted in being *an overlooked* field, Balder argues (2011, p 6-8).

The phenomenon of VAWIP has been studied in countries in transition towards democracy or post-war. But in recent years organizations as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) have done a mapping of this phenomenon in a global and European context. Results shows that it is prevalent in Europe and in a wider scale (IPU 2016; 2018). The report from 2016 from IPU state that sexist remarks and intimidation are common as well as providing one example of the prevalence of threaten the children of the female parliamentarians (IPU 2016, p 4). They also lift factors which increase the risk of abuse as being member of the opposition, being young or belonging to an ethnic minority (IPU 2018). There is also an argument that online media can be seen as an 'instrument' of the VAWIP phenomenon (Bardall 2013). VAWIP can here be defined as "*being targeted by violence based on gender with the aim of undermining and repressing political participation"* (IPU 2016 p 2). There are some scholars that research about this topic, one being Mona Lena Krook who connect the phenomena to the backlash for women's rights Krook(2017, 2020, 2022). It is Krook's framework that later is going to be discussed in section 6.

Many suggest that a backlash has something to do with the gendered nationalism that is on the rise globally, seeking to control the female body and keeping the "natural" patriarchal position (Agius et al., 2020). The liberal political system in a western world context have experienced recent backlash in terms of democracy development. Agius et al., (2020) refers to this phenomenon as a populistic male nostalgia and the threat which stops everything from becoming "great again" are argued to be migration and the feminist (Ibid p 439). Increased focus on border control as well as male values is highlighted together with misogyny and climate denial (Ibid p 439).

Piscopo and Walsh (2020) connect in similar ways as Agius et al., (2020) with the importance of perception in the ontological insecurity of the progression of female and the global agenda. Resulting in the increase of harassment and resistance of women and the LGBTQA+ community (Ibid, p 265, 266). To connect further with the framework of VAWIP Gentry (2022) uses the critical terrorism framework and discusses the notion of that the way

we usually define terrorism are leaving out violence against women and women as political beings. Which highly connects with the political violence and has a foundation in the patriarchal system. The rhetoric of populism and gendered nationalism could therefore arguable be seen as an explanation to the phenomena of the increase of gender-based violence, and violence against women in politics as well as feminist activists, especially in a post-pandemic world.

These findings are in line with the recent article by Off et al., (2022) indicating that the perceived increase in competition between women and men in relatively gender equal societies results in more sexist attitude for young men. The reason suggested being that younger men think more about career opportunities and would be more sensitive to perceived competition with women as it could be perceived as a threat (Off et al., 2022, p 6). These findings could be worrisome as they suggest that young men are prone to regard advances in women's rights as threatening in times of insecurity and economic instability.

This dynamic is as previously discussed are not reckoned to fit in to a Swedish context, which have led to that research on this topic are in its infancy as will be highlighted in the next section.

3.2 Sweden

In Sweden there have been some studies on this topic in very recent years. Håkansson (2021) wrote *Do women pay a higher price for power? Gender Bias in political violence in Sweden*. The main findings were that the cost of being a female top politician in media was higher when comparing with male counterparts an depended on political hierarchy. Håkansson does also highlight the intersecting dimension of violence depending on things such as age and together with ethnic background and high media presence. These findings are highlighted in another study of Erikson et al (2021) where the main finding was that the online abuse toward politicians has a gender dimension. According to their survey the men experienced more general online abuse, but the women got more gendered abuse. Another finding was that men are more inclined to want to leave politics if being abused, but the women already consider this abuse as a cost of being in politics. Also, the women are inclined to not speak up about sensitive topics such as feminism, migration and integration which was another finding based on the abuse. Erikson and Josefsson(2021) have researched on the intersection of gender and

age in the Swedish parliament and suggest that the there is a tendency of not perceiving young female MPs as legitimate as the male counterpart or an older woman or man (Ibid, p 91). The young(er) women that have high political positions seems to have this "thick-skin" and are not wanting to quit in any higher ratio. Thus, research suggest that women in parliament often work harder and are relatively more competent than their male counterpart but are being perceived as less competent and legitimate based on gender norms and structure (Ibid p 96).

There seems that institutionalized structures in the Swedish parliament withhold gendered attitudes, even though we have had relatively equal political representation in Sweden for many decades (Erikson and Josefsson 2021). Furthermore, a newly released report by Håkansson together with SNS (2022) indicate that the general negative attitudes towards female politicians and especially high up in the political ladder could be based on gender stereotypes of females in powerful positions. This is argued to connect to the sociological term of "agentic attributes" which are given traits that can relate to the gender binaries of women and men. Example of agentic attributes can be showing authority and confidence and if a female does the same, one seeks to dislike the same behavioral traits (Ibid, p 2).

4.Theoretical framework

4.1Reflections on ontology and epistemology

To place this thesis in relation to other research one must reflect on the necessary evil of ontological and epistemological foundations (March et al., 2018, p 177). The ontology refers to if it exists an objective reality and the epistemological relates to how can we get knowledge about this (Ibid, p 180). This thesis takes on an anti-foundationalist perspective where our reality is mutuality socially constructed. Here the societal order of the patriarchy is going to influence every discussion made in the paper and lay foundation for its analyses. Furthermore, the power of language and its constitution of reality is crucial and the emphasis on the importance of the creation of power in the society. Since poststructuralism clarify the ontology and epistemology as mutually constituted and not separated, one must be considerate. This thesis recognizes institutions and the role and realness of for example, democracy, parliament, and media. Yet, problematize that these are not fixed entities but constructed by us as people together in collective understanding.

4.1.2 Positionality on feminism

This thesis is using a "feminist lens" within the epistemological foundation of poststructuralism. But how to approach feminism? I am going to use Lazar's (2005, p 16) on how to approach a feminist perspective in relation to critical discourse analysis. Lazar argues in line with contemporary feminists on those general liberal concepts on "freedom" and "universality" are not enough. Thus, it is always going to be generalized from the male, as in line with argumentation of Acker (1990). Assuming every woman as equal which arguably is not being true when accounting the intersectional logic of Crenshaw (1989) and Kuperberg(2018; 2021). The solution in how to approach gender in accordance with Lazar (2005, p 16) are to think in broader in terms of freedom, equality, and universality. As the way life differs within gendered structures that still prevailing, even if the conditions such as education and labor force is fulfilled. This set of thoughts can be argued to be problematic

because rights is something that can never be taken for granted and arguably feminism is still of importance (Lazar 2005, p 17-18; Off et al., 2022). As in the case of abortion laws seen in today's Hungary, Poland, and the recent overturned law in the constitution with Roe v Wade in the United States leading to more states have incentives of voting for restrictive or non-existing abortion laws (Cursino 2022; Mccammon 2022; Tayler 2022). Thus, capitalist patriarchal power dynamics are important and valid in constituting our interpretation of reality which will be visible throughout the study.

4.2 Theory and relevant concepts

4.2.1 A continuum on the concept of violence

Violence is one of these words that everyone knows what it means but when start to discuss it, no one does. As in other concepts of democracy, freedom, and justice. This thesis is trying to elucidate gendered political violence, so how can violence be defined? What do we mean with violence? Is there any difference on online and offline violence? What is sexual violence or gender-based violence or violence against women in politics?

In a post structuralist agenda this thesis take inspiration from a broader definition of violence. Hence taking the concept of violence in according to (de Haan 2008, p 27-40) as *essentially contested*. De Haan(2008) argues that violence is both under and overly defined and that it is a slippery term in which we always add our socially constructed perception of what violence is. The concept of violence is *universally* seen as an act of force of foremost physical character that is a criminal deed. One argument being not to regard violence as an act of being or not being but rather to be placed in a continuum of acts and deeds. Whereas the more minimalistic definitions focus only on direct acts in a foremost physical character but structural violence as *racism* and *sexism* is being left out of that definition. As well as the use of symbolic violence "of domination" which is according to de Haan is not seen as violence but in the perception of this thesis will carefully add the symbolic violence of domination is reference to patriarchy which we are a part of (Ibid, p 31).

Also, when justifying on the use of the term one should see to the "cost and benefits" since there are always two sides in using the concept in a certain way. And for this thesis a broader definition is more in line with the feminist aim.

Moving on as advocating on a continuum of violence the rest of the theoretical framework is going to regard the various aspects as categories in a continuum of violence, see figure 1 below[2]. In the section 4.2.3 another discussion is going to be done on the different types of gendered political violence.
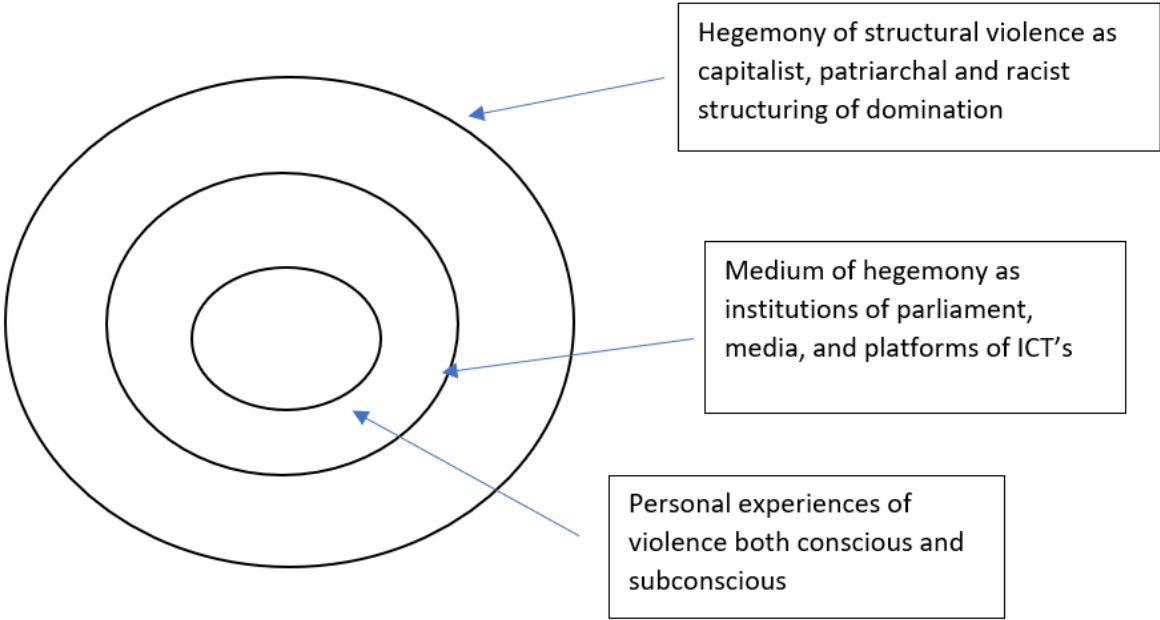
Figure 1: A typology on the different levels in a spectrum of (gendered) violence

Text in figure:
- Hegemony of structural violence as capitalist, patriarchal and racist structuring of domination
- Medium of hegemony as institutions of parliament, media, and platforms of ICT's
- Personal experiences of violence both conscious and subconscious

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[2] Figure 1 made by the author on a reflection on the levels of violence

4.2.2 Political and electoral violence

The field of violence in politics is highly colored of a minimalistic form of violence and originates from contentious politics as the politics of terrorism and social movements (Della Porta 1995). Della Porta defines political violence as a process of physical efforts to impose damage to a political opponent (Ibid, p 2). We have political violence, and we have the subtype *electoral violence* which is violence in election processes. Birch et al., (2020) discusses that violence and elections often interact and that it depends on the powerplay among political players. The main point of violence in time of elections is to influence the election outcome and to exclude candidates from either participating in campaigns or restrict information flow (2020, p 4, 7). Birch et al., (2020) discuss how the election system matters and suggest that a majoritarian system which has the characteristics of the "all or nothing" creates incentives of violence. In times where there is increased polarization and "high stake election" the violence increases as well (Ibid).

To understand gender and politics and the reason for the VAWIP phenomena, some theory on gendered nationalism is going to be presented below together with a feminist critique on political violence.

4.2.3 Framework of gendered political violence

If applying the further extension of the political violence framework to include gender-based violence several scholars (see Krook 2022, Bardall et al., 2020; Krook and Sanín 2019; Schneider and Carroll 2020) claims the need for a more maximalist definition.

A framework which combines a gender perspective in politics and on political violence is needed. This thesis is going to examine this but firstly one need to define as Bardall et al., (2020) have done and to make distinction in how political violence can be gendered and how it is different from both ordinary political violence and gender-based violence. Political violence is gendered when we have gendered motives and/or forms and/or impacts. Forms

meaning the gendered experience of political violence as women usually are targeted indirectly and sexually and men more direct. Motives regarding the power of hegemony of patriarchy and the use of violence to keeping the power. Impacts are referring to the gendered narratives that seeks to delegitimize and possible exclude women in politics. Thus, if it is not a gendered form, motive or impact it is political violence without a gendered character.

In addition to the dimensions on violence Schneider and Carroll (2020) try to define the difference between political violence, electoral violence, and gender-based violence. When adding the gender dimension as firstly done by Bardall(2011) psychological violence and harassment and economic violence is of importance they argue. The aim of electoral violence is to create *fear* of engaging in the elections and in politics, which when adding female candidates in politics or female voters the intersection between these two creates a growing alarming democracy problem (Schneider and Carroll 2020). In their essay they first define the "conventional" approach" to political violence as violence which makes a clear cut of political violence and election violence and gendered political violence. But the alternative approach is the one that can be regarded as useful. Were we have different circles of violence that intersect rather than are separated see figure 2 below. A gendered motivation to the violence can be tactical as to change the outcome of the election (Ibid, p 182-184), as stated above of Bardall et al., (2020).
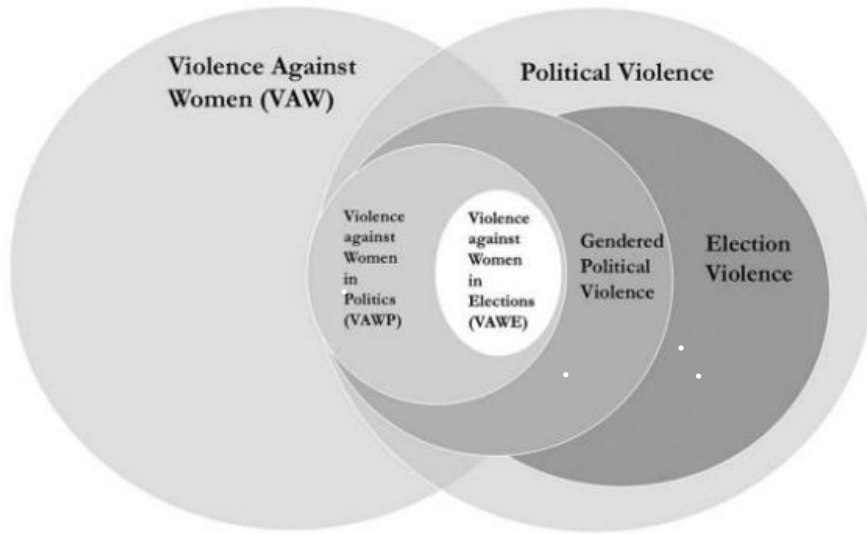
Figure 2: Alternative approach
See Schneider and Carroll (2020, p 181)

Going beyond the concept, and into the technicalities. Gender scholars have extended the concept of violence to not only something that can be physical or psychological, but also adding aspects that relate to gender-based violence as sexual and economic violence(Krook and Sanín 2019). They do also add a fifth category called "semiotic violence" which relates to portrayal of women and the ways that seek to delegitimize women in politics (Ibid). See the different types in the figure 3 below.
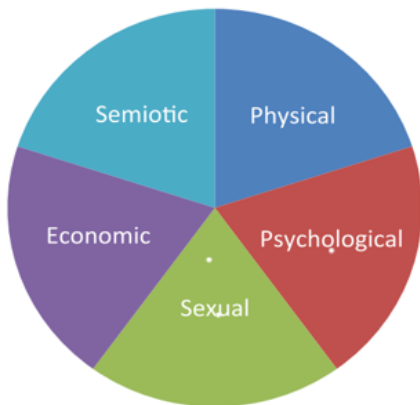
Figure 3: Types of violence against women in politics
Krook and Sanín (2019, p 743)

Semiotic violence is a suggested fifth type of violence against women and is used in research on women in politics and going to be the focus of this thesis. It is a wider "continuum of violent acts", as argued by Krook (2022, p 372) to limit political participation. The modes of semiotic violence being *rendering women invisible* and *rendering women incompetent*. The dimension of *rendering women invisible* focuses more on the removal of female bodies, voices, or places and in that way minimized the political participation. The most prominent feature seen in the experiences of the female MPs are the removing women from places as digital platforms. Other categories under rendering invisible can be the lacking portrayal of political women, mistaken women as not being political and women in politics getting lesser speaker time. The other dimension of *rendering women as incompetent* shows in different, often implicit ways on how gendered phrases and words that are being used in a patronizing way. The categories of this mode, which include showing that political women are emotional and delusional, denying the competence of these women, sexually objectifying, and denying that political women are real women. The dimension of incompetence relates therefore to women being "unfit" of leading and being in politics (Krook 2022, p 383).

The gendered dynamic can be connected to the concept of *sexism* and *ambivalent sexism*. In the article from 1996 Glick and Fiske wrote that sexism can be reckoned as a form of prejudice which take multifaceted forms. They argue on that there are two types of sexism, the hostile one which are classic *sexism* as in male dominance and emphasising on the natural differences of the sexes and the division of labour. Whereas the *benevolent sexism* is more subtle sexist stereotypes which can be reckoned as positive which help to maintain the gendered structure of power. One example of being called "cute" in professional life can be argued as something positive but help to delegitimate the female (Glick and Fiske 1996, p 492). The ambivalence is the inherent two-sided structure that the attitude of be sexist as women as less knowing, but one should also care for the women (Ibid p 494). The ambivalence is clear when women breaking the traditional roles and being a woman that seeks to challenge the power dynamic, the article mentions being a feminist, and in the case of this thesis, being a woman in parliament.

Krook(2022) claims that the aspect of semiotic violence has increased with the rise of new media This are as well discussed of Bardall(2013) whereas media can be used as a tool to combat VAWIP but also since the presence of more focus on attributes such as pictures and morale.

4.2.4 Study gendered political violence intersectionality

When discussing gender in political science one concept that is vital especially in this study is the concept of *Intersectionality*. Intersectionality refers to the interaction of different identities one can have as a person in relation to a social power hierarchy. The concept was coined on the intersection between sex and race in the United States by Kimberley Crenshaw(1989). Crenshaw formulates a black feminist critique of feminism being the intersection of categories of identity instead of separate entities. She does this with examples from courts where because of race not being recognized as female. She emphasis on that discrimination can tend in different ways depending on your intersection identity leading to "double-discrimination" (Ibid, p 149). Crenshaw(1989) claims that the structure of patriarchy is in reference to the white women which makes it different when being translated to women from the non-normative group (Ibid, p 156). In relation to violence against women in politics (Kuperberg 2018, 2021) have discussed the importance on the intersectionality in the topic of VAWIP.

Kuperberg (2018) examining intersecting identities in reference to the online violence of female EU parliamentarians. She also emphasizes the importance of context and states that males in accordance with intersectionality also have different experiences of political violence. Kuperberg extends on Crenshaw's concept and mentions that there are several other intersectional features in VAWIP. Some of them are what party affiliation you have based on the more left and rightist parties being more targeted as something threatening the status quo. So, the different motives can differ intersectionality as well as the different forms of targeting depending on identity. A portrait of these could entail that the more different aspects you have the violence would increase. Kuperberg (2021) discusses furthermore on the intersection perspective in the VAWIP area in UK politics using MPs with an in intersection of race and gender.

In this thesis the intersecting identities of interest would be the intersection of gender, ethnic identities, sexual identities, and age. That together with other factors such as media visibility proven in recent research that these are factors that have an impact on the political cost of being in politics. But considering the lack of multiple identities in Swedish

parliament, the most prominent intersecting identities would be being women and being young, as well as other ethnic background in one case.

Henceforth, violence is not just physical force but could today work in more subtle ways in times of peace, which will be further contextualized in the realm of media and ICT's in the next section.

4.2.5 Media and the contemporary world of ICT's

One way this inherently gendered reality is shown are in the notion of media, which is highly important in our society where ICT's are a prolongment of our bodies and the distinction between the technical media and reality becomes blurred. Many scholars have lifted a warning sign for digitals medium as a platform for violence. Henry and Powell (2015, p 760) are reflecting on the intersection of violence and digital technologies. As they are an important feature of contemporary daily life for many people, especially among the younger population and can be described in relation to Habermas as "frontier of new democracy" (Ibid, p 761). Gaplin(2021) agrees with that but state that social media is one type of digital public sphere that is gendered. Gablin argues that the same inequalities that are seen offline can be found online and that is exist "strategic silences" on social media that seeks to silence marginalized groups (Ibid, p 162).

The ways in which digital media are gendered being that it is mostly men that are owning the big media companies and knowledge about technology and technological platforms have gendered norms (Henry and Powell 2015, p 762). There are some reasons for why cyberspace is easy to be a platform of violence and malicious treatment in comparison to offline violence. Some aspects are that the perpetrator can attack many at the same time, under transnational conditions and at the same time remaining anonym (Ibid, p 764). The attacks can consist of examples like sexualized pictures which have gendered forms and impacts. The digital platform is firstly seen as a medium of being "disembodied" but where in the examples of the interviewees in section 6, the female body is never disembodied but are consistently becoming sexualized in both online and offline spaces. This connection of gendered technologies is an under researched topic Henry and Powell argues.

"The harm of online abuse, on the surface, may appear "disembodied," but in actual fact, the effects can be both psychical and physical (Henry and Powell 2015, p 768)"

Hence, there is an argued structural gendered misrepresentation in traditional media (Haraldsson and Wängerud 2019). Media is going to present our reality but highlight certain aspects which make the gender aspect even more present in media (Ibid, p 524). This effect creates a climate that leads to less engagement from women in politics consequently, which is a finding that Aalberg and Strömbäck(2011) agrees with. Aalberg and Strömbäck lifts the" mediatization" of politics and society where media have power to create a social construct of reality, which not necessarily have connection with the actual reality. Leading to the importance of media coverage when being a politician, to gain visibility and influence. Which based on the male dominance in media, creates different incentives with media for political men versus women. Potentially leading to a biased media portrayal, and therefore different political visibility and influence, with the logic of Aalberg and Strömbäck(2011).

The dynamics can also be visible in social media (Bardall 2017, p 100). Socio-psychological violence as intimidation can be very effective for violence against women in politics and the UN state that most of online violence are aimed for women often connected with moral and related to the gender stereotypes (Ibid, p 104-106). The use of images in online spaces to delegitimize the political female are common as focus is drawn to the female attributes instead. Things such as rape threats are common as well as online harassments on forums like Twitter. And at the same time social media can also help to monitor the violence and try to aim for social media literacy as well as advocacy (Ibid).

Henceforth, these theoretical findings will be set into the framework of CDA framework in the next section, highlighting the relevance of discourse in VAWIP.

4.2.6 Critical Discourse Analysis as a theory

As the Critical Discourse analysis (CDA) is both a theory and a method some theoretical statements are going to be presented and then in the next section the methodological foundation of the CDA framework will be explained. Discourse is as previously discussed are connected to power and the concept of hegemony and language as it is a connected circle which affects each other (Fairclough 2010, p 126). The theoretical background for the critical implication of discourse takes inspiration of Gramsci and the power relation between modern capitalistic societies and class. It is stated then that there are a "*political society*" which have the power and regarding as the public and we have the "*civil society*" which are the domain of

hegemony and are the private. The political society therefore controls the civil society by coercive measures and the phenomenon of social change is linked with the change of discourse (Ibid, p 128,131). It is if importance when using the CDA framework which are connected to other hegemonies, as the hegemony of capitalism, and the patriarchy.

Discourses can be used in several ways as making reason of our social world (Ibid, p 230). Furthermore, the critical bit is related to examine the so-called "social wrongs" such as injustice and inequality in different sense and what is the foundation of these "wrongs" (Ibid, p 231). The way that this thesis is aiming to be critical is just in relation to the social wrongs, by arguing that gender inequality is a social wrong. I am going to use a critical discourse analysis CDA, but with a feminist approach Lazar (2005 p 1). Lazar points this out that the CDA points out the gendered practices which are not neutral, but highly related to our *perception* which are relevant because the perceived experience of violence or inequality or unfairness is related to our perception as humans (Ibid p 7, 10). When using CDA the *aim* is to unpack the main narrative to be able to the see the mechanism surrounding it and what is being "silenced".

5.Methodology

5.1 Qualitative and feminist methodology

This thesis is attempting to uncover hidden gendered discourses and mechanisms in relation to political violence in which a qualitative methodology is beneficial. The aim is not to describe the phenomena on the surface with mere statistics but to understand the impact on the *description* on the experience of gendered political violence. Qualitative methods are argued to be of interest when studying feminist questions regarding behavior and context, the so called "thick description". Hence, self-reflexivity of the researcher is of even higher importance in a qualitative method (Vromen 2018, p 245). The qualitative method of choice for this thesis are semi-structured interviews with in-depth elements to lift the female MPs experiences and reflections on the topic. Providing depth and adding reflections on the online element of the violence as well as implications. The interview section will be described below in section 5.2.

The aim with this study is not to be objective to the normative social order of the patriarchy. Therefore, this thesis will try to make a normative attempt of a poststructuralist feminist critique of the political system. The normative aim will follow as a red thread throughout the essay and will consequently affect the analysis and the claims that are made. Thus, being able in accordance with CDA to uncover a social wrong in relation to the societal political system.

5.2 Semi-structured interviews

To uncover the social wrong interviews are going to be conducted. As for example Kuperberg (2021) research on applying CDA framework on abusive Tweets of UK female parliamentarian intersectional with the framework of semiotic violence. As to gain a broader perspective in relation to gendered political violence one cannot only conduct quantitative studies. Hence, the need to explain *how* the phenomenon of gendered political violence is related to our society and to go beyond the concept (Vromen 2018, p 237).
Reflection is going to be provided on the different themes regarding context of the election period, the online dimension, and the potential personal political impact. According to Vromen (2018, p 246) interviews are reckoned as primary research with focus on individuals' perception of events. The chosen level of female politicians in parliament is of relevance as to the findings of Håkansson(2021) that the violence seeks to increase with level on the political hierarchy. Thus, the interviewed female politician should according to theoretical findings have some experience of different types of violence which are of interest.

The interview study is going to be in the line with the "grounded theory" where one takes a theoretical concept of eg *gendered political violence with special focus on semiotic violence* and aim to examine the concept in the interview material. The goal is then to further develop the concept, using an inductive approach (Vromen 2018, p 247). Which is done by using quotes to further highlight relevant aspects of the material (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p 127). Interviews are furthermore said to be efficient when digging into unknow places and fields, which I would argue that this field is (Ibid, p 262). Interviews with in-depth elements can be regarded as a powerful way to gain knowledge about experiences and of a specific phenomenon Yeo et al., (2014, p 178). Building trust is of essence as when interviewing about violence against women one must consider the researchers perception of gender and not letting it spill out on the interviewed (Ibid, p 181).

Another big gain of interviews can be the likability to gain perspective that one might not had expected to find. The focus in this thesis is to see how the phenomenon of in this case *gendered political violence* and gender in parliament is being visible through different examples, Therefore, the selection of respondents is important based on their experiences related to discourse.

5.3 Procedure of conducting interviews

In the case of making the selection of interview respondents in the case of this thesis the aim was to get a few female respondents from each party, preferably with difference in age, background and political position, newcomers and not. The interview material consists of 14 interviews with female parliamentarians from all the different parties with a good differentiation of a left-right divide related to a Swedish context which one could argue is sufficient for the aim of this thesis. [3] One could argue that it would be beneficial to compare with men in the parliament as well (see Bjarnegård 2018), but this thesis chooses to only focus on discursive aspects of female experience with the aim to dig deep. Esaiasson et al., (2017, p 268) argues that to interview a few persons of centrality of the population of interest could be enough. The interview guide with questions, see appendix 10.1, was being sent out before the interview so the respondent had time to think about the themes and questions beforehand. One reason being that some of these questions can be sensitive and to prepare the respondent of the focus of the area.

The different themes were first broader questions regarding their political career and the political climate and election period. Thereafter there was questions of the nature of being a woman in parliament, followed with more questions surrounding media and social media and to finish off with the tough questions regarding violent acts and hate. The questions related to different themes that are in line with the research question of this thesis. The aim with the questions was to use short simple ones that open for conversations, which could be followed up with deeper questions. The interview guide was trying to follow this structure but was also changing this format depending on the conversation during the interviews.

The goal was to get a broad picture over relevant mechanisms on the discourses of being a woman in politics. As well as the role of the election period of 2022, semiotic violence and the experience of threats and abuses which can be argued in according with the theory section to have a gendered dimension. The selection of respondents was done by mailing out an information email to the list of all female parliamentarians, and then see who was responding. It was also done with a "snowball-method" since when conducting some of

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[3] 3 women from both the Moderate party and the Social democrats, 2 from both the Centre party and the Sweden democrats. As well as 1 from the Green party, 1 from the Christian democrats, 1 from the Liberals and 1 from the Left party see Appendix 10.3.

the interviews some of respondents was checking with their colleagues if they also wanted to join. This is also a classical method in making a relevant selection. Although in this case the population of female parliamentarians was limited, and the selection method was to try to get parliamentarians from the different sides of the political spectrum to join. The interviews were conducting either at zoom or in a quiet and safe environment as a group room or at a café. Each of the interviewees was recorded with the permission of the interviewee and the condition of confidentiality see section 5.6. After the interview the recording was being transcribed of the relevant parts and thereafter deleted. The transcribed material was used to analyze with a critical discourse analyze framework to dig out the possible gendered power structures. When turning to analyses the interview material one can use a strategy of trying to concentrate on the most important part of the interview by constructing so called memos, a short collection of main quotes and answers (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p 280). This was done in accordance with the different themes as well as the theoretical operationalized categories of Krook(2022).
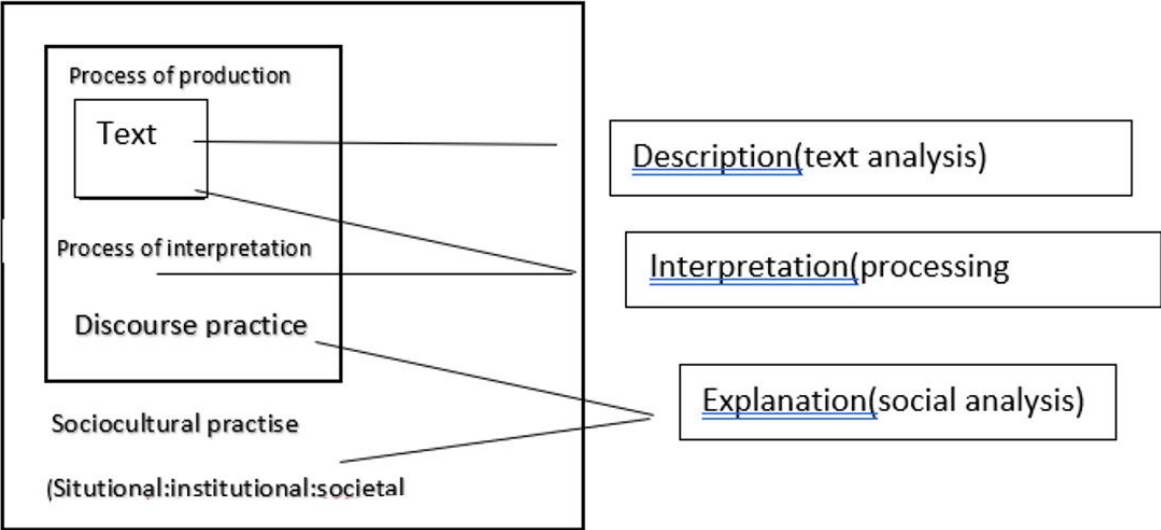
5.4 Critical discourse analysis as method

The critical discourse methodological framework focuses on unpacking power structures in discourses. That benefits this study as the power structures in politics and as in gender is sticky as connected to the general norm. This thesis aims to study the institution of parliament and its representatives. As Fairclough (2010, p 30) explains social institutions, as the parliament in this case, is built on IDF (ideological-discursive formations) which is a different set of dominant discourses. Each of the IDF create a culture, a "speech community" which as the name suggests is an own community with norms and ideologies (Ibid). These different set of "communities" must be "denaturalized" in a critical way to be able to examine the "common sense" practices that is so naturalized that no one reflects on the phenomena. The denaturalization process involves making visible of the structures which is not visible in at first. Which are going to be seen relevant when looking at the results from the discourses on experiences of the female parliamentarians in section 6.

In this case of gendered political violence and gender in politics, especially in consolidated democracies as in the case of Sweden, it could be of value to unpack the "speech communities" and naturalized practices that penetrates the daily live and policymaking at the

institution. It is also of essence to have the application of evert party affiliation since each of the parties represent an own set of "speech community" that have different views on the society, on gender and on violence. Yet the women are more alike than different regarding their answers of the interview material.

The concept of "background knowledge" is also of essence which are the basic normalized knowledge that constitutes the later knowledge production within the institution (Fairclough 2010, p 31). The concept of what constitutes the normal order affect what discourses that can exist, which also becomes visible when studying political institutions or the institution of social media. (Ibid 40-41). When describing CDA as a methodology it cannot be seen as a very distinct line between theory and method but as different focus points or "steps" which is not linear (Ibid p 234). The basic structure of the methodological concern of carrying out an analysis in Critical Discourse Analysis are there are the different dimension of the so called "text" which are relate to language and can be written, spoken, or transcribed. Then we have the discourse as in text production and interpretation followed by the and the sociocultural practice which relates to institutions as well as the non-discursive elements of what are not in the discourse. The critical being to be able to see connection between the text and the social practice and thus relate it to the non-discursive (2010, p 131-133). See figure 4 below.

Process of production

Text

Description(text analysis)

Process of interpretation

Discourse practice

Interpretation(processing

Sociocultural practise

(Situtional:institutional:societal

Explanation(social analysis)

(Fairclough 2010 p 133)

Figure 4: CDA Fairclough steps

5.5 Procedure of analysis

The research consisted of firstly transcribing all the 14 interviews to be able to go through the material several times to grasp relevant themes and phrases that was presented in the interviews. As relevant themes in the interview questionnaire which will be more furrow examined in the result and analysis section. After that the material had been transcribed it took several readings to find quotes that was more relevant and common across the interview material, together with relation to structural discursive elements. The next step was to divide the material into the distinct categories of the typology of Krook(2022) of rendering incompetent and rendering invisible. Thereafter the material was structured around themes as online platforms and gender silences. As many of the interviewees reflected on Twitter engagement and its effect on politics and insecurity.

5.6 Limitations and ethical considerations

Turning to limitations to this thesis and ethical considerations which are of utmost importance within this topic. The way I pose the questions and which question that is being posed have a genuine effect on outcome of the material. With that said you cannot take yourself out of your research, I as the interviewer could be argued to be a research instrument as well as the respondents. But one must be considerate with what perspectives you bring to the table as in background and other personal and political views that should gently be put aside but is inevitable going to affect the way I interpret our reality (Rose and Johnson 2020, p 440). As for example me, as a white girl growing up at the countryside. Furthermore, as of the sensitivity of this topic the anonymity on the interviewees is of utmost importance and have been considered in all the elements with risk of losing some off the general content. But as of the violent nature and the exposure this can have for the female MP's it is important to consider ethical considerations in terms of inform consent, confidentiality (see Webster et al., 2018, p 96). The interviews are anonymous and therefore information that could give the parliamentarian away are not going to be used and at the same time the material should lift

their reflections, language use and individual experiences. Therefore, I must make choices how to combine these two requirements which might have effect on the general content.

Turning to the discussion of generalizability as well as reliability and validity. The poststructuralism has had critique on not only referring to that every interpretation is equal one another and therefore it is hard to say something about anything. That it generally has much place for agency and that a generalizable "truth" does not exist (Wenman 2018, p 136, 139). At the same time this approach could be argued to be necessary when studying phenomena that relates to power and hegemonies, but it can be hard to measure what you are supposed to measure, the validity of the concept of gendered political violence when the "truth" differs. But the point is that the different "truths" are building the main discourses can be a part of the puzzle to unveil the "truth".

There exist of course some limitations regarding the reliability of the study as interviewing are highly context based and vary depending on the interviewer the situation and the respondent. But by providing a way for how the analysis has been "coded" and conducted, you can overcome that issue. This thesis is based on how the MPs reflect on their experiences which according to Rose and Johnson (2020) a more positivist view would consider that a bias. But the argument lifted in being reflexive with what personal reflections one brings to the table, which could enhance the depth of the topic. The meaning is that research can be trustworthy in reference to a robust design and transparency (Ibid, p 435).

"Incorporating subjectivity and reflexivity means that it is very unlikely that different researchers might arrive at similar results, and this discrepancy is in fact a strength of qualitative research." (Rose and Johnson 2020, p 440)

The example of reflexivity could be that the answers received to me from the interviewees, a woman and a student have another position in power when talking to the female MPs in comparison if a male professor would have conducted the interviews. The answers provided was very free and close to a conversation which reveal hidden discursive elements of their experiences. Yet, I could have impacted the way in which the respondents choose to answer since being new to conducting interviews. But as the number of interviewees increased, I could easier twist the conversation in a subtle manner. Another limitation relates to translating relevant quotes from Swedish to English without losing the inherent Swedish meaning which cannot always be directly translated. Although this was done in a consistent manner and as well as a I can manage. Despite the limitations and one need to start to shed light in a qualitative way for others to follow.

6. Results and analysis

6.1 What is violence? Reflections from the interview material

The interview material has shed some light on what diverse ways violent behavior can take. The women in the interview material have described everything from a general feeling of something that is not right, a pit in your stomach to actual death threats. The violent acts in terms of hate and harassment are usually not a crime and therefore just something you have to live with, despite it changing the behavior of the MP. Some of the MPs wanted to highlight that the security threat towards politicians in Sweden are increasing, which also statistics from BRÅ(2021) can confirm. One could discuss if extending the concept of violence could potentially make visible of the acts and deeds that many of the politicians are struggling with, either on a day to day basic or more rarely and make it a more discussed topic as to go beyond violence of only physical character.

The respondents had different opinions where the line was going to be drawn for violent versus nonviolent behaviors. Some of the respondents reflected on the difference between hate and threat, in which the *hate* where annoying but not a criminal act and the *threat* was a criminal act. The definition that most of the respondents discussed was a more maximalist one where the one buzzword was *frequency*. If the hate and threats happen so often that it creates a feeling of insecurity or get physical implications as fear or depression, then it should count as violence. This goes for online violence as well as offline violence. These reflections on violence from the MPs will be used in the result and analysis section below.

6.2 Interview material on gendered political violence

This thesis is a study about (gendered) hegemonic power, politics, and violence in the context of Sweden. The general findings of the interview material and the results are going to be presented together with a CDA analysis through the content. I show how the violent acts can be categorized into categories of violence with focus on semiotic violence Krook(2022). The focus of the interview material falls into four themes; first the *political climate in reference to the general election of 2022* which is the general context of the study. Second what it is like *to be a woman in Swedish parliament* and what gendered structures still prevail. Third, the *effects of media and social media, as twitter* which is a digital space often mentioned by the interviewees. The last theme of this essay is the general *vulnerability of being threatened and being a victim of violent acts and security issues*. This thesis is presuming that the semiotic aspect is of relevance in Swedish contexts because many of the gendered structures in society and in parliament are implicit. Semiotic violence could be seen as an implicit form of psychological violence and as a form of implicit coercion into being silenced.

Earlier in this work, the typology of violence has been discussed. This thesis does not hold that all the different examples below are intended violent acts. But still, when advocating for a wider perception of violence, as in the example of consensual sex or any other gendered aspect, it does have grey areas. The semiotic aspect deeply is grounded in attitudes and is not necessarily an intended malicious act. Nor are such acts underpinned by malicious intent as is often the case in many of the hateful comments uttered in social media, but nonetheless are not seen as such because of their online character. These aspects are going to be discussed when analyzing the results emerging from the interview material. Below in figure 5[4] the different dimension of violence is presented in relation to the reflections on experiences from the parliamentarians which will be elaborated more in the following sections.

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[4] Made by the author
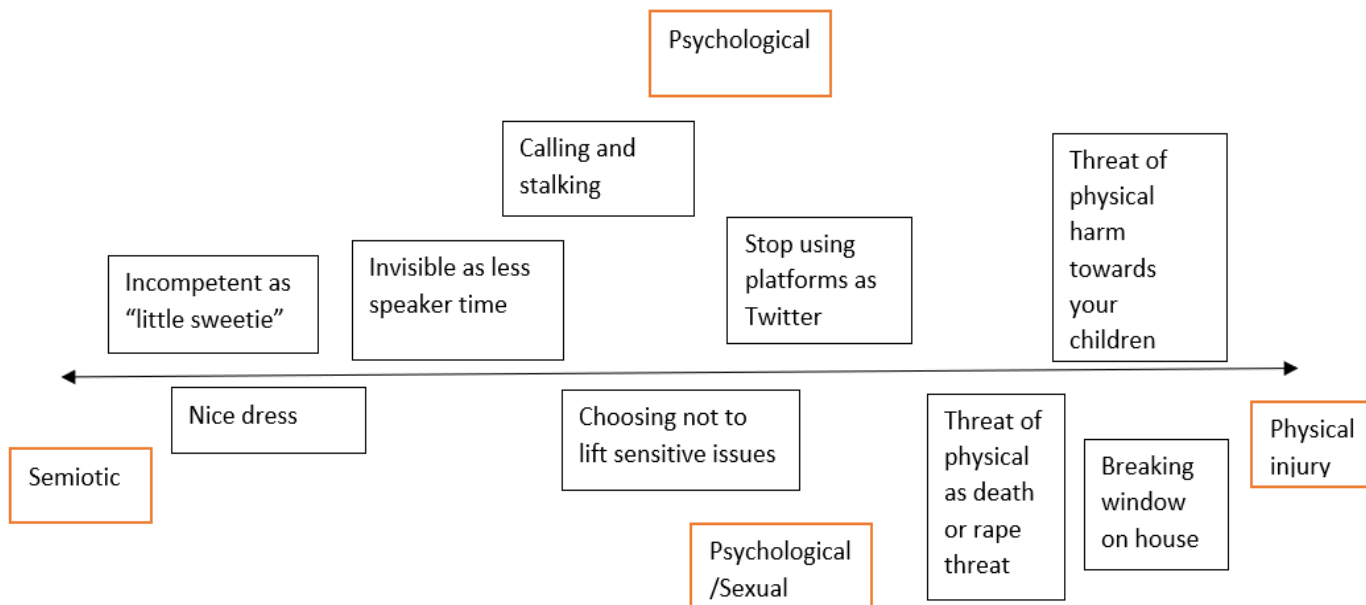
Figure 5: A continuum of experiences of VAWIP in the Swedish parliament

6.3 Semiotic violence or how Swedish politics is gendered

Semiotic violence is a suggested fifth type of violence against women in politics and is a wider "continuum of violent acts", as argued by Krook (2022, p 372) to limit political participation. There exist two different modes as means of *rendering women incompetent* or *invisible*. The discontent of gender stereotypes creates malicious attitudes towards our female politicians, and especially the one that is visible in media, have high positions, managing sensitive questions and have more agentic attributes as leaders (Håkansson 2022, p 2).

This is visible in the interview material, as a "common sense" and a naturalized way of acting in the political sphere that limit the ability of equal participation. The way of acting and common sense can link to how sexism work (Glick and Fiske 1996). As how the stereotypes are not always considered negative which makes it hard to legitimize the rendering incompetent discourses when they take place.

6.3.1 Rendering incompetent

The first mode of rendering somebody as incompetent shows in different, often implicit ways on how gendered phrases and words are being used in a patronizing way. According to Krook(2022) there are categories of this mode, which include showing that political women are emotional and delusional, denying the competence of these women as mansplaining, sexually objectifying, and denying that political women are real women. Many of these categories can be seen in the answers provided by the female parliamentarians. It can be in the internal dynamic inside the walls of parliament, or it can be external in relation to the portrayal in media and social media.

Denying political qualifications

One of the most common ways of rendering the political women as incompetent is to deny or patronize the experience and knowledge the female MP have, through language, which can be seen across the interview material. It can be for example one MP talking about gender quotas and "*not because you know just as much as everyone else, but rather that they are obliged to have you there" (R11).* This statement pinpoints that within the social practice in government the feeling of being obliged to have you there could indicate the hegemony of power when the MP does not feel that she has the same right as the male colleagues to participate in the political sphere. In this feeling there could be implications for the incentives of this MP and the perceived space in which she can act.

Other internal discourses that could be identified across the material relate to the perceived inexperience of being a woman and especially a young woman (see Eriksson and Josefsson 2021) . Comments and discourses of this kind are privilege over the actual experience or political engagement the politician is trying to push for.

1)"Little sweetie, what should you do here? Have you lived your life?" (R6)

This quote in different variants have been used to describe the MP trying to take up space in the political life, which is stated more clearly if the MP is young. These kinds of comments focus on both being little and sweetie. The perceived gendered experience when interpreting the discursive practice is visible. As in that you are a *little*(childlike, no need to take seriously)

and *sweetie*(a sweet woman , non-political, should not put up a fight). The combination of the expression "lilla gumman" in Swedish or "little sweetie" is highly common across the interview material and could be stated in the end of sentences or could be argued be used as domination technique, even though it might not be with malicious intent that statements are uttered.

      The comment could also be interpreted as a way of degrading and undermining the competence of the MP. The experience of the female MP gives input on the social discursive practice of the Swedish parliament and its unspoken norms of male dominance. Implicitly it can also provide context of the perceived threat this young female MP is symbolizing for the hierarchical male dominance. Furthermore, *have you lived your life?* This kind of comment could also be suggestive of the commentator doubting the ability of the young female MP to be doing her job. As asking whether she should be somewhere else, possibly raising her children or working with something else more suitable for a young woman.

      Hence, these kinds of comments are important because they demonstrate how discursive practices upholds the gendered institution of politics. An underlying gendered tone is clear when viewing two other quotes:

*2)"Now I am sitting in the **tax policy committee** which is a traditional male-dominated committee. I have been treated very positively, but also with this bitter aftertaste "yes how fun with a **smart girl** that **knows something** about tax policy"....there exist some form of **male gaze** and **male preferences** around these type of questions that still are like...**dominated**...they are still there"(R11)*

*3)"If you are young and a woman, then it is positive...then everyone thinks that is it great that you want to join...at the same time it is also...**it is great that you want to join, but you should not take my position**....even though I have not experienced it so much in my party, but I can imagine that others have"(R14)*

The quotes above state the general male norm and culture that surrounds male-dominated committees and the parliament in general. They also show the social practice of the male norm regarding this committee and the general invisibility of smart girls there. There is also the non-discursive statement that most girls are not smart, most girls do not know anything about tax policy, and most girls are incompetent regarding these kinds of questions. And by being the smart girl, somehow you become something that most girls are not. Which in that

31

sense is incoherent with the role of the general girl or young female. The second quote points in a similar manner that you are welcome here but as a female MP you are only welcome if you surrender to the social practice, thus, that you do not challenge the gendered hierarchy.

*4) "[…] I was just given a **correct statement** of information that could help us….then they must joke about that I am **little**, **young** and have **weekly pocket money**….things like this, you get angry and upset over and you feel very diminished…like that **you never is being seen for your competence** even though you are clearly showing it, instead you get pushed down even though the other did not know anything, they did know anything…instead they are going to **patronize** me, it gets weird….but things like that can happened quite often"(R1)*

The quote 4 is stating quite clearly the feelings of being seen as incompetent when she, as a young woman was going to discuss a political question at the board meeting. She says that she feels angry and diminished, which could possibly limit the space that she thinks she should take in this debate. The comment of being little and young and having weekly pocket money seeks to undermine the competence of this MP when she is trying to participate in the discussion. The social practice seeks to show that young women should not participate and suggest things. Because if they do, then the gendered silence in these comments suggest as in the other cases the similarity with being a child, not being of age. That silence has implication as to participate in democratic processes, one must be of age. It is a joke that the men around the table laughed at which exemplifies in what ways the political sphere can be gendered in the context of Sweden and that it might reflects how the female MPs act in the political sphere.

Similar comments could be seen in reference to social media which will be more thoroughly discussed in the section 6.5 but a few examples of the rendering incompetence mode on social media comments can be:

5) "You are stupid" "You are an idiot" "You are not smart enough to be an MP" (R7)

6) "Before the prime minister voting, then me and my female colleagues could get a lot of messages with people that like "haha, press the right button now haha"(R1)

These kinds of comments are not threatening but have a degrading character. It shows the general perception of rendering the MP as incompetent and shifting the focus in other

directions. Quote 6 also suggest that the male MPs did not gain these kind comments which suggested the gendered nature of these comments that females are incompetent and cannot press the right button in an important political voting process. These discourses could indicate that the gendered character is visible and showing the lack of legitimacy of the female MPs.

Role incoherence and denying that political women are real women

The most common perception seems to be the general role incongruence, the mix of characteristics that you are young and inexperienced with the gendered element in order or create a patronizing tone. Different set of discourses of experiences from the female MPs can elucidate on types of degrading behavior, but it could also be portrayed as a clearer disconnect with how females should be and act in debates and the general approach one should have.

> 1) *""Because if a man do it [state a hard opinion] then it is a bit like "yes of course", but as girl, "how can you", as mother "how can you", as woman, "how can you"....[state a hard opinion]."(R9)*

There seems to be a general attitude of how to act to both fit the female stereotype of being a soft female but also a political female. In the Swedish context this connection with being a political female you must still follow gendered uncoded rules in the way you debate and act. As the respondent above reflected; women politicians are subjected to different treatment than general women despite sharing certain behavioral traits are in line with the findings of Håkansson(2022). The gendered silence could possibly refer to the perception of non-acceptable behavior when acting in a way that is being perceived as hard as in line with agentic attributes if you are a girl, a mother, a woman.

2)"*Am I the **sweet, the cute**, litle gir, **not little girlie** but like the **cute one** that is **not hard one**, then it is harder to able to jump on me, or harder I should say*" (R6)

The same can be argued in quote 2 - in this case the woman in question attempts to joke about her experience and makes the reflection that it is easier not to be regarded as the hard one. This shows the importance of discourse on violence. Moving forward the finding here can be that there are limits to how you can act as a female MP in the Swedish parliament.

3) "I am not a hard person, I am quite happy generally, so it is quite hard to portray me like that of those that know me (R9)

*4) "I do not believe that it is your own responsibility and so, but I see, like how the different politicians have like different approaches **on social media** and depending how, how **"pointy" you are or how confrontative and controversial you are**, in opposite of not being that. I am a person who is not very controversial on social media…… I am trying to acknowledge other people as well, so I do not receive much hate and threats on social media but I see other women in my party and other **that are a bit more controversial, who are a little more "pointy", who get extensively amounts of hate and threats"(R7)*

These quotes are further exemplifying the use of gender stereotypes -with words and expressions like being "*a hard person*" or "*pointy*" or "*controversial*" or "*confrontative*" generally are not seen as something that is beneficial for a female MP. In the text and interpretation of the text the quotes say something about the traits that you want to have and that is not beneficial to be believed to be hard or pointy. Quote 4 reflects on the linkage between approaches and the extent you receive hate on social media. The social practice regarding quote 3 refers to the portrayal in media and the norms and traits that surrounds the institution on media while quote 4 is stating the norms on social media which relate to more hateful and violent behavior.

The implicit and non-discursive practice relates to what it means that you do not want to be considered hard because you are happy. That could be interpreted as to be a hard politician is in direct opposite of being a happy politician. It could be a gendered implication here in how you describe yourself which must be connected to the female stereotype of being pleasant and nice and not hard. Hence, in quote 4 the gendered silence is shown in assumption that it is the woman herself that decides to be pointy or controversial or confrontative, ways that deviate from the female stereotype and that is the reason for why they are being perceived as pointy rather than having clear opinions. These kinds of descriptions of beneficial traits are very common across the interview material and a general observation that those women that deviates from the acceptable behavior receive more hatred. In the reflections provided by the women no one is saying it explicitly, it is just a common sense of how one should act as a political woman.

Women as delusional and emotional

The next category refers to making the political women seem delusional and emotional or words unfit for the political role. This category has like the others the implication of telling the narrative of the woman unable to act rationally and being unfit of the political. Making comments and images of the political woman as emotional changes the focus from the political role to the lack of legitimacy and manifests gender stereotypes regarding leadership. For example, a quote of a description of a situation during the election campaign this year a political opponent portrayal the Green Party Märta Stenevi as:

1) *"Thought she looked like..an Italian old, now I do not know how to name him..with **starring gaze and crazy** …then it is of course, that was quite clear. Then if it had something with **Märta being a female or if…yes, I believe it had***(R12)

In this quote a party member reflects on that Märta Stenevi more often than the male counterpart get these comments. The party member reflects on whether these kinds of comments have something with Märta being female. Here the comment seeks to render her as delusional and crazy, with the purpose of telling the narrative that Märta is unfit as a political leader. This comment on social media which relates to the institution of social media which are also grounded in a distinct power hegemony.

2) *"It is very common with these, **hidden jokes** that seeks to…diminish you in any way…then it also gets harder to fight against it, because if someone state something as directly offensive then you can say "it is not okay, I think you can behave better"..and in similarity you can feel the same with jokes as well but then you are being perceived as like..**difficult or so**…"(R1)*

In a similar manner quote 2 centers on the hidden character of the gendered structures and the line that the politician seeks to balance. This can be seen in the way the female politicians do not want to be considered as difficult and therefore let the hidden jokes go under their radar. Similar comments can be seen across the interview material that there are many things that are not okay but still the MP does seemingly unbothered by it.

Sexually objectifying the political women

The last category of this mode is sexual objectification and focusing on attributes instead of the actual political content. In accordance with the semiotic framework, it also connects with ignoring the legitimacy and knowledge of the female MP but rather focusing on the attributes of their gender. Comments on their looks and their dressing takes attention away from the politics. Krook(2022) notes that such comments figure globally, however, with such comments employing explicit sexualization. While in the Swedish context they are rather subtle, but still prevalent.

Some of the female MP's state that appearance and looks are mostly commented in relation to women rather than men. For example, comments about the pretty dress are common instead of the important speech that was conducted. Some of the interviewees reflect on that sometimes focus is more on them or their party leader's appearance rather than the political content. It is also an oxymoron because you cannot be too focused on your looks. But on the other hand, the reflections indicate that the female MPs should care more about looks than the male counterpart. Otherwise, you will get comments that you did not brush your hair this morning or in general comments from party members and from media about looks, weight and dressing.

1) *"[…]other things like after you have had a debate, and then you start to think "God, did that went well?" and then you would appreciate some good words or appreciative comments but then you could instead get "**what a lovely dress you are wearing**" or something similar (R1)*

2) *It is an act of balance to dress…well enough for the job, but not steal the gazes. And that is an interesting feminist discussion, **should you make yourself as common as possible or should you just steal the gazes, is it good or bad? (R7)***

This category is something that is a typical gendered trait of the female body as focusing on attributes and appearance. Regarding quote 1 and 2 it, is common across the interview material that focus is drawn from what you are saying to comment on your dress and looks. Another common theme is how to handle this problem, should you stand out or should you be "common" the word common in this aspect is interesting what it refers to? Could it be drawn to the common knowledge of what

"common" is in the political sphere and, "the common" is the male and the non-common is the female.

3) *"Yes, it foremost of Ebba, like you are allowed to dislike her, it is okay in some way, and that leaders are writing where it is personal attacking, that I think is very unpleasant, you must divide the thing and the person, and you don't. When they sometimes wrote that **she had a white dress and was a bride to the Sweden democrats** and so on" (R14)*

4) *[comment in media]"Bush in **a suit,** trying to take place among the men"(R5)*

5) *"I have a very clear example from a digital meeting I had one year ago..where half of the meeting tended to regard each other and when the more senior **representatives could not stop to comment on me and another women's looks**. It became somewhat surreal, because there we sat with a clear agenda and we almost did not have time to tend to it...and then you start to wonder..**was it so that they did not want to get to the agenda because it was uncomfortable** or was it that they believed that this was how one tended for good relations (R11).*

Quote 3 could be interpreted like that of that it is acceptable to dislike Ebba Bush, party leader for the Christian Democrats, and the interviewee further reflect on the example of media calling Ebba a bride for the Swedish democrats. Being a bride is usually connected to sexuality and virginity which relates to being rendered a sexualized objected based on the choice of clothing. Furthermore, showing the gender binaries as in quote 4 with a suit is so gendered that it becomes a symbol of taking place, and power if using the CDA framework. The quote 5 is a very clear example appearance and looks potentially being a political tactic to not discuss something (see Di Meca and Brechenmacher 2020). To conclude the mode of rendering incompetence are seen in the interview material and could show in what ways the political life in Sweden is gendered.

6.3.2 Rendering invisible

The other category of rendering invisible focuses more on the removal of female bodies, voices, or places and in that way minimized the political participation. According to the framework of Krook(2022) the most prominent feature seen in the experiences of the female

MPs are the removal of women from places. In the Swedish case more online platforms, such as Twitter.

1)"*Like to most classic one **is that you are not seen around the table** if you are the only woman, that you do not get to be listening to or that someone else stating a similar thing that I already have said, among other things*"(R3)

"2) [a comment]"*a **young immigrant girl who have an opinion, you should rather be quiet***, this is not your country anyways, like that"(R5)

These quotes show how you might not be listened to, not take the same space, or have the speaker time as your male colleagues. These are themes that are common and can be seen across the interview material, in some cases you feel that you can take just as much place as a man, but often some comments and phrases suggest otherwise. In quote 2 the gendered silence is explicitly stated in a comment on social media, but this gendered silence is also intersectional in focusing rather on the features of a "immigrant" girl that should be quiet. The silencing in general is more explicit on social media and more implicit as the use of domination techniques in the offline spaces.

3) "*My point is that when so many already in an early political position or age are being exposed for this aggressive hate…so if you are putting an end to a girls political engagement at the age of 17, **then we will not have any 30/40/50 or 60-years old female politicians, because she quit at the age of 17***(R5)

4) "*you do **not want to be portrayed a as a victim**, because then you are afraid that it would only highlight that you are not at the same level as my male counterpart*" (R3)

This *silencing* effect reflecting in the discursive experiences of the female MPs could be seen as problematic. Hence it can result in the silencing of opinions and voices as quote 4 suggest. The feeling of as a female MP she will not consider yourself a victim because then you are not considered as an equal legitimate political leader. In quote 3 this MP suggests the gendered effect of the silencing type of violence and its potential effects on representation. But at the same time as seen in quote 4. The female MP does not want to be considered a victim, because suggests that she cannot keep up the same level of engagement as her male counterpart.

The most common comment that could relate to the mode of rendering visible is the decline in social media activity on Twitter. Many comments across the interview material are suggestive of active engagement on social media being difficult. The toughness in the conversations on social media is further reflected on in quote one 2 and being exemplified in quote 3. These women reflect on what kind of comments that they receive and does also say that you could report many of them to the police. Still but that they simply do not report the big lot, the reason being that it takes to much energy and time from the actual political work (see BRÅ 2021). But as I will be discussing below many of the MPs say that they must be present on social platforms to be active in the political debate and connect to the voters.

1) *"Yes, I am active on Facebook, Instagram **and not very active on Twitter, because I think it is too though conversations there**(R2)*

2) *"Now **I do not use Twitter so much, because I think it takes too much energy**....I wrote one time about my political leader and how she are calm and collected and provided a stable leadership, and then you immediately **get sooo many comments that you could sit a whole night and report to the police very many of these comments**(R3)*

3) *"it[the hate] impact on who have the ability to cope with some questions and **then many choose not to be on Twitter for example**" (R9)*

The last quote suggests that many choose to be removed from places like Twitter which could be argued is a clear example of the mode rendering visible

6.4 Physical and psychological violence

As previously stated, many of the respondents tend to define violence as an act of a physical nature. But many agreed that physiological violence can be regarded as an act of violence. There are some examples of acts towards the female MPs that have either been threatened to life, either on social media or mail. The activities of writing, calling, mailing, and threatening to kill them are violent acts and closely linked to physical violence or a serious case of physiological violence with threats bordering on being physical. Other comments relate to damage of property eg breaking the window at one of the MPs home, or threatening of

spitting in the MPs face or threatening of hitting, things that also are indicated by the report of BRÅ (2021). Many of the respondent state that getting death threats is common and if not getting death threats, threats of very violent character. Some of these acts of threat of violence have effects for the MPs involved, either getting angry and pushing harder, or in thinking both once and twice if *the political price is too high*. But since interviewing MPs that have choosing to stay, the political price seems to be worth it, but often resulting in one being more careful with both things you say, and to not state where you and your kids are.

In accordance with a post structuralist framework and CDA words and expression have impact on power dynamics and how one perceives something as serious. Many of the quotes in the material show the gendered power dynamic.

1)*"I have myself been targeted with death threat in, in my earlier political role, it is still there in a way that I believe, or I am convinced that male parliamentarians do not reflect on in the same way and the threats against me, during those time when I was threatened,* **is partly of violent character but then almost always also of sexual character, like degrading character** *....and I believe that…this* **double punishment or the double threat effects women as parliamentarians** *in a much wider range then men…that we are threatened with that we shall be* **"mutilated, killed and raped"***, but this sexual violence is rarely as explicit towards men"(R11)*

The quote above shows a reflection on the difference between the threats that male parliamentarians get and threat that female parliamentarians get. This fits well with the spell out the theory again stating that one reason for using more sexist threats and harassments from the MP being female. The sexual character and the so-called double punishment could refer to that the parliamentarian being subject of hatred based on her political role but also the hatred towards her as a woman in politics. Hence, women not having this kind of political power could possibly be interpreted as implicit motivation of the gendered character of the violence.

2)*"[…]…In connecting with that* **I received a stone that was thrown inside my home..they was throwing and the window broke, when we were asleep in the middle of the night***, it was..quite unpleasant, not just quite, it was very unpleasant. And that I believe, I believe it had a direct connection with an internal political conflict which was highly exposed in media, but it was not a political question, it was…* **I was portrayed very negatively in media***" (R8)*

Here we have what the report of BRÅ wrote about being a violent act towards property which is a physical act and is a criminal act. Here the MP state that the portrayal in media might be something of a motivator to the deed, which is common across the interview material that media and social media seems to trigger hateful behavior (see Gaplin 2021, Gorrell et al., 2020; Aalberg and Strömbäck 2011).

3) *"It was a person, precisely he, who said that he would kill me, when I was engaging in particular issues regarding buildings and cultural heritage, **he said that would set a building on fire close to me**….and then it felt scary because even though he never have done anything, that day when he get the idea to act, then I live close by…that did not feel terrific…in that **situation I was very reluctant to press charges**"(R1)*

Here we have another example of a female MP that got death threats from a man that lived close by, and this quote shows that the mere threat of a physical act and the insecurity if this man would act, have an impact on the MP. In this case it was in reference to a specific political issue which is also a common theme across the interview material. Another tendency that this quotation provides is the reluctance to press charges which also the report from BRÅ (2021) mentions is common. One might assume that this because it has not been a violent act yet and then many might not feel that is legitimate yet to press charges. Another factor here was also that the man was living close to the MP, which is a fear reiterated in the material - that proximity makes the threat even more real.

4) *"When I started to become politically engaged, I then I received much **media[attention], then I got a lot of hate from different types of Nazis, racists, skinheads on the street, threatening letters and emails and all that**…. I got hate from the extreme left, it was totally bizarre. **They dropped by my work, they sat at the buss after work, every day for a long period of time to mark presence in my life, they, I was forced to quit one of my jobs because they destroyed the facilities so much**…and their hatred towards me was **partly grounded on my skin colour** (Interview 5)*

Here we have another example of physical and psychological threats. They physically destroyed premises and the effect got real when the MP was forced to quit her job. Here we have also a partly racist motive and in reference, this MP have received quite some hate. This can be one example of how the hate target intersectionality (See Crenshaw 1989).

5)"[…).And then when that idiot wrote that…if you[women in the party]going to protest at the square,
I will show up, I have a gun with me*….then of course…then you start to think…and then it has gone*
too far"(R10)

Here we have a clear example of a death threat and the MPs experience of this act of being
threatening with a gun during a protest. It also shows the gendered aspect of violence based
on that the protest was going to center around equality issues which in accordance with
previous research is of sensitive and can generate hate.

6)"But I do not have any colleagues who has not been exposed for hat and threats I would say. And
*that, that could look very different, some, **some get a stalker**, who is not threatening in that way that*
they explicitly are threatening you, but who are a s stalker that shows up, who send things, trying to
*contact you, **consistently present in your live**" (R5)*

Above we have another example of a phenomena that might be more common for females
rather than males. This MP notes that it is common to have stalkers, stalkers that usually do
not act but still are present and being threatening in just the targeting of harassing and the
being in their life. There is also a common thread across the interview material that some of
the interviewees have been targeted and some of them have explained that it might have to do
with being a female and being a visible female. Circulating back to the gender stereotypes it
might be easier to approach a female MP based on that the power dynamics become different
in reference to approaching a male MP.

*7)"[…]it was left wing activist of some kind who decided to call me, text me, **I got around 162 calls***
***during the night**, then I was living alone, so I went to and slept at a friend's place..they called and*
*where like super nice and like "**Hi, dirt shall dirt have, now someone are going to call you all***
evening…**"…my phone got so many calls and texts that it could not handle it, **it just laid there and
***they called and called and yelled and were very unpleasant**. " (R9)*

This quote number 7 is a clear example of harassment this MP experienced. Even though it
was "just" calls and text she got frightened and uncomfortable and choose not to go home that
night. It shows that this kind of psychological violence (and harassment) has implications for
the actions and perceptions for this MP. The formulation also that the party and the MP was
like "dirt" could also be seen as a tactic to delegitimize, if analysing the broader discourse.

*8) "**You can take quite a lot of threats and hate**, it is not fun, it can be tough, **but when it starts to be directed towards your family** in any way and especially **if the children** are getting involved…these threats when, **when they show where the kids goes to pre-school and such**…then it starts to cross very hard lines for very many people…"(R1)*

Here we have a clear example which is also a common theme across the interview material. Many of the female MPs have received extensive hate and threats and seemly unbothered by it. But if the hate and threats start to direct towards their families and more specific their children, many of the women then argued that it gets to you.

If adding a gender dimension to the frequent occurrence of these statements and the perceived cost of doing politics, the cost is something durable when it is only affecting yourself. But when the hate is targeting their children, it is a darker act of threatening since they do not have anything to do with their mothers' political role. When adding a feminist CDA lens the common theme of going after the children, could connect to the general connection that the children is belonging to the female. The female could here be seen as first and foremost a mother. This, if really wanting her to quit or limit a woman's political decision making going after the children could be a gendered logic of the perpetrator. In quote 11 we have the same dynamic but also with a stated effect that one chooses to quit or leave or just become a bad representative because of these kinds of harassments.

One difference in the threats and violence towards politicians if they are women is that the sexual character on the dynamics of violence. The same goes as for the hate and violence targeting differently of the woman are young or have another ethnic background.

*9) "The hate we[women] get are more of a **sexual character, it have a tendency of..hitting lower, become rawer in some kind of way, and in that way I believe that you got to have a different kind of..thick skinn**"(R5)*

10) "I know where you daughter is going to school, I shall rape her" (R1).

Quote 9 reflect on the perceived sexual character of the hate that the female MPs experience. The formulation of "hitting lower" and become rawer suggest in what way the sexualized hate have ability to get more implications of the feeling for the MP. This MP also notes that there is a need to have this special type of thick skinned to live with the sexualized hate that targets

who only because you are female. The silenced perspective here is that if you do not have this kind of thick skin, you cannot live in the political sphere as a woman. In quote 9 and 10 we have an example of what the sexualized hate or threats can be like. Targeting both the child, the daughter and threaten with rape, a highly sexualized form of violence which in connection with the daughter get especially "raw" in its character as stated in quote 5. It is not surprising that these kinds of comments get "target lower" and have a higher impact ratio and that you need to be even more thickened skinned.

*11)"I was thinking of that comment, "**Bloody rainbow lover"** ....he understood that you belong in this world and I belong in the other world where we do not believe that this(LBTQIA+ love) is okay, it is polarized in some way"(R1)*

Quote 11 provide examples of how the intersectional character of gendered violence and hate. And does also show the intersectional character of the hate receiving that if you are a woman, young, even supports LBTQIA+ rights, the hate is going to target every aspect.

6.5 The misogynist place of Twitter and media portrayal for views

The power hegemony can be explicitly clear on forums such as Twitter which everyone in the material have mentioned in one way or the other. Across the interview material there seems to be a general concern around how media chooses to expose some of the political content to receive views which according to the MPs might heighten an already polarized debate. It also seems that on social media as in Twitter, and other forums mentioned such as Facebook and Instagram generate hateful comments and often of degrading, threatening or sexual character. The specific kind of comments connect to the gendered silences and the idea that women should not have political view and should rather be silent.

1) *"[...]if you are a minister or a minister candidate, a spokesperson, who are **having a political speech in the chamber and its gets viral, then you** just take one bit, and sometimes it is not connected to what, the most classic one **is that you just take something out of context***

*and take one line from someone and take away the question and only have the answer…**which they post and then hate follows**"(R9)*

This quote shows when first analyzing the texts that first and foremost the expression "put yourself out there" is interesting if adding a gender lens to it. It has some connection to if you are more visible as a politician and to have an opinion about specific issues and in general have a more powerful position. The MP notes that it is quite common to take a statement and pick out some parts that would make this MP look bad, non-knowing and so on. This extract is later posted on social media as a sort of "hate-campaign". Going back to the semiotic modes of violence, it could be considered as rendering the MP incompetent and in similar manner use this to spread the general opinion of her not being a legitimate political leader, which would be the non-discursive gender silence in this statement.

*2)" It exists so **many trolls out there, real trolls and fake trolls**…I know that many feels that it is very uncomfortable and…but **me I do not care so much**, it is…I am **not so easily concerned**. I am **not so easily provoked, like "just write what you want" on my pages,** but sure you are quite available" (R5).*

In quote 2 the woman reflects on the existence of trolls, which when you consider the discursive practice and the social practice it is trolls on the internet that this MP are talking about. The MP notes that she does not care so much about these "trolls", that she is not so easily provoked, but others are. Trolls are expressions of hate online and many in the interview material define them in a range of ways using words and expression such "*hate-tails*" or *"troll fabric"* and that these masses of haters have a hidden agenda. The social practice is the context of trolls and hate online, which are a common phenomenon as stated in this quote. Furthermore, what is the gendered silence here? The gendered silence could be arguably consisting of the narrative of that these women are unconcerned by not being easily provoked goes back to the "thick skin" debate.

*3)"[…] **I do not always read the nonsense** or what you can say. I am that kind of person that are very good at ignoring. **Blocking a lot but also do not acknowledge it**, there you are very different as persons. Like some **people are sensitive to hard words much, much more** than others do and I believe that it effects..we are different persons, some are more sensitive, and then it is those that you feel that you must answer much, much more…But I can see from my own analysis that, there are other people that feel that they **must answer and maybe sitting and answering and then of course that you are***

*"triggering" a bit more...I would say that it is something we must speak more about, how you **handle "hatewaves"** on Twitter"(R7)*

In the quote 3 it is possible to observe a similar pattern as in quote 2, that this MP is good at ignoring the "nonsense" and use the tactics of blocking and not acknowledging the comments. She also mentions that the others that are a bit more sensitive they might "trigger" the hate and notes that it might be something that the parliament needs to do more to reduce hateful targeting of MPs online. The discursive practices of the use of words such as describing the hate as "nonsense" which are common among the interview respondents which one could interpret as self-defense of not acknowledge the effect of these comments. By calling the comments nonsense or not noting that it is hateful content the female MPs can more easily ignore it and treat it as something that does not affect you. Also, by indicating that the response to the comments might trigger other comments is also an act of stating that if you do not choose to ignore these comments, then more hate is going to follow, and then you might be able to look away.

The implicit and gendered silence here regard the phrase of calling hate nonsense but also the same as in quote 2 that by stating that you do not care, you are stating that you are having this "thick skin" attribute that one needs to have. What is not being said is that the triggering of other hateful comments might also place the responsibility of getting hate on the MP herself instead of as the quote state in the end to have measures for how to handle this on a more structural level.

*4)"I believe that it **gets more and more common,** but also that **those who hate and threatens become more refined, they move just in the grey area that you find formulations who you know makes the other person uncomfortable, but is not qualified as a real threat….it is only a statement or an advice**…it is an nasty development but…I can only see just within my own party, or the one that just resigned…. I know several people that have **been receiving death threats multiple times**" (R11).*

*5)"I am more affected by having **a colleague who feels that "now a must shut down my Instagram account",** because then you have **silenced this person**. Then you feel bad. **But regarding myself, I do not care so much**" (R5)*

In quote 4 and 5 we have similar statements. Quote 4 discusses the climate and hate on social media. This MP highlights the commonness of the hate and that those who hate to know exactly what they should do so it does not be qualified as a "real threat". She finishes with

46

stating that receiving death threats is something that is common. The discursive practise when using words as a "real threat" what does that entail? Is it a threat that is regarded as criminal as the death threats? The shadowland of hate seems do grow and seems to have effect on the MPs across the interview material. This so called "grey area" of hate or threats seem to be a common perception of the general interview material and as stated in the earlier quotes, that this hate is just something you shrug off. Furthermore, in quote 5, colleagues have been forced to shut down an account because of this hate of comments. Also, that the hate silence politicians which could be seen as physical effects of digital hate. Indicating that it is of important to consider these grey areas as violent behavior when the implication has such strong impact on the receiver and on the political output.

*6)"[…] Or medias agenda to get a debate between 2 or 3 politicians that fast must say something witty…it **is more focused on entertainment and that is not what politics should be about, to be entertained by political rhetoric's**" (R4)*

In quote 6 the media and the digital age where the attention span is low, and the direction of politics is pointed into a more of entertainment. The social media, more formal ICTs are paving a way for a new digital age, which have many possibilities to connect but also divide.

6.6 Effects and gendered consequences

The analysis above has presented some evidence as to how the different forms of semiotic violence can be applied on the interview material of the female MPs in parliament.
This section is going to present some gendered effects and consequences seen across the interview material. One question that was asked to all participants was if they felt that they needed to be thick skinned or tough to be a woman in politics and almost everyone said "*yes, of course*". It also applies to everyone that is wishing to be in politics, because it is a tough environment. But despite all that, is it still considered something that women might have to be a bit more tough than the male counterpart to get something done. It is a necessity to survive in politics, and many are quite jaded or oblivious about this fact because it is included in your *everyday life* and in that sense *a naturalized common knowledge*. For many that have started politics early, it has become something that is connected to self-identification. There was quite a lot of agreement that targeting, female politicians to acquire "*certain kind of thick*

skin" (R5). Another effect of the hate is that women in many ways self-censor themselves, choosing not to talk or post about the sensitive issues as, migration, gender equality, climate, and crime. Which can have wider implication for the decision making then any election results (Håkansson 2022, p 12).

Several examples from the interviewed MPs (1, 3, 9, 10, 12, 14) provide comments on what questions generate more hate and what possible effects they have for the politicians. The MPs focus mostly on the hate and threats they get online because most of the interviewed has received hate online but not always offline. In quote 1 she reflects on that feminist political topics trigger hate. The focus on questions that connects to the body can be referred to the general framework of the binary distinction of mind and body, public and private. The body could if interpretating the silence relate to the female body and that questions over the female body always going to trigger hate (see Gaplin 2021). The reflections provided by the female indicate that only a feminist analysis of how a society is supposed to be are triggering hate. The division over these topics can as quote 2 indicate leading to that less people might want to take questions such as equality.

1) *"The feminist question regarding the right to your body, abortion…. **question that concerns the body and are regarded as feminist questions** like perspective of the labor market, parental insurance, when it regards a feminist analysis of how the society are supposed to be. **That triggers a lot[hate]"**(R3)*

2) *"It can lead to **a polarized debate,** that could potentially lead to that people **rather not work with equality**, people might step away from it"(R10)*

There are other questions that make women politicians more prone to receive hateful comments and violence, including integration and migration, climate and environment, some other mention crime and punishment and local issues as closing schools and such. Which could potentially have effect on lifting these questions, in particular on online platforms.

*3)" **Climate and environmental questions** have gone in similar direction and **migration is definitely there**…and it is those questions where we have clear standpoints on, have much politics and are working much with these questions…when you talk about these questions you notice that you receive, a lot[hate]"(R12)*

48

*4)" Foremost on **social media, if you write something regarding gender equality or migration**, THEN it can just explode with **hate and trolls**" (R1)"*

In summary the gendered effects consist of self-censoring and silencing. The quote 5 and 6 below indicate the tendency of avoiding being controversial and taking this kind of sensitive political question because of the risk of being targeted. The same if you have a child at home, indicated in quote 6 could potentially lead to skewed distribution of politicians that are staying and handling the sensitive questions, or just not taking the questions at all, which have effect on the democratic output.

*5)" I have not been so effected of[the hate]…I am not so controversial…**I try not to make statements in these very controversial type of questions**. I try not to step into the discussions, I do not know if I would want to, but maybe choosing to…be a bit of a coward and not take that discussion, because of being targeted and, that might not be great always (R14)*

*6) "It [the hate] also affects what politicians we get and who are willing to take specific questions…because it is of those things…**I have young children at home…that does also effect what type of questions…need, daring to handle** (R9)."*

7. Discussion

*"[…]. You absolutely need some "thick skin"..what goes pas, it just have to drain off, **you must be like Teflon**" (R9)*

This thesis has the goal to develop the framework of VAWIP in the context of Sweden with the help of the framework of semiotic violence. Or how the gendered structures are legitimizing further degrading and violent acts. The general findings are indicating that semiotic violence limits acts of participation in parliament but is more prominent in connection with the general population and social media, how you are being described and what comments you get. The abuse in accordance with the material provided seems to be mostly online with the population, but also take semiotic form in the internal dynamic in parliament. One could argue as many of the female MPs do, that these comments are just *nonsense* and that you can take it away or hide it on social media. Or in parliament, you just ignore it, you develop a thicker skin or become like a pan of Teflon, *as all politicians need.*

However, female politicians based on the material need even thicker skin. Especially if you are going to participate and take tough and uncomfortable debates and not being "*the nice and sweet one*" (R6), as indicated by prior research. This balance seems to be more difficult for female politicians as the female MPs have noted. If you are controversial, you might get more comments and hate, and therefore you will not be this kind of woman. One can clearly see how the gender stereotypes and binaries on how to act as a representable woman, when in parliament, is a balancing act and could in some cases result in threats for you or your family's life. As well as connection with gender stereotypes and have possible these dynamics can be grounded in a benevolent sexism ambivalent with a woman being in the public sphere (Glick and Fiske 1996).

Moving forward the aim of this thesis is also providing the in-depth interview context for possible mechanisms and highlighting that things such as age and ethnic background are factors that highlights in almost all cases the abuse. There seems to be a general trend of being young and a woman in politics is hard, and when also belonging to an ethnic minority the general hate is wider but once again, the skin might be even "thicker" and might become more jaded of the exposure.

Another finding concerns self-censorship is a common thing that is being mentioned by most of the respondents as well as sensitive questions as migration and integration, gender equality, LGBTQIA+ and climate and the debate on crime. The finding of

self-censure is highlighting in several other reports and research (IPU 2016:2018; Håkansson 2021, Håkansson 2022). This thesis has also asked question in connection with the behavior and exposure on social media. There seems to be evidence that the self-censure is extra precent in relation to social media, since if writing something wrong or writing about certain topic the so-called "hate-tail" start to spread. The hate-tails on Twitter seems to have effect on most of the parliamentarians in the material. Many have chosen to leave the platform and engage more at Facebook or Instagram where more of the party followers are active. But at the same time one can start to question the vitality of Twitter as political forum if more and more political actors choosing to leave the medium.

It has as Kuperberg (2021) stated impact on the representation of who is daring to take on certain political positions and what people that is searching of becoming political active in general. When interviewing MPs that have experience from this year's *general election of 2022* almost everyone state that the polarization has increased and that the general conflict in politics have increased. And as stated in the interview material because the politics reflects society and society is reflecting at politics it is not surprising that we see as BRÅ(2021) state an increase in violent behavior towards politicians. Following the logic of Birch et al., (2020) of elections violence increasing in high stake and polarized elections. The gendered character of violence might relate to that is general a lower boundary to act towards female politicians. Because female presence of female bodies could if referring to the theoretical argument be regarded threatening for the hegemony (Lazar 2005; Henry and Powell 2015). These structures and discourses of experiences are not something that is surprising, but when digging deeper into the "common knowledge" and naturalized perceptions one can see the gender dynamic. And how it has implications for the decision making for these female leaders as well for our perception on violence.

Furthermore, on can lift this topic to a more general political context hate-tails campaigns in other countries have been used in geopolitical hidden purposes. As previously stated, there is a rise of gendered nationalism and a general force that wants women and other non-powerholding groups to be silenced (see Agius et al., 2020; Piscopo and Walsh 2020; Off et al., 2022). Silenced into not lift certain kind of controversial questions, resulting into silence the participation. Being connected to the importance of national security and cyber-security, the VAWIP phenomena and especially online could be considered a threat to national security and could be considered having wider implications than "just" the perceived threat for women in politics (see Di Meca and Brechenmacher 2020).

51

8. Conclusion

Undergirding this thesis is the question: *In what ways does gendered political violence manifest itself in Sweden with focus on the general election of 2022 and online targeting of female parliamentarians?*

My point of departure is that gendered political violence is detrimental to our society, our democracy, and the development for further gender equality. Thus, it is important to challenge such violence rather than treating it as something inevitable. By exploring gendered political violence through discourse, I have sought to draw attention to the effects that gendered political violence have on inclusive democracy in Sweden and beyond. To answer this question, I first located my thesis within frontier on research of gendered political violence with focus on digital forums impact on politics. I presented my theoretical framework with focus on semiotic features of this form of violence and then accounted for my methodological choices of using qualitative method by employing a feminist critical discourse analysis on the interviews conducted. Semiotic violence could be seen here as an implicit form of psychological violence and as a form of implicit coercion into being silenced. This approach enabled me to conduct a thoroughgoing analysis of my interview material providing in-depth findings to extend on prior research.

   The results of that analysis indicate that the manifestations of gendered political violence in the context of Sweden are fourfold. Firstly, it manifests itself in the semiotic character that political violence takes, in particular how the gendered power structures underpinning Swedish politics. As well as across settings contribute to rendering women (female bodies) incompetent and/or invisible. In so doing employing "common sensical" discursive constructions, as when describing young female politicians or other intersectional characteristics in accordance with 'double-discrimination" Secondly, such gendered power structures have impact on the perceived seriousness of the violent acts. The prevalence of gender bias and stereotypes within politics could be seen as a way of legitimizing other acts of violence by undermining the perceived experience of the threats and harassments. Thirdly, the institution of social media, in particular Twitter, has a viable impact on the exposure of hatred and harassments and as indicated ought to be debated more. Not least when being a politician digitally is inevitable in our digital society. The results of thesis are in line with those of research projects, not least because online visibility and availability is likely to have

implication for female MPs to a greater extent than for their male counterparts, for example what space you dare to take and what questions and portfolios you choose to handle. Fourth, gendered political violence in Sweden in parliament leading female politicians to self-censure. This happens both on and offline and when sensitive political issues are debated such as crime, climate, integration and migration and gender equality. This was notably visible in the context of the general election of 2022, an election that was surrounded by a polarized political climate.

      With gendered nationalism and polarization being on the rise there is clearly room for further research on gendered political violence. One suggestion would be to conduct more extensive social media analysis, and, in so doing, exploring the discursive contents of different platforms over time. More studies of both parliamentary, regional, and municipal levels of politics are needed to uncover the gendered dynamics that affect the working conditions and professional lives of female politicians. It would be insightful to investigate to what extent the Swedish parliament caters for the security needs of female politicians and the extent to which parliamentarians and society at large have knowledge of gendered political violence. This would also involve investigating the gendered and intersectional motives of the perpetrators, and, if possible, compare across country contexts. By shedding light of this topic, a more inclusive democracy could be discussed.

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10.Appendices

10.1 Interview guide Swedish

Tema 1. Uppvärmning
Vilken var din väg in i politiken?
Hur ser du på ditt uppdrag som riksdagsledamot?
Hur upplevde du denna valrörelse?
Hur ser du på kommande mandatperiod?

Tema 2. Egenskaper och upplevelser som kvinna i politiken
Vilka egenskaper skulle du säga är bra för en riksdagsledamot och politiker?
Skulle du säga att man behöver vara tuff för att kunna vara en kvinna i den politiska sfären?
Märker du en skillnad i vilka frågor som drivs av män/kvinnor?
Hur upplever du det allmänna klimatet i politiken?
Finns det något som gör att man känner sig sexualiserad/påmind om sitt kön?
Har du någon gång känt dig förminskad eller på något sätt osynliggjort när du har försökt lyfta en fråga inför
     dina partimedlemmar?
Upplever du att du får det mer än dina manliga kollegor?
Tycker du att detta kan vara en typ av "våld" i vid bemärkelse?

Tema 3. Media/social media
Media

Hur känner du att du blir beskriven i media?
Hur känner du att ditt parti blir beskrivet i media?
Hur känner du att media har påverkat denna valrörelse?
Har du märkt en skillnad i medierapportering under din tid som politiker/riksdagsledamot?
Anser du att det finns en könsskillnad i hur media beskriver politiker?
Finns det vissa frågor som du inte vill ta upp inför media?

Sociala medier
Använder du sociala medier i ditt politiska uppdrag, om ja vilka?
Har du använt dessa mer/mindre än i föregående valrörelse?
Hur upplever du den generella stämningen på sociala medier?
Finns det vissa ämnen som du undviker att ta upp i sociala medier?
Har du upplevt att du har fått nätat?
Eller fått hotfulla sms, mejl, telefonsamtal?
Om ja-vilken karaktär? Vilka aspekter har du fått mest hot/hat från?
Vad tror du att det kan bero på?

Tema 4. Utsatthet och våld
Har du upplevt något som har gjort dig olustig, obehagad eller på något annat sätt utsatt som politiker?
Har detta påverkat ditt politiska uppdrag?
Om ja- Är det någon du vet vem det är?
Varför du tror att folk gör så här?
Märker du en skillnad i vilka frågor eller portfolios som du har haft?
Märker du en skillnad som en kvinna i politiken beroende på bakgrund såsom klass, ålder, etisk eller kulturell
bakgrund, sexualitet, funktionshinder osv?
Anser du att detta är ett problem? Om ja-Vad kan man göra åt det?

Avslutande
Är det något mer du vill tillägga?
Är det något av det du har sagt som kan göra att man kan identifiera dig som du vill att jag tar bort?
Hur har du upplevt denna intervju? Är det något jag bör ta med i framtida intervjuer.

10.2 Interview guide English

Theme 1. Warm up
What was your way into politics?
How do you look on your duty as a member of parliament?
How did you perceive this election period?
How do you view the upcoming term of office?

Theme 2. Attributes and reflections on being a woman in politics
What attributes would you say is necessary for being a member of parliament and a politician?
Would you say that you need to be tough to be a woman in the political sphere?
Do you notice any difference what questions are lifted by men/women?
How do you perceive the general political climate?
Is there anything that makes you feel remined of you sex, or being sexualized?
Have you ever felt diminished or in any other way rendered invisible when you have tried to lift a question in
         your party?
Are you perceiving there exist a gender difference in this?
Do you think that this type of behavior can be "violence" in a wider sense?

Theme 3. Media/social media
Media

How do you feel that you are being described in media?
How do you feel that your party is described in media?
How do you feel the media has affected this election campaign?
Have you noticed a difference in media reporting during your time as a politician/member of Parliament?
Do you think there is a gender difference in how the media describes politicians?
Are there certain issues you don't want to raise in front of the media?

Social media
Do you use social media in your political mission, if so which ones?
Have you used these more/less than in the previous election campaign?
How do you feel about the general mood on social media?
Are there certain topics you avoid covering on social media?
Have you experienced that you have received the online violence?
Or received threatening texts, emails, phone calls?
If yes-which character? What aspects have you received the most threats/hate from?
Why do you think could be?

Theme 4. Exposure of violence

Have you experienced something that made you uncomfortable or in any other way exposed as a politician?
Has this affected your political mission?
If yes- Is there someone you know who it is?
Why do you think people do this?
Do you notice a difference in the questions or portfolios you've had?
Do you notice a difference as a woman in politics depending on background such as class, age, ethical or cultural
background, sexuality, disability, etc.?
Do you think this is a problem? If yes-What can be done about it?

Ending remarks
Is there anything else you would like to add?
Is there anything you have said that could identify you that you want me to remove?
How have you experienced this interview? Is it something I should bring up in future interviews?

10.3 Respondents

Table 1. The age spectrum and political affiliation of the MPs

Respondent 1	S(social democrats)	Young
Respondent 2	M(Moderate party)	Young
Respondent 3	S(social democrats)	Middle aged
Respondent 4	C(Center party)	Middle aged
Respondent 5	M(Moderate party)	Young
Respondent 6	SD(Sweden demicrats)	Young
Respondent 7	V(Left party)	Middle aged
Respondent 8	SD(Sweden democrats)	Middle aged
Respondent 9	M(Moderate party)	Young
Respondent 10	C(Center party)	Middle aged
Respondent 11	S(social democrats)	Middle aged
Respondent 12	MP(Green party)	Middle aged
Respondent 13	L(Liberal party)	Older
Respondent 14	KD(Christian democrats)	Older