

What is the problem?

The politicisation of violence experienced by  
Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom



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## Abstract

Political violence in otherwise 'stable' democracies seems to be a growing phenomenon – from the attempted coups in the United States of America (USA) and Germany to regular online trolling of elected representatives to senior women politicians across the world standing down because of threats (BBC, 2021; Schumacher, 2022; Camut, 2023). In the last ten years in the United Kingdom (UK), there have been two fatal attacks on British Members of Parliament (MPs), a terrorist attack on the Houses of Parliament and regular online abuse towards politicians (e.g. Collignon et al., 2022).

A gendered lens is helpful for developing a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. Feminist scholars have expanded our understandings of violence beyond a narrow conceptualisation of physical forms in areas of conflict to a multi-faceted phenomena that includes sexual harassment and online abuse in democracies (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016a; Bjarnegård, 2018; Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo, 2020; Collignon, Campbell and Rüdiger, 2022).

Yet, this literature has paid less attention to the policy dimensions of the phenomenon. Therefore, this thesis applies an interpretative feminist approach to policy analysis (e.g. Bacchi, 2012a) and Feminist Institutionalism (FI) (e.g. Mackay and Krook, 2015) to explore if, how and why violence against politicians has been politicised as a policy problem.

The thesis' driving research question is 'How and why has violence (including abuse, intimidation and harassment) against MPs become politicised in the UK during the period

from 2010 to 2021?’ with the sub-research question, ‘Has the phenomenon been politicised in a gendered way and, if so, how and why?’ The multi-method qualitative study interprets and traces the discursive emergence of the policy problem and concrete policy change through policy debates, documents and original interviews.

I find that the phenomenon of violence towards MPs in the UK has been politicised from a gender-neutral problem of predominantly physical threats that demands a security response to a multi-faceted policy problem involving a range of institutions and actors including Parliament, political parties and the police.

I pose that a key part of the explanations for the politicisation is likely the long-term ‘gendering’ of relevant political institutions, such as policy discourse and parliamentary and policy architecture. Yet, the phenomenon has been gendered in a largely individualist, protectionist way, without a diagnosis of structural inequalities and related prognosis that political institutions should be transformed.

Advancing understandings of gender and political violence as a policy problem has important implications for research and practice on addressing violence in politics and democratic participation and policymaking in the UK and around the world.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the late UK Members of Parliament (MPs), Jo Cox and Sir David Amess – not because of how they died, but the values of public service by which they lived.

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Many say that PhDs are lonely experiences. In some ways, I have found this to be true. Starting my doctorate in the midst of a global pandemic likely exacerbated the isolation. Rather than spending my first year exploring different Oxford colleges with a gaggle of new friends, I was mostly stuck inside a flat, staring at pixelated floating heads. Yet, in many other ways, this PhD journey has been characterised by community.

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## Abbreviations

<b>app.</b>	appendix
<b>BAME</b>	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
<b>CFA</b>	Critical Frame Analysis
<b>Con</b>	Conservative Party
<b>CPS</b>	Crown Prosecution Service
<b>CSPL</b>	Committee on Standards in Public Life
<b>CWPSN</b>	Conservative Women's Parliamentary Staff Network
<b>EHRC</b>	Equality and Human Rights Commission
<b>FI</b>	Feminist Institutionalism
<b>FTAC</b>	Fixated Threat Assessment Centre
<b>FWN</b>	Fabian Women's Network
<b>GE</b>	General Election
<b>ICGS</b>	Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme
<b>IPSA</b>	Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority
<b>IPSO</b>	The Independent Press Standards Organisation
<b>IPU</b>	Inter-Parliamentary Union
<b>Lab</b>	Labour Party
<b>LD</b>	Liberal Democrat Party
<b>LGBTQ+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender and/or Queer and other minoritised sexual and/or gender identities

<b>LSN</b>	Labour Staff Network
<b>LWN</b>	Labour Women's Network
<b>LWPSN</b>	Labour Women's Parliamentary Staff Network
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>NPCC</b>	National Police Chiefs' Council
<b>OpB</b>	Operation Bridger
<b>OSA</b>	Online Safety Bill/Act
<b>p.x</b>	page x (1,2 ect)
<b>PLAIT</b>	Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team
<b>PM</b>	Prime Minister
<b>PSD</b>	Parliamentary Security Department
<b>PX</b>	Interview Participant X (1-20)
<b>sec.</b>	section
<b>SNP</b>	Scottish National Party
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>VAWP</b>	Violence Against Women in Politics
<b>WPR</b>	What is the Problem Represented To Be? framework

# 1. Introduction

## A growing phenomenon

In their 2024 General Election acceptance speeches, the re-elected Jess Phillips and Shabana Mahmood MPs characterised the “horrible” and “terrifying” intimidation they experienced during their campaigns (Lawson, 2024). Political violence, including abuse, harassment and intimidation, has become a somewhat regular news story in the UK with reports of online rape threats, office vandalism and MPs standing down because of abuse (Chakrabarti, 2016; BBC News, 2019; Oppenheim, 2019, 2020; BBC, 2020; Mohan, 2021). Since 2016, two MPs – Jo Cox and Sir David Amess – have been murdered in the context of their local constituency advice surgeries.

The UK case seems to be part of a global trend of growing political violence in otherwise established, ‘stable’ democracies (Collier and Raney, 2018; Kishi, Pavlik and Matfess, 2019; Krook, 2020; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2023). Examples range from the attempted coups in the USA and Germany to senior women politicians in the Netherlands standing down because of threats (BBC, 2021; Schumacher, 2022; Camut, 2023).

This growth in political violence around the world is distinctly gender-differentiated in form and impact (Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo, 2020; Krook, 2020). Men more commonly experience physical attacks and women more commonly face psychological and sexual violence (Bardall, 2011; Hunt, Evershed and Liu, 2016; Kishi, Pavlik and Matfess, 2019). Women who are already marginalised in politics and society, such as women of

colour, tend to experience more personalised violence, such as hate speech (Dhrodia, 2018). Women seem to be more likely than men to withdraw from political participation because of their experiences and/or perceptions of violence (Electoral Commission, 2024a).

A gendered lens is helpful for developing a comprehensive understanding of political violence that goes beyond a narrow conceptualisation of physical forms in areas of conflict. This thesis is informed by the burgeoning but relatively nascent literatures on gendered political violence and violence against women in politics. These scholars have expanded our understanding of political violence to include sexual harassment and online abuse, and established that such violence experienced by politicians is intersectionally gender differentiated (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016a; Bjarnegård, 2018; Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo, 2020; Collignon, Campbell and Rüdiger, 2022). Departing from traditional political violence scholars, recent feminist scholarship argues that violence happens not just in areas of political unrest but also in established democracies (Dhrodia, 2018; Krook, 2020).

This new literature draws on feminist literature on violence more broadly into the political sphere. Importantly, these scholars make clear that gender-based violence is not only about individual acts or incidents, but is a cause and manifestation of gender inequality (Henry and Powell, 2016; Hearn *et al.*, 2020). In the political sphere, women's experiences of violence reflect their marginalisation in society and, more specifically, in political institutions (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016a; Bjarnegård, 2018; Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo, 2020; Collignon, Campbell and Rüdiger, 2022).

While this literature has contributed to our understanding of the phenomenon of violence in politics, it has paid less attention to if and how the phenomenon has been addressed in policy. Practitioners, policymakers and academics have called for further research on and development of policy as part of multi-faceted 'solutions' to address gendered violence in politics (National Democratic Institute, 2018; Krook, 2020; UN Women, 2020). A few scholars have undertaken region- and mechanism-specific research, for example legal frameworks in Latin America (Restrepo Sanín 2021, 2022) and parliamentary code of conducts (Collier and Raney, 2018; Raney and Collier, 2021; Julios, 2022). Yet, the connection of the phenomenon of this violence to policy and politicisation remains relatively under-explored.

## A gendered policy problem?

This thesis contributes a more extensive exploration of policy to the gendered political violence literature. It bridges contestations within feminist approaches to political violence to explore the phenomenon's political impacts. Taking forth the understanding that gender differences and inequalities impact the phenomenon, this thesis explores how gender might feature in the politicisation process of the phenomenon of violence towards MPs as a policy problem.

The thesis adopts an interpretative approach to the policy-problem formation or politicisation process. Politicisation is a process of political institutional change, including discursive change in how the phenomenon is represented as a policy problem by key actors

in key political settings, as well as concrete policy change. Interpretative literature on politicisation tells us that 'real' problems do not always get taken up by the policy agenda; discursive and discrete political change is a result of a complex set of interplays between events, actors and existing conditions in agenda-setting processes (Bacchi, 2012a; Kenny, 2013; Mackay and Krook, 2015a; Htun and Weldon, 2018; Cairney, 2020b).

To explore politicisation, the thesis applies Feminist Institutionalism (FI). FI understands that political institutions are gendered, and that institutional change is complex and dynamic (Franceschet, 2015; Lovenduski, 2015; Mackay and Krook, 2015b). FI applies a gendered framework to institutional change, and can be used to analyse politicisation processes. In particular, Discursive FI places importance on interrogating change in political discourse (Krook and Freidenvall, 2015; Lovenduski, 2015). This DPhil connects feminist approaches on political violence and FI to uncover the politicisation process of violence towards MPs in the UK.

This thesis connects feminist approaches to political violence and institutionalism to map if, how and why violence against politicians has been politicised as a policy problem and if and how gender is considered in the politicisation process. The driving research question is: 'How and why has violence (including abuse, intimidation and harassment) against MPs become politicised in the UK in the period between 2010 and-2021?'. The sub-research question is: 'Has the phenomenon been politicised in a gendered way and, if so, how and why?' The multi-method qualitative study interprets and traces the discursive

emergence of the policy problem and concrete policy change through policy debates, documents and original interviews.

I find that the phenomenon of violence towards MPs in the UK has been politicised as a multi-faceted policy problem involving a range of institutions and actors including Parliament, political parties and the police. Violence towards MPs was initially represented in policy documents and debates as an individual, gender-neutral problem of predominantly physical threats that demanded a security response. Over time, problem representations evolved to conceptualise a widespread problem impacting MPs as a group, not only physical forms but also especially occurred with regularity online. A key part of the politicisation has been linked to the rise of social media.

A key interpretation of the politicisation process is a framing of the phenomenon of violence towards MPs as a problem that threatens democracy. The other key part of the politicisation story is its gendered framing. That is, such violence particularly impacts women through more aggressive forms of violence, and it risks women leaving politics, which negatively impacts the normative good of representative democracy.

I interpret the politicisation process as having been in three inter-related chronological phases. First, 'pre-politicisation' until 2014 sets the historical, status quo for the problem. Violence towards MPs was seen as rare events of physical violence towards individuals, perpetrated by terrorists and, rarer still, those with specific mental health needs, that required a security/police policy response. In the second phase, 'emerging politicisation,' between 2014 and 2016, key processes and events – especially the 2014

Scottish referendum, the 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2016 murder of Jo Cox MP – created conditions for violence towards MPs to be specifically politicised.

The third, final and ongoing phase is that politicisation is crystalised. This phase emerged with events and the initiatives of key actors around the 2017 election. The development of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) on Intimidation in Public Life report was key in this problem of violence towards MPs being on the political agenda. The emerging policy architecture that had focussed on security actors expanded to cover a range of actors including political parties and the Electoral Commission, and covered a variety of forms of violence including online. By the end of 2021, with the murder of Sir David Amess MP, the problem of violence in politics is an established part of the political agenda, framed as an important, gendered and online problem.

Overall, I pose that an attention to gender in political institutions has been an important condition that has allowed for the emergence of gender as a key discursive frame in the problem of violence towards MPs. This ‘gendering’ of institutions has involved substantive representation of the increase of number of women MPs. Parliament as an institution has also evolved, such as commissioning and implementing some recommendations from the gender-sensitive Good Parliament Report (Childs, 2016, 2019). Discursive and discrete policy has also changed, for example with the discursive recognition of gender-based violence as a problem and the development of violence against women legislation (Hearn and McKie, 2010).

Yet, I critique this politicisation process. The phenomenon has been gendered in a largely individualist, protectionist way, without a diagnosis of structural inequalities and related prognosis that political institutions should be transformed. What is represented as a problem of democracy could be alternatively represented as a problem of power inequalities that requires more profound structural transformation beyond security and behavioural change. A more comprehensive problem framing could allow for feminist institutionalist theories and interventions to better integrate violence in the imagined and realised transformation of discursive and discrete political institutions. The theory and practice of Gender Sensitive Parliaments (GSP) could better integrate and address the growing phenomenon of gendered violence in politics as a crucial part of political institutional change.

Empirically, the thesis establishes that the phenomenon of gendered political violence has been politicised in the UK. It provides a decade-long account of the emergence of the phenomenon as a policy problem. This thesis also puts forward an original framework for policy analysis that could be adapted for further academic and practitioner work.

This thesis' main contributions are to the gendered political violence in democracies literature. Theoretically, the thesis contributes by moving beyond identifying and measuring the phenomenon to identifying and theorising how it has been politicised discursively and concretely. This thesis also suggests that the 'gendering' of political institutions is an important condition for the representation of political violence as a gendered policy problem.

## Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured into eight chapters. The next chapter, two, reviews the relevant literature with a focus on scholarship on political violence and political institutions. Chapter three details the theoretical and analytical approach. The multi-method qualitative study traces the discursive emergence of the policy problem and concrete policy change, drawing on frame, content and thematic analysis of parliamentary debates, policy documents and original interviews.

The first main empirical chapter, four, traces the discursive engagement in the agenda-setting space of policy debates within the parliamentary institution. The frame analysis finds that violence (usually referred to as abuse, intimidation, and harassment) towards MPs has been increasingly framed in parliament as 'normal' or 'expected'. The phenomenon is framed as an attack on the normative public good of democracy. Different forms of violence, but especially online, are represented as harmful. The main policy problem represented is the lack of social media regulation to be solved by the government and social media platforms. Notably, over time there has been an increasing focus on women's experiences as particularly aggressive. Yet, women's experiences are not necessarily represented as important in themselves, but because of their impact on the public good of democracy.

Chapter five presents a case study the Committee on Standards of Public Life (CSPL) Review into intimidation in public life. The thematic analysis concludes that the key factors that led to the set-up of the review include the initiative of Prime Minister Theresa May prioritising this issue after the 2017 General Election, following a longer-term series of developments, including the tension during the 2014 Scottish Referendum. The key factors that influenced the review process focusing on certain aspects of the problem – especially in terms of social media and gender inequalities – was the evidence submitted to the review, especially the tense interactions with representatives from social media companies and the testimonies from MPs’ offices, particularly Diane Abbott’s.

Chapter six offers an interpretation of the content of policy documents as part of the recently evolved specific policy architecture. I develop a specific analytical framework that incorporates variations in gender and violence. The analysis reveals that the specific policy architecture has developed over time from primarily a security response to individual incidences to a collective response by a range of policy actors including political parties and parliament who have implemented preventative and punitive behavioural rules. The individual policies vary in their application of gender, the policy architecture overall has evolved over time from a largely gender-neutral response to more gender-sensitive. While important for the safety and security of politicians, the policy architecture’s focus on protective security and individual behaviour risks undermining the underlying structural drivers of the phenomenon and preventing the necessary transformation of political institutions.

Having explored the politicisation process and related developments throughout the thesis, the final empirical chapter, seven, analyses how MPs themselves understand and construct the phenomenon and policy problem. Interpreting original interviews, the main themes in how these MPs perceive the phenomenon are that it is a worsening problem in its prevalence and severity, especially on social media; it is a gendered issue in terms of women experiencing both more violence than men and particular forms of abuse; and is an important problem because of its impact on individual well-being and democracy. MPs expressed different views of the effectiveness of the policy architecture, especially in how it responds to the different forms of violence and the gendered experiences of women MPs. Several MPs point to larger cultural problems of politics making it challenging for policy to respond to the growing problem of violence.

The final chapter, eight, the Discussion and Conclusion, synthesises the analysis and findings of the thesis as a whole. The phenomenon of violence towards UK MPs has been politicised as a policy problem over time from one-off incidents to be dealt with by security forces to a multi-faceted policy problem that threatens all MPs and democracy. The reasons for the politicisation relate to a complex interplay of events, processes and actors including: tension of the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum, shock of 2016 murder of Jo Cox and abuse and policy responses around the 2017 General Election. This chapter presents an overview of the politicisation process to critically reflect upon the overall research questions and this thesis' contributions.

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter outlines the most literature to the thesis. The two sub-sections of this literature review are political violence and political institutions.

The first section considers how the literature on political violence has evolved with feminist contributions and the key contestations to integrating gender between the gendered political violence (GPV) versus the violence against women in politics (VAWP) approaches. Feminist scholars have expanded the concept of political violence have expanded the field to consider a more comprehensive understanding of violent acts and contexts. Contentions surround if and how different gendered subjects and structures should be theoretically and empirically considered.

The second section of this chapter presents an overview of literature on policy and politicisation, highlighting feminist, constructivist contributions and theories around political institutions. Feminist theories have developed historical theories by examining how gender is integral to the practice of political representatives and institutions. Feminist Institutionalism (FI) in particular builds on the theories around 'New Institutionalism' that institutions have both formal and informal 'rules of the game', and pathways for change in political institutions both in terms of 'formal' mechanisms (e.g., policies) and, importantly, 'informal' rules (e.g., customs and behaviours).

The literature review sets the context for the theoretical framework in the following chapter, which aims to connect the gendered violence literature to the study of policy and politicisation.

## Political Violence

### Evolving understanding of the forms and contexts of political violence

Political violence has been historically theorised in terms of physical force during periods of unrest. Political theories tend to define political violence as “force for political ends, outside its normal use in international warfare or in the internal administration of justice ... characteristically expressive of its political purpose” (Gilbert, 2005). This literature has tended to focus on geographic and temporal contexts of conflict with actors as the state and/or terrorist groups. A ‘minimalist’ approach to violence (Bufacchi, 2005; de Haan, 2009; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2023) is usually adopted: violence is narrowly defined as force, usually a physical attack such as terror attacks, assaults and assassinations (Coady, 1986). However, particularly in the sub-field of electoral violence, there has been some attempt to include non-physical forms such as threats and blackmail that can prevent political activity, especially standing or voting in elections (Fischer, 2002; Höglund, 2009; Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, 2017).

Feminist scholars have expanded the concept of political violence. A main strength of the explicitly feminist approach is to reveal that ‘neutral’ approaches to political violence

are male-biased and downplay or even ignore the experiences of women, conceptually and empirically. For example, Bjarnegård (2018, p. 692) argues, “most studies ... are inadvertently designed to capture a “masculine” experience of violence, while the “feminine” experience of violence that is not observable ... is not included.” The main empirical way in which feminist approaches depart from the mainstream literature is by adopting an explicit, comprehensive understanding of violence which is defined to comprise not just physical forms of violence but also sexual and psychological (such as threats and harassment), and measuring these forms of violence and women’s experiences (Bardall, 2011, 2013; Piscopo, 2016; Bjarnegård, 2018; Davies and True, 2018; Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo, 2020; Holm, 2020; Krook, 2020).

This comprehensive understanding of violence aligns with feminist theorising of violence more generally. Feminists expanded the understanding of what ‘counts’ as violence in theory and policy practice (Kelly, 1987, 2011; Boyle, 2019). Domestic or intimate-partner violence can involve not just physical assaults but economic abuse and psychological, coercive control (APPG on Domestic Violence and Abuse, 2019). Sexual violence has been shown to be not limited to rape but to also include sexual harassment (MacKinnon, 2021). Violence can involve single or many incidents; often the repeated nature of ‘everyday’ acts of harassment can lead to significant, compounded violence (Boyle, 2021). Academics and practitioners increasingly reject the view that violence is “part of the job” or “the cost” of participating in politics (Bardall, 2011; National Democratic Institute, 2018; House of Commons, 2019; Krook, 2020).

Importantly, gender-based violence is not only about individual acts but is a cause and manifestation of gender inequality (Henry and Powell, 2016; Hearn *et al.*, 2020) with evidence showing that women face disproportionate violence related to their gender throughout their lifetimes and across geographic and class contexts (Kelly, 1987; Watts and Zimmerman, 2002; Kilpatrick, 2004; Hearn and Mckie, 2008). To explain this, some feminists draw on Bourdieu (2001) who identified “masculine domination” as a form of structural or “symbolic violence” in which women and feminine acts are subordinate (Walby, Towers and Francis, 2014; Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016a; Hearn *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, many argue that in order to combat such violence, structural gender inequalities need to be transformed (UN Women, 2019; UNFPA and UNICEF, 2020; Erlingsdóttir and Chandra, 2021).

In the emerging gendered political violence literature, there are various typologies of violence. Physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence are common across typologies (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016; Herrick and Thomas, 2019; Krook, 2020; Bjarnegård, 2023). Krook (2020) offers clear definitions of each: “Physical violence encompasses a wide range of bodily harms involving unwanted contact and confinement resulting in death or injury” including assault, murder, property damage (p.127); “Psychological violence inflicts trauma on individuals’ mental state or emotional well-being” including stalking, bullying, threats online and/or offline (p.139); “Sexual violence comprises a host of unwanted behaviours targeting a person’s sexuality and sexual characteristics, ranging from non-consensual physical contact to unwelcome verbal conduct of a sexual

nature” (p.154); and “Economic violence employs economic hardship and deprivation as a means of control” including withholding campaign funds and property damage (p.177). Some authors specifically include the location or context of violence, with particular attention to online spaces (Bardall, 2013).

An emerging form of violence, generally and in political contexts, is that which takes place online. The repetitive and compounding nature of online violence has been identified as a particular feature as there can be multiple perpetrators repeatedly posting harmful content (Henry and Powell, 2016; Jane, 2017). These unique features make the internet, particularly social media sites, a fertile environment for violence in politics (Bardall, 2013; Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), 2019, p. 5; Krook, 2020). Online violence is now known to take a range of forms, including direct threats of death and rape, hate speech, image-based abuse, doxing (sharing personal information without consent), trolling (purposely disruptive content) and pile-on or mobbing (in which many different accounts retweet or reiterate an abusive message) (United Nations Broadband Commission, 2015; Jane, 2017; United Nations, 2018a). This can have serious individual and group-felt psychological impacts (Mantilla, 2015; United Nations Broadband Commission, 2015; Jane, 2017; Lewis, Rowe and Wiper, 2017; United Nations, 2018a) with victims and others withdrawing from the public space (Henry and Powell, 2016; Jane, 2017; Law Commission, 2020). Such withdrawal can have professional and financial implications (Mantilla, 2015; Jane, 2017), including for politicians who are expected to participate on social media as part of their jobs (Barker and Jurasz, 2019).

As well as compounded and online violence, symbolic violence is another form of violence that is contested within the inter- and multi- disciplinary literatures, especially within feminist political violence scholarship. One way in which Krook (2020) attempts to operationalise symbolic violence is by including a particular type, semiotic violence, in a typology of violence against women in politics. Her typology includes physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence which align with other feminist political violence literature, both comparing men and women and focusing exclusively on women. The “new” concept of semiotic violence involves “drawing on and reinforcing inequalities by using words and images – and, in some cases, body language – to injure, discipline, and subjugate members of marginalized groups”; in the women in politics context, “these acts are less about attacking particular women directly than about shaping public perceptions about the validity of women’s political participation more broadly” (Krook, 2020, p. 187). This violence can be perpetrated in a range of ways including in-person and online (Kuperberg, 2021).

However, the inclusion of symbolic and/or semiotic violence is not widely accepted in the emerging feminist literature on political violence. Bardall (2020b) urges more empirical and conceptual development of symbolic violence before it can become an accepted part of the typology of gender-based violence in politics. She criticises what she sees as a misinterpretation of Bourdieu’s approach to symbolic violence, arguing that it should not and cannot be neatly incorporated into normative and empirical studies of violence against women in politics. Bardall seems to criticise the incorporation of symbolic

violence in violence research more broadly. These disagreements may be expected when studying the wide-ranging phenomenon of violence.

As well as expanding the understanding of what forms 'count' as violence, the emerging feminist scholarship also expands the understanding of which political contexts can be violent. Departing from traditional political violence scholars, recent feminist scholarship argue that violence happens not just in areas of political unrest but also in established democracies (Dhrodia, 2018; Krook, 2020). For example, Bardall et al (2020, p. 917) point out that "researchers have paid less attention to the gendered aspects of political violence in more 'mundane' settings—meaning violence that disrupts the regular practices of holding elections and governing, disruptions which occur in both unstable and stable regimes." The Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) conducted what is widely accepted as the first global study of violence against women parliamentarians and a subsequent regional European report (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018a). Globally, 82 per cent of those surveyed from 39 countries reported to have been subject to psychological violence, 62 per cent recalled experiencing sexist remarks and 20 per cent said they had been victim to physical violence. This is a compelling challenge to the more established political violence studies which tend to conceptualise political violence as only happening in areas of political instability and conflict in the Global South (Fischer, 2002, p. 8; Höglund, 2009; Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, 2017).

Gender-differentiated studies of political violence seem to support these conceptualisations, with men more commonly experiencing physical attacks and women

more commonly facing psychological and sexual violence; such studies often involve surveys conducted by international and activist organisations in different geographic contexts (Bardall, 2011; Hunt, Evershed and Liu, 2016; IFES, 2018; UN Women, 2018; Kishi, Pavlik and Matfess, 2019; National Democratic Institute, 2019a; Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), 2019; UN Women, 2020).

Research in the UK reflects this gender-differentiated phenomenon. Some studies find that intimidation and threats are experienced more by women than men (House of Commons, 2019; Collignon, Campbell and Rüdiger, 2022). Others find that even if women do not experience as high numbers of incidents of abuse, especially on social media, the forms of violence are more aggressive and gendered, for example women face more sexualised and personal threats compared to abuse based on ideology and policy positions that men experience (Atalanta, 2018; Southern and Harmer, 2019; Ward and Mcloughlin, 2020).

Furthermore, in political locations, women have been found to experience discrimination not just because of sexism but because of the intersection of sexism and other processes such as racism, ableism or homophobia (Dhrodia, 2018; Kuperberg, 2018, 2021; Runderkamp *et al.*, 2022). Kuperberg (2021) found a high prevalence of online sexist and racist abuse against a group of high-profile Muslim and Jewish women UK MPs in early 2019. Amnesty International (Dhrodia, 2018) found that female candidates of ethnic minorities were disproportionately abused on Twitter before the 2017 General Election with one black MP, Diane Abbot, receiving nearly half (45.14 per cent) of all of the abusive tweets in the sample.

Scholars theorise that the impact of such violence can be a ‘chilling effect’ on individual women and groups of women, reducing their political participation, which threatens the diversity of political representation (National Democratic Institute, 2019b; Krook, 2020). This chilling effect is not as simple as people leaving politics or not participating in the first place – emerging research suggests that women may change the way they participate because of their experiences or perceptions of abuse. For example, nearly half of the local election women candidates who responded to the UK Electoral Commission’s (2024b) survey reported that they avoided campaigning alone or discussing controversial topics, compared to around 20 per cent of men, because of fear of harassment.

The way that women respond to the perception of violence could be conceived as part of the concept of “safety work” (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020) in the violence against women literature. This concept refers to the preventative actions – from texting friends that they arrived home, not going out late at night, moving train carriages when the only other person is a man – that women do to avoid or prevent harassment and other forms of violence.

### Contestations of integrating gender

There are important contestations within the feminist approaches to political violence (Bjarnegård et al 2023) . Broadly, these can be separated into approaches that focus on women’s experiences and those which compare the experiences of and impacts on men and women.

The Violence Against Women in Politics (sometimes abbreviated to VAWP or VAWIP) (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016b; Krook, 2017, 2018a; Biroli, 2018; Restrepo Sanín, 2018; United Nations, 2018b; Krook, 2019, 2020) approach applies a violence against women framework which understands that women experience violence because of their sex/gender (Kelly, 1987, 2011). Violence against women in politics can therefore be conceptualised as both a specific form of violence against women and a unique phenomenon in the political realm (Bouka, Berry and Kamuru, 2019, p. 316; Krook, 2020, p. 4). While violence against women is a problem of structural gender inequality, violence against women in politics is a compounded problem of equality and democracy, which threatens women's political participation (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016b, 2016a; Restrepo Sanín, 2018; United Nations, 2020).

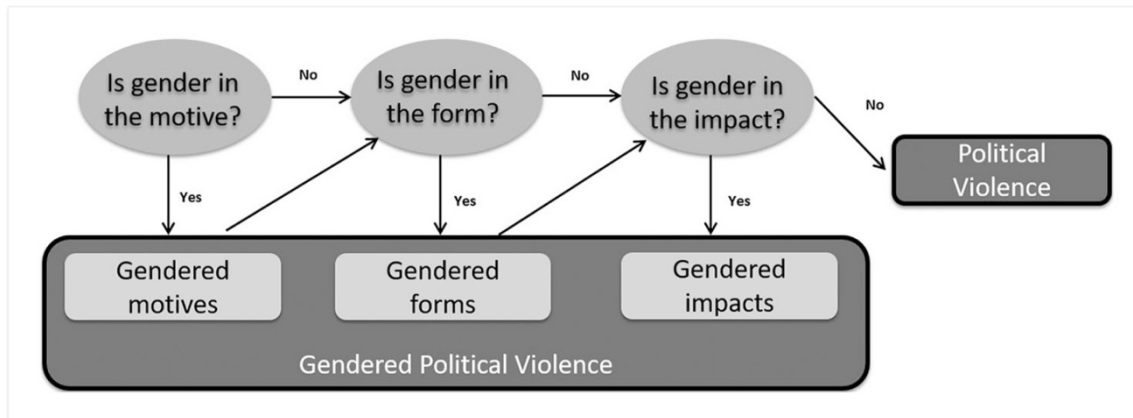
Some advocates of the VAWP approach (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016b, 2020) argue for the need to focus specifically on women, and distance themselves from an approach that compares the experiences of men and women. For example, Krook (2020, p. 9) "rejects the view that violence against women in politics is simply a gendered version of already-recognized forms of political violence" and "argues that this phenomenon is distinct because it specifically aims to exclude women as women from the political sphere via dynamics of structural, cultural, and symbolic violence". Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2020, p. 746) argue that comparison between men and women "risks theorizing a false symmetry between men's and women's experiences." This view is reflective of some other feminist violence researchers who argue for the importance of focusing specifically on women

because of their structural disadvantage, rather than a gender comparative approach (Jane, 2017, p. 9; Boyle, 2019, p. 20).

However, other scholars advocate for comparing men and women. These scholars emphasise that men are gendered beings, drawing on important contributions from masculinity studies. While 'gender' can be often equated with 'woman' especially in the policy sphere, some scholars are keen to point out that gender is a social construct with meanings intertwined within individuals, groups and institutions (Connell, 2006). 'Hegemonic masculinity' broadly refers to sociality constructed, expected traits for men, which is often domineering and relational to femininity; crucially, these gendered expectations can be locally specific and intersects with expectations around other social structures such as race and class (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

In studies of political violence, therefore, some argue that it is only through gender-sensitive comparison between men and women that the gendered aspects of violence, particularly its forms and impacts, can be understood (Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo, 2020; Holm, 2020). Bardall et al's (2020) critique of the VAWP literature is its lack of analytical precision in always assuming a gendered motive or intention for attacks on women politicians and urge a distinction between motives, forms and impacts (as outlined in their figure, reproduced here as Figure 1).

Figure 1. “Gendered political violence: motives, forms and impacts” in Bardall et al. (2020, p. 924)



VAWP scholars Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2020) respond to the criticism by creating a distinction between two separate phenomena: violence in politics, and violence against women in politics (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016b, 2020; Krook, 2017, 2020). In violence in politics, victims are targeted for their political ideologies; in violence against women in politics, victims are targeted because of their gender. Krook draws on Pitkin’s (1967) and Phillips’ (1994) distinction between “substantive representation” or “politics of ideas” versus “descriptive representation” or the “politics of presence” to argue that politicians can be attacked because of their policy positions or their identity. This approach is operationalised through a “bias event” framework based on detecting hate crime to identify cases of violence against women in politics. As outlined in Table 1, criteria include that the offender made comments or symbols indicating bias towards the marginalised group, and that the group perceives the event as motivated by hate or bias (Krook, 2020; Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2020). In operationalising this framework, Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2020) consider that the assassination of Benazir Bhutto was a case of violence in politics, as it was

not related to her gender, while the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the murder of Jo Cox were violence against women in politics, because aspects of these cases were related to their positions as politically active women.

Table 1. Identifying Bias Events Table from Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2020, p. 747)

**Six criteria for detecting bias**

1. The offender made oral comments, written statements, or gestures indicating bias.
2. The offender left bias-related drawings, symbols, or graffiti at the scene.
3. The victim was engaged in activities related to his or her identity group.
4. The offender was previously involved in a similar incident or is a hate group member.
5. A substantial portion of the community where the event occurred perceived that the incident was motivated by bias.
6. The victim was evaluated negatively according a double standard.

Note: All six criteria need not be met to reach a conclusion of bias.

A drawback of any gendered approach is that it is challenging to separate forms, motives and impacts, and to identify gendered motives or intention. Political and gendered motives may not be easily separated. People may be targeted for their identity *and* their ideas or perceived ideas. As Krook (2020, p. 69) points out, women with feminist policy platforms may experience increased abuse. In this context, it is not always easy to separate the women identity from the feminist issues. Women may also experience violence because they are perceived to hold feminist views, even when they do not.

A key limitation of the gendered political violence literature is limited attention to political impacts, i.e. policy discourse and solutions. In terms of specific research on policy for violence against elected representatives, there has been some nascent research describing the development of policy (but not necessarily considering explanations).

Globally, policy has been presented as a “solution” to the phenomenon of violence in politics (Krook, 2020; vawpolitics, 2022). For example, the programmatic research

including from the National Democratic Institute (2018) and United Nations (UN Women, 2014; UN Women and United Nations Development Programme, 2017; UNDP, 2022) offers recommendations for policy actors including governments, police, parliaments and political parties.

A growing number of countries have updated or developed policies to address gendered violence in politics (Bardall, 2020a; Restrepo Sanín, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). Restrepo Sanín (2022b) categorises the ways in which gendered political violence has been legislated in Latin America including stand-alone laws to criminalise violence/harassment against women in politics, reforming electoral laws to incorporate a 'gendered lens' and modifying gender-based violence/violence against women laws to include political violence/harassment. This latter approach was also adopted by the parliament of Catalonia which modifies an act on gender-based violence to incorporate violence against women in politics (Verge, 2021).

Beyond specific legislation, an important way in which gendered violence/harassment in politics has been addressed, especially in Europe including the United Kingdom as well as in Canada and Australia, is through parliamentary and political party policy architectures, namely behavioural codes of conducts with complaint/investigation mechanisms (Collier and Raney, 2018; Verge, 2020; Raney and Collier, 2021; Julios, 2022). Notably, Verge (2020) argues that the differences between the Latin American and European approaches to gendered violence in politics reflects differences between viewing violence/harassment against women in politics as a human

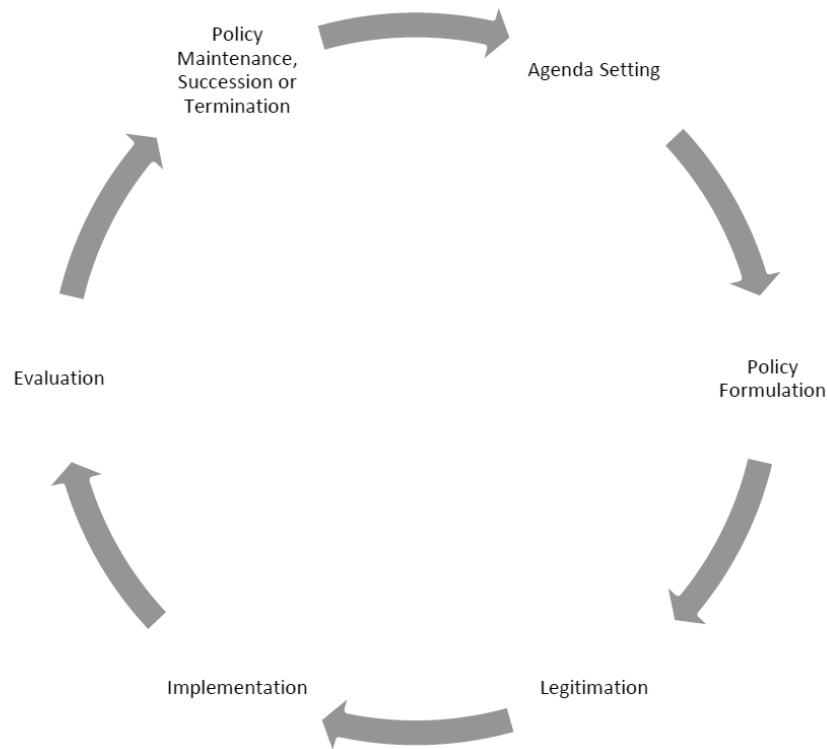
rights issue within the broader gender equality framework, as in Latin America, and, viewing harassment as part of an ethical breach (rather than human rights violation), as in Europe.

## Political Institutions

### Policy Problem Formation and Politicisation

This thesis aims to connect the gendered violence literature to the study of policy and politicisation. Within the variety of different approaches to the study of policy and politicisation, there is some agreement that there are distinct policy ‘stages’ (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972; Mazur, 2017). Building from Laswell (1956)’s concept of policy stages, modern scholars (Varone, 2016; Cairney, 2020b) establish some idea of stages or a cycle including agenda-setting, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. One example of a policy cycle is shown in Figure 2. Agenda-setting involves policymakers identifying ideational policy problems for public attention. In policy formulation or adoption, specific aims and solutions are developed. Implementation involves the policy in practice, including empowering institutions with resources. An influential theory is the power of ‘street-level bureaucrats’ – such as police officers, teachers and local government officers – in creating the reality of the policy in practice which may or may not be in accordance with the aims or ideals set out in the agenda-setting or policy formulation stages (Lipsky, 2010).

Figure 2. “The Generic Policy Cycle” in Cairney (2020b, p. 27)



Further to the descriptive study of policy and politicisation, explaining why phenomena are politicised, i.e., enter into these policy stages, is complex. An important framework the idea of ‘multiple streams’ (Kingdon, 2013) influencing policy formation. Such ‘streams’ include the ‘policy stream’ which includes the interests of policymakers (whether elected representatives or technical bureaucrats), the ‘politics stream’ such as changes in national mood and ‘problem stream’ which may include specific event.

An important contribution of the feminist policy literature is uncovering the social construction of politicisation processes. In constructivist feminist policy analysis, policy problems are recognised as constructed, reflecting ideas more than perhaps actual social

policy problems (Bacchi, 2012a; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2017). Importantly, feminist policy analysis tends to subscribe to an interpretivist (rather than positivist) approach to meaning making.

Significantly for this thesis, many feminists have long argued that exploring discursive meaning is an important part of understanding gender and violence in terms of politicisation (Bacchi, 2012a; Strid, Walby and Armstrong, 2013; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2017; Asante and Shepherd, 2020). Gendered violence has gained political and policy significance over time partly through discursive gains in understanding the phenomenon as a political problem in international normative frameworks and national UK policy (Watts and Zimmerman, 2002; Hearn and McKie, 2010; Hearn *et al.*, 2016).

Importantly, when phenomena are politicised, some meaning can be lost. While many would praise the gains made by activists 'naming' the problem of violence against women being adopted on the political agenda, some would also urge caution and scepticism. The explicit link between violence and structural inequality is not always a given in political discourse. Across European contexts, there is a large variation in the extent to which violence is linked with gender equality in political discourses (Krizsan and Popa, 2014; Strid *et al.*, 2021). A recent example of the lack of connection between violence and inequality is within discourses of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment was revived in political and policy discourses in 2017 with the #MeToo movement, with some apparently cultural, political and policy shifts (Erlingsdóttir and Chandra, 2021), but some feminists problematise the movement's focus on individual "monsters" and not the structural cause

of gender inequality (Boyle, 2021; Hearn, 2021). Solutions are said to be punitive to individuals rather than structurally transformative towards the core causes of widespread sexual violence. When political institutions adopt a problem into the political agenda, a lot of meaning can be lost in translation of problem to policy.

Feminist policy scholars and practitioners often appraise the ‘gender sensitivity’ of policy responses. This means looking at the extent to which gendered dynamics are considered in the policy process, documentation and implementation (Mackay and Krook, 2015a; UNFPA and UNICEF, 2020). A gender blind or neutral policy would not mention gender differences or gender norms. Gender sensitive policies will pay attention to gender, but may not attend to structural gender inequalities. Gender responsive or transformative approaches will acknowledge and address inequalities with an aim of gender equality.

To interrogate politicisation, feminist policy analysis has been said to have undergone a ‘discursive turn’ (Mazur, 2017; Htun and Weldon, 2018). It is therefore accepted as important to identify explicitly stated or implicitly assumed ideas about gender in the various, complex policy ‘stages’ (Mazur 2017). In particular, it can be important to assess if the discourse explicitly links to gender equality, rather than simply noting some gender dimensions (Krizsan and Lombardo, 2013; Jenson, 2015), like in a gender sensitive analysis. (Bacchi, 2012a; Htun and Weldon, 2018).

A particularly useful framework is Bacchi’s (2012) ‘What is the problem represented to be?’ approach demands a ‘problem-questioning’ (rather than ‘problem-solving’) approach to analysing policy discourse and content. Bacchi suggests a set of questions for

analysis (outlined in Figure 3), which can be systematically applied or, as is my approach, inform the principles of the analysis to interrogate the assumptions, silences and effects of the problem representation.

Figure 3. WPR Chart: What's the Problem Represented to be?

**Question 1:** What's the problem (e.g. of "gender inequality", "drug use/abuse", "economic development", "global warming", "childhood obesity", "irregular migration", etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policies?

**Question 2:** What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions (conceptual logics) underlie this representation of the "problem" (*problem representation*)?

**Question 3:** How has this representation of the "problem" come about?

**Question 4:** What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be conceptualized differently?

**Question 5:** What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the "problem"?

**Question 6:** How and where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?

Reproduced and adapted from Bacchi (2012a, 2012b, 2017).

## Political Representation and Institutionalism

In addition to interrogating policy and the policy process, theories of representation are central to the study of politicians and politics in established, 'stable' democracies. Feminist theories have developed historical theories by examining how gender is integral to the practice of political representatives and institutions.

An important aspect of a functioning or 'stable' democracy is one that involves fair elections to select representatives (Pateman, 1970; Collier and Levitsky, 1997). While there have been historic conflicts about what exactly the role of a representative is and should entail, in brief, there is some agreement that political representatives act as advocates for the constituents that select them through democratic processes of elections (Pitkin, 1967; Phillips, 1994, 2012).

Furthermore, there has been growing consensus that increasing the diversity of representation is important for democracies because political institutions should reflect the country as a whole and diverse political representation leads to policy that reflects the interests of the population (Phillips, 1994; Mansbridge, 1999; Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006; Lawless and Fox, 2010; Childs, 2016). In the literature, there is a widely accepted distinction between "descriptive representation" and "substantive representation" (Pitkin, 1967) or the "politics of presence" versus the "politics of ideas" (Phillips, 1994). Women (as with other groups) can be represented by women being present and/or by their actual policy interests being ideated and legislated. An important contribution of feminist literature is identifying that gender is an important analytical category in politics which examines women politicians changing historically 'masculine' institutions through transforming informal and formal rules.

Feminist Institutionalism (FI) builds on the theories around 'New Institutionalism' that institutions have both formal and informal 'rules of the game', and pathways for change in political institutions both in terms of 'formal' mechanisms and, importantly,

'informal' rules (e.g., customs and behaviours). FI develops these idea to identify the gendered power dynamics, processes and impacts of institutional change, especially 'critical junctures' which are events that lead to institutional change (Franceschet, 2015; Lovenduski, 2015). Constructed ideas around masculinity and femininity are integral to the formal and informal rules that can lead to policy change (Connell, 2006, 2020; Mackay and Krook, 2015b). FI argues that "all institutions are profoundly imbued with gender" (Chappell and Waylen, 2013, p. 612).

For feminist institutionalists, political institutions are not separate but deeply embedded and interconnected to broader social ideas around gender and inequalities. For example, the "gender order" can be understood as "large-scale patterns in relationships among people and groups, and the persistence of those patterns through time" (Connell, 2020, p. 98). The "gender regime" is "the gendered patterns of a particular institution", for example, politics or parliament, which "usually correspond to the broad gender order" (Connell, 2020, p. 99). The "gender regime of political institutions can be understood as masculine: that is, it was created for and by men, has historically purposely excluded women and arguably remains challenging to women through formal and informal rules (Pateman, 1988; Connell, 2006; Lister, 2010; Collier and Raney, 2018; Miller, 2021, p. 123).

While the presence and actions of women in all their diversity have made the political institutions that once actively excluded them more inclusive, those of historically marginalised identities have been said to remain "space invaders" (Puwar, 2004) because of formal and informal 'rules' and 'backlash' which prevent full inclusion (Phillips, 1994;

Mansbridge and Shames, 2012; Childs, 2016; Connell, 2020; Miller, 2021). For example, public and institutional attitudes about gender roles continue to punish politically active women for eschewing their private sphere roles as caregivers (Lawless and Fox, 2010; Lister, 2010; Mansbridge and Shames, 2012; Childs, 2016; Saha and Weeks, 2020).

Integrating the study of discourse and institutions is a subfield of FI. Discursive FI theorises the way in which (policy) problems are defined discursively to (re)formulate institutions (Krook and Freidenvall, 2015; Lovenduski, 2015). Discursive FI would argue for a two-way causal mechanism: the gendered nature of political institutions can influence the discursive construction of a gendered problem, and the discursive construction of a gendered problem can influence the gendered nature of political institutions (Krook and Freidenvall, 2015). Another, related sub-field is Historical Feminist Institutionalism, which identifies the gendered power dynamics, processes and impacts of institutional change, especially 'critical junctures' which are events that lead to institutional (that can be discursive, informal or informal) (Franceschet, 2015; Lovenduski, 2015).

A useful elaboration of this idea of gender norms suggests that sexism, that is discrimination based on this gender group, can be 'hostile' and/or 'benevolent.' Initially developed by Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001), hostile sexism is understood as outwardly negative while benevolent sexism appears positive but is harmful by relying on gender norms of women's inherent fragility or weakness. In a politics context, this might mean that some voters (of any gender) may not vote for women because of a view (conscious or not)

that women's inherent roles as caregivers may be at odds with the capabilities associated with political office (White *et al.*, 2024).

An important philosophical principle of many feminist theories is to go beyond studying institutions to transforming them. Beyond simply being 'added' to existing political institutions with masculine rules, feminists have made recommendations and worked for change within political representative institutions (Phillips, 2012; Lovenduski, 2014; Celis and Childs, 2020; Hargrave and Blumenau, 2022; Siow, 2023). Women MPs and other stakeholders such as feminist academics and activists have been 'critical actors' (Campbell and Childs, 2013; Celis and Childs, 2020) in successfully changing some aspects of political institutions.

For example, the feminist institutionalist theory and practice of Gender Sensitive Parliaments (GSP) (Palmieri, 2011; Childs, 2016; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018b) argues that changing formal and informal rules and practices will make institutions more able to elect and retain women MPs. The UK parliament commissioned gender-sensitive reviews of parliament, including the Good Parliament report (Childs, 2016), and has adopted some recommendations including creating a Women's Equalities Committee, proxy voting and baby leave, to help women (and others) better balance their family and political responsibilities (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018b; Childs, 2019).

Notably, the GSP framework has tended to focus on family and labour protection workplace policy such as recommending on-site childcare facilities, baby leave for politicians and restrictions to late night voting (Childs, 2016). Recently, it has expanded its

focus to include protections against violence, especially sexual harassment policies (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018b, 2022).

As I will outline in the next chapter, my theoretical framework poses that FI, including GSP, can (and should) be conceptually applied to understanding the politicisation of the phenomenon of violence towards MPs.

### 3. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical and analytical framework of the thesis. My theoretical framework is, broadly, a feminist approach to the politicisation of the phenomenon of violence towards MPs. This framework connects feminist approaches to political violence and intuitionism. The analytical approach of the thesis applies interpretive, multi-method qualitative methods to trace the discursive emergence of the policy problem and concrete policy change.

The chapter is structured as followed. First, the text outlines how this theoretical framework bridges contestations within feminist approaches to political violence to explore the phenomenon's political impacts. It presents a theory of politicisation informed by feminist interpretative, constructivist approaches to policy problem formation and political institutions.

Then, the chapter provides an original overview of the UK case as part of the analytical framework. The overall research design is presented. The main details of the methodology are outlined here in order to convey the overall methodology of the thesis but that key details are also given in each chapter individually as appropriate. Finally, a reflection on positionality is offered as an important exercise in research transparency.

## Bridging the VAWP and GPV approaches to analyse politicisation

I apply a feminist approach to political violence that attempts to bridge the contestations of the gender and political violence (GPV) versus the violence against women in politics (VAWP) approach. I respect the strengths of both approaches and suggest that they do not necessarily need to be in conflict, particularly for the study of politicisation.

The GPV and VAWP frameworks are primarily looking to understand how to theoretically and empirically measure the actual phenomenon of violence. This thesis is perhaps able to bridge the contestations because it is less concerned with identifying whether motive plays a specific role or with measuring the specific prevalence of violence. This thesis is looking to explore how political institutions understand political violence and use gender.

My thesis draws from both the GPV and VAWP approaches' recognition of women's structural disadvantages in politics and society. Recognising that there is a specific problem of violence against women in politics does not (and, I would argue, should not) preclude an understanding of gender-differentiated motives, forms and impacts of violence.

More pertinently, my choice of theoretical and analytical focus is a response to the calls by both Bardall et al (2020) and Krook (2020) for further research on the *impacts* of gendered violence. Both GPV and VAWP approaches engage in policy impacts somewhat. For Bardall, policy development *is* an outcome of gendered political violence. For Krook, policy development *should* be an outcome of violence against women in politics. Yet, I would argue that neither Bardall et al and Krook deeply engage with policy conceptually –

after all, the aim of the approaches was primarily to conceptualise phenomena, not policy problems.

My framework builds on the contributions of *both* these approaches to explicitly analyse policy development. This thesis is exploring the interpretation of a gendered phenomenon – that is the gender-differentiated phenomenon of political violence and the specific phenomenon of violence against women in politics – as a matter for political institutions.

Building on the consensus in the literatures, this thesis adopts a comprehensive understanding of violence. I understand ‘violence’ is used to include harassment, abuse and intimidation. This comprehensive, inclusive approach is used in recognition of the interrelated aspects of these various forms. I am informed by the typologies of political violence in the emerging feminist literature. I am particularly influenced by Krook (2020)’s categories of physical, psychological, sexual, semiotic and economic violence. Physical violence is bodily harm and includes. Drawing on the theoretical analytical importance of the online space (Bardall, 2013; Jane, 2017; Lewis, Rowe and Wiper, 2017; Kuperberg, 2021), I also include ‘online’ as a specific form of violence.

I adopt a theoretical and analytical approach that all of these forms are on the continuum of political violence. This does not mean that every form is uniquely impactful or should have the same policy response, nor that I expect research subjects to share my approaches. For example, policy makers and policy documents may separate criminal and non-criminal forms, and identify harassment as not meeting the criteria of violence. My

broad understanding is an approach for analysis and theorising, rather than a dogma I expect research subjects to follow.

Furthermore, I adopt a holistic approach to gender, understanding gender as individual identity, a social structure that is embedded in institutions. Crucially, I aim to integrate intersectionality into my analysis. From an intersectional perspective, multi-method qualitative research can allow us various avenues of understanding multiple oppressions and perspectives. While there are contestations about how to effectively operationalise intersectionality, this thesis adopts the approach of centring gender and actively identifying where it intersects with other social processes (McCall, 2000, 2001, 2005; Choo and Ferree, 2010; Daly, 2020).

In particular, the thesis examines the gendered, including intersectional, aspects of politicisation or policy problem formation. This thesis understands politicisation as a process and analyses the interpretation of violence towards politicians within political institutions over time. The majority of the thesis descriptively interrogates understandings of gender and violence in the politicisation process.

This theoretical and analytical approach is particularly influenced by principles of Bacchi's (2012) 'What is the problem represented to be?' As applied to my research, these principles caution that the process of politicisation policy problems are constructed and may or may not reflect or address the phenomenon/the problem in 'reality'. Normative ideas around the roles of MPs and construction of gender will impact the translation of the phenomenon at the various stages of the policy process.

Where I depart from Bacchi is an outright rejection of the ‘problem-solving’ approach as I theorise what an ideal, transformative politicisation process might be. In this way, I draw on principles of Feminist Intuitionism (FI).

FI theory conceptualises institutions as changeable. For example, the aforementioned FI theory of Gender-sensitive Parliaments (Palmieri, 2011; Childs, 2016; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018b) argues that changing formal and informal rules and practices will ‘gender’ parliaments to make them more able to elect and retain women MPs. I theorise ‘gendering’ efforts, such as baby leave, changing timing of debates, and anti-violence policies, as ‘social policy for MPs’. An aim of social policy is promoting the welfare or wellbeing of a population (Alcock, 2016, p. 7), and these are policies designed to redress inequalities and improve the welfare of a specific population, with an aim of advancing the wellbeing of society as a whole by improving gender equality in political decision making.

My approach conceptualises politics as a workplace. This builds on the, mostly emerging, theoretical work in feminist institutionalism conceptualising parliament as a workplace, rather than only a political institution that makes decisions (Collier and Raney, 2018; Miller, 2021; Raney and Collier, 2021). Importantly, the political workplace encompasses various contexts, including parliaments, constituencies, political party events such as for fundraising and campaigning, as well as online spaces such as social media platforms where politicians are increasingly expected to carry out their roles (Barker and Jurasz, 2019; Kuperberg, 2021). In this theory, MPs are both democratic representatives

and individual workers; they are public servants who require protective policy to carry out their roles.

MPs are at risk of violence in multiple ways. Perpetrators can be other MPs, party members, constituents and members of the public (Collier and Raney, 2018; National Democratic Institute, 2018; Krook, 2020). Take the recent murders of MPs: Jo Cox was murdered on her way to her constituency surgery and David Amess was killed while giving advice at his surgery. MPs regularly face online threats when attempting to carry out their roles (Southern and Harmer, 2019).

Given the variety of MPs' workplace and risks, MPs are supported by different policy actors, institutions and mechanisms. In this thesis, policy is understood comprehensively as the rules, guidance and institutions developed by specific actors towards a set of aims. I am less interested in specific legislation than I am with policy as an institutional architecture that manages and responds to MPs experience with a range of violence that may not meet the criminal threshold. This conceptualisation, and empirical work, informs my focus on certain policy actors and institutions, as I will further discuss later in the thesis. I am interested in understanding what these institutional policies and practices are and how and why they were developed.

In interrogating policy problematisation, it is important to go beyond simply identifying if gender is mentioned to uncovering underlying ideas/assumptions, including exploring how policies construct or reinforce gender un/equal relations (Daly, 2020; Chanfreau, 2022), and assessing the nature of the discursive understanding of gender

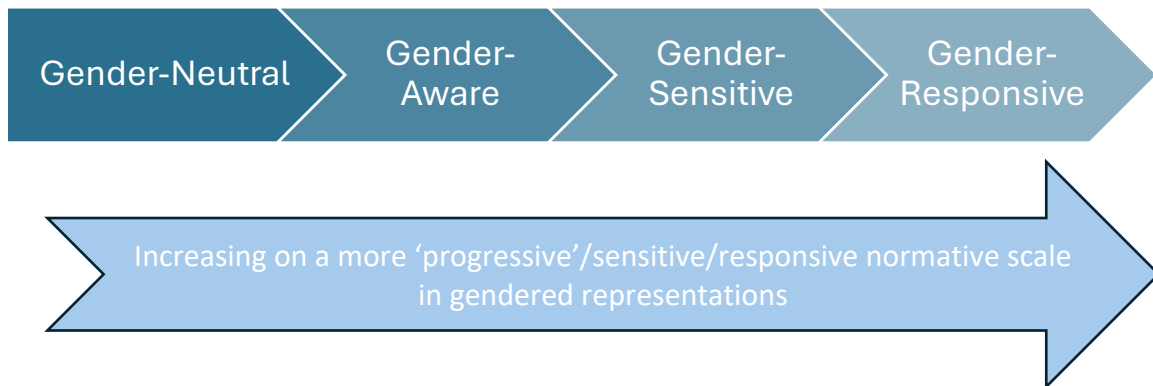
equality, (Bacchi, 2012a; Jenson, 2015; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2017). For example, considerations could include if gender is represented as an individual identity and/or a structural phenomenon, with such inequality embedded in institutions, and if sexist and/or racist violence is identified as part of inequalities in society.

Key parts of critically analysing problem representations are identifying the “silences” or what is the problem *not* represented to be, and possible alternative problem representations (Krook and Freidenvall, 2015; Bacchi, 2017).

This thesis particularly informed by the feminist institutionalist scholars and practitioners who go beyond ‘gender-sensitive’ to ‘gender-responsive’ or ‘gender-transformative’ approaches (Mackay and Krook, 2015a; UNFPA and UNICEF, 2020) which can be applied to that policy to ascertain whether it just includes women but extends to transforming gender relations towards equality.

In order to truly respond to and transform gender relations, an intersectional approach would be necessary. An intersectional approach recognises that gender intersects with other oppressions and identities such as race to create unique sets of oppressions (Hankivsky, 2012; Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013; Kuperberg, 2018).

Figure 4. Theorising gender in politicisation processes



In my theoretical framework a normatively 'ideal' politicisation process would be gender responsive. This means that the problem formation of violence towards politicians would have a stated aim of responding to structural intersectional gender inequality. Gender would be understood as both an individual identity and a structural phenomenon that demands the transformation of political institutions, including parliaments. More specifically for the empirics in this thesis, policy debates and texts would discursively explicitly connect addressing violence to addressing structural inequalities. Policy responses to violence would explicitly include institutional change on the part of parliaments, police, political parties and even broader societal locations such as schools.

Alternatives to this theoretical pinnacle are backwards along the normative scale. In a gender-sensitive politicisation process, gender, perhaps also intersecting with other characteristics, would be recognised as a risk factor in terms of violence because of structural inequality. In policy debates and responses, large-scale institutional transformation may not be demanded but the risk factors of structural inequalities would be discussed in relation to violence in politics.

In a gender-aware politicisation process, gender, perhaps also intersecting with other characteristics, would be recognised as a factor in relation to the problem of violence, but likely as an individual characteristic, rather than as a structural inequality. Policy debates and responses may recognise women and/or marginalised individuals as at particular risk of violence. Responses would be more individualistic rather than structural in nature i.e. addressing the behaviours of individual perpetrators and victims.

Finally, the least 'ideal' politicisation process would be gender-neutral with no recognition of gender nor its intersection with other characteristics or inequalities in relation to violence in politics. Gender would not be identified for individuals nor institutions in policy debates and responses.

It is useful to consider this idealised theory within empirical background to develop expectations. Given then what we know about the challenges of integrating gender in the policy making process across contexts, including the UK, we would not necessarily expect a fully-fledged gender-responsive approach in the politicisation process. For example, recent scholarship that analyses UK policy from an intersectional standpoint finds that identities, such as gender, race and disability, are usually presented and approached as separate rather than connected; largely because of the language and application of equalities legislation, such as the UK Equality Act, which separates out different 'protected characteristics' (Christoffersen, 2021).

This does not mean that it is irrelevant discuss ideal – rather, I argue that it is important to set out what an ideal policy would be, while being realistic about what is likely

to be found empirically within the focus of study. In this thesis, an FI approach allows us to conceptualise the ideal ways to address the problem of violence towards MPs and map the ways in which the problem has been constructed to date. Both the empirical 'reality' and conceptual 'ideal' allow us to develop understandings of the gendered dimensions of the politicisation of violence in UK politics.

## UK Case Background

A single-case study allows the mapping of politicisation of a specific phenomenon. The UK is a particularly relevant case study because it has been a focal point for raising the profile of violence experienced by politicians in 'non-conflict' contexts following the murder of Jo Cox MP in 2016 (Krook, 2019). This section offers an original overview of the background of the problem of violence towards UK politicians.

UK politicians have experienced political violence in the past but usually in the context of conflict (Sabbagh, 2021). The perpetrators of all but one of the previous MP assassinations were Irish nationalist terrorists.<sup>1</sup> The other murder of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval in 1812 was by an individual seeking in vain for government compensation for unjust imprisonment (UK Parliament, 2023c). What was likely so shocking about the murder of Jo Cox is that it happened during relative peacetime.

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<sup>1</sup> Between 1979 and 1990 MPs Airey Neave MP, Robert Bradford MP, Anthony Berry MP and Ian Gow MP were assassinated by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) during conflict in Northern Ireland.

Since this murder, there has been burgeoning political and academic attention to the range of violence experienced by MPs, and another murder of an MP, Sir David Amess, in 2021. Yet, despite global political and academic attention, an in-depth analysis of the processes of politicisation of the phenomenon has not yet been conducted. In the existing literature, there seems to be an assumption of important events and policy developments without fuller interrogation. Appendix 1 presents the broader policy architecture and the specific policy documents.

Historically, preventing and addressing violence experienced by MPs was approached almost exclusively as a preventative security response. The primary actor was the Parliamentary Security Department (PSD) which was (and remains) under the responsibility of Parliament (Director of Parliamentary Security) in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Service to protect those working in Westminster (UK Parliament, 2023b). The initial securitisation of Parliament and Whitehall<sup>2</sup> seemed to develop in response to terrorism, initially in the 1980s, Irish nationalist terrorism and in the early 2000s, Islamist extremism.

The increasing recognition that the public could be perpetrators emerged slowly, and still was seemingly viewed as rare before 2016. In 2006, the Fixed Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC) was established in partnership between the Metropolitan Police Service and the National Health Service (NHS): "Its purpose is to assess and manage the risks from lone

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<sup>2</sup> Whitehall is the street in which many Government departments are on or near, a moniker for the Government ecosystem

individuals who harass, stalk or threaten public figures” (Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, 2023c). While still primarily a security problem, violence experienced by politicians was also understood as a problem of health, specifically perpetrators with severe mental health issues. FTAC seems to assume one-off incidences of violence (defined as harassment, stalking and threats) perpetrated by individuals with specific psychological needs.

During this period, there were two high-profile incidents of violence towards MPs at constituency advice surgeries. In 2000, Nigel Jones MP survived a sword attack by a constituent conspiracy theorist, which killed his staff member, Andrew Pennington (Hattenstone, 2000). In 2010, Stephen Timms survived a near fatal knife attack by a radicalised constituent seeking “revenge” for the UK’s involvement in the Iraq war (Timms, 2021). These cases were seemingly treated as one-off cases rather than reflective of a wider group-based problem of threats towards MPs.

By 2015, there seemed to be a shift towards group-based threat policy. Following an increase in abuse towards MPs, in December 2015, a national security plan, Operation Bridger, was established by Parliament and the police. The immediate reason for the creation of the strategy was “the fraught parliamentary debate on bombing Syria saw an upsurge in concern about threats of violence” (UK Parliament, 2016). As far as is known through the policy analysis, this was the first time there was a specific, national strategy which dealt with abuse towards all MPs. It was primarily focussed on policing and set-up Special Point of Contacts (SPOCS) in local police forces who were officers responsible for dealing with threats and abuse towards the MPs in their areas.

Furthermore, in January 2016, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) made changes to the security package which seems to have included a removal of the limit on security spending for MPs, which was previously limited to £2,000 per MP (IPSA, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2017a, 2017b, 2022a).<sup>3</sup> The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) scheme was set-up in 2009 to regulate MPs' budgets in response to the 'expenses scandal' in which multiple MPs were found to be abusing public funds (IPSA, 2023). Another policy development (for which a specific date could not be publicly sourced nor recalled by interviewees) was changing the way IPSA reported spending. Security funding is now also reported collectively, rather than by individual MP. IPSA (2022a) rationalised this practice "to reduce risk to the MP, their staff and their families." What is clear in the IPSA policy documents (and confirmed in the interviews) is that since 2017, IPSA has deferred security funding decisions to the police: "will fund the cost of security measures as recommended by the National Police Chiefs' Council" (IPSA, 2022a, p. 52). While the initial and perhaps remaining overall aim of the IPSA scheme is to prevent abuse of public funds, the specific security funding is now about protecting MPs, staff and families.

The next key policy development was in direct response to the fatal shooting and stabbing of Jo Cox MP in June 2016, the first murder of an MP in peacetime since the height

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<sup>3</sup> The IPSA Scheme is renewed every year. The early editions, 2009-10 and 2010-11, stated "The limit for Security Assistance will normally be £2,000 in any financial year" First Edition of the Scheme (2009-10): and Second Edition of the Scheme (2010-11): A 2022 information page indicates that the "security budget is uncapped". It is not made clear when this uncap occurred. From 2011, the scheme did not indicate a cost, but there is not a clear statement of when it was uncapped. According to 2017 Freedom of Information Request, changes to security available were rolled out in January 2016, which may have been the cap. The 2016-17 edition of the scheme includes "new arrangements" which seem to include "Funding is available under Security Assistance for costs incurred in line with the security options package issued by IPSA."

of Northern Ireland conflict.<sup>4</sup> Operation Bridger was expanded to establish a new unit, the Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team (PLAIT) in parliament to coordinate with local police services on security threats to MPs. The public introduction to the classified document states: “their [MPs’] role does present unique vulnerabilities and risk if they are to continue to practice open and transparent democracy by being available to their constituents. It is important that we retain the confidence of MPs” (National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC), 2016). This reflects attention to an increased problem of (potential) violence that could impact MPs collectively.

The year 2017 seems to have been a turning point in policy development especially by political parties and parliament to address the phenomenon of violence against MPs. The events leading up to and during the 2017 General Election as well as the CSPL review on Intimidation in Public Life seem to have been significant drivers of politicisation. One marker of politicisation is the increase in the number of specific parliamentary debates on discussing the specific topic of violence against politicians.

During the General Election campaign, in March 2017, a terrorist attacked Westminster and killed five people, including police officer Keith Palmer who was protecting parliament. In addition to this extreme attack, MPs encountered an apparent rise in other forms of abuse, harassment and intimidation.

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<sup>4</sup> Notably, although Jo Cox was the first MP murdered since 1985, there were two high-profile physically violent attacks on MPs in the 2000s: In January 2000, Nigel Jones MP attacked with a sword which killed his aide Andrew Pennington who intervened. In May 2010, Stephen Timms MP survived near-fatal stabbing.

Following the election, in July 2017, the Prime Minister (Theresa May) announced an independent review of Intimidation in Public Life by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), an advisory, non-departmental public body (different to a select committee). The CSPL drew on the nascent but growing research by academics and the third sector, including Amnesty International's analysis of online abuse experienced by women candidates in the 2017 snap general election campaign (Dhrodia, 2018). CSPL published its review in December (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2017). Reflecting the growing policy agenda, several parliamentary debates took place in relation to the topic on intimidation in public life from 2017.

Largely in response to the CSPL's recommendations, law enforcement/security actors produced guidance for MPs on facing threats. In 2019, The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) produced 'Responding to Intimidating Behaviour: Information for Parliamentarians'. The 'Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections' (2019 and 2021) was produced by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), The Electoral Commission and College of Policing. The purpose of these documents seems to be to educate politicians on ways to respond in the existing legal and security framework. This policy action by police actors reflects an understanding that violence towards MPs is a growing problem. For example, in the foreword, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) (2019, p. 2) stated that the guidance was "developed in a context in which Parliamentarians have been the targeted victims of criminal conduct."

These documents outline what laws and mechanisms MPs can use when faced with criminal abuse. Unlike in some other countries, there has not been specific legal/criminal responses to the problem of abuse in politics. There are laws that MPs and police can and do use to address violence such as the Protection from Harassment Act, Criminal Justice and Courts Act (which had amended the Malicious Communications Act 1998) and Criminal Damage Act. (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2017; National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) et al., 2021) but not a specific criminal law as such.

Political parties also took action in response to the CSPL review and became important policy actors in addressing violence. For example, initially agreed and planned in 2017 in partnership with CSPL, the parliamentary joint statement on conduct of political party members was published in 2020 (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2020a). Political parties updated their individual policies at a faster pace. While political parties had some behavioural rules before, specific behavioural codes of conduct and policies focussed on preventing and addressing harassment (and other forms of violence) emerged from 2017. Rather than a specific focus on security, these policy responses were focussed on behaviour with punishments including loss of party membership and limits on standing for parliamentary selection.

During this time, Parliament also expanded its policies beyond security to setting behavioural standards and sanctions. As well as concerns about MPs as victims of intimidation, a related reason for policy action was MPs as perpetrators. In 2017, there were widespread, high-profile accusations of sexual harassment and bullying during the #MeToo

Movement, focusing mostly on male MPs abusing female staff and other women in the political ecosystem (Krook 2018, Julios 2022). In a significant policy move, the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) was established in 2018. This includes the UK Parliament Behaviour Code and separate policy and procedures for ‘Bullying and Harassment’ and ‘Sexual Misconduct’ which covers all MPs and staff in parliament (whether victims or perpetrators).

During this period, several high-profile incidences of violence took place, including the foiled planned assassination of Rosie Cooper MP by neo-Nazis (Marsh, 2019). Separately, the Labour Party was investigated by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the arms-length government body mandated to hold organizations to account for discrimination. The EHRC (2020) found that the party had engaged in anti-Semitic harassment and discrimination, and mandated policy change.

In October 2021, the second murder of an MP in peacetime occurred. Sir David Amess MP was killed at his constituency advice surgery. As I will further explore, although the attack was clearly physical violence, much of the political discussion centred around the need to address the range of violence MPs experience particularly online abuse towards women.

## Research Design

The research design, also summarised in Figure 5, involves analysing aspects of the politicisation process, which build upon each other to answer to the overarching research questions.

The driving research question is 'How and why has violence (including abuse, intimidation and harassment) against MPs become politicised in the UK 2010-2021?' The sub-research question is: 'Has the phenomenon been politicised in a gendered way and, if so, how and why?'

The timeframe allows us to consider and analyse potential developments before the important event of the murder of Jo Cox in 2016 and capture important recent policy developments in recent years, including the CSPL review.

I have developed a multi-method qualitative study to allow multiple aspects of the politicisation process to be uncovered (Kenny, 2013; Ritchie *et al.*, 2014; Cairney, 2020a; Esposito, 2021). The study examines four dimensions of the politicisation of the problem of violence towards MPs that I have summarised as 'Policy Debates', 'Policy Committee,' 'Policy Architecture' and 'Policy Reflections.'

The thesis is designed with the view that it is necessary to do the descriptive research to set the foundation for the explanatory work. My enquiry into politicisation is a combination of the descriptive – what are the key parts of the politicisation process and how has the problem been represented discursively – and explanatory – what reasons have driven the politicisation generally and the specific problem representations.

This thesis adopts an explicitly interpretative, feminist, qualitative approach, which involves an interrogation of underlying, constructed meanings in the processes and outcomes of policy problems. Aligned with the theoretical framework, I am informed by the principles of Bacchi's (2012) 'What is the Problem Represented To Be' framework in terms of uncovering problem representations including 'silences.' In terms of a discrete methods, I use frame, content and thematic policy analysis, with a focus on 'Critical Frame Analysis' which demands attention to underlying normative principles from (policy) problem 'diagnosis' to 'prognosis' (Verloo, 2007; Dombos, 2012; van der Haar and Verloo, 2016). As indicated, the specific methods used are In each chapter I will go into detail of the specific methodological approaches in each other.

Since the interview evidence is spread across chapters, I will summarise the commonalities of this evidence-source here. The twenty interviews with MPs and CSPL actors were conducted between March 2023 and October 2024 at a location of the participant's choosing – sometimes online and sometimes in person in Westminster. One interview was 20 minutes in duration, one was 90 minutes, and the others were around 60 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured with a short list of pre-determined questions which allowed me to change the order or ask additional questions depending on the evolution of the conversation. The interview guides are in Appendix 2.

The interviews were recorded directly onto my password protected OneDrive using Microsoft Word and/or with my password protected phone recording and then uploaded directly onto OneDrive and deleted from the phone. Interviews were initially transcribed

with the Microsoft Word transcription software and manually corrected to ensure accuracy. I removed some filler words (e.g. 'you know', 'like', 'um'). I also removed some details for confidentiality reasons e.g. the name of the party, cabinet or shadow cabinet role or constituency when it would make clear the particular case/individual.

I used NVIVO software to support the analysis. I began with initial codes book informed by the research questions and existing literature relevant to my comprehensive exploration of various aspects of the politicisation process of violence, including harassment, abuse and intimidation of UK MPs. I will further explain the analytical approach for the CSPL and MPs interviews in the relevant sections.

Each of the empirical chapters is structured as follows. First, the 'Introduction' outlines the context of the chapter's enquiry. Second, the 'Analytical Approach' details the specific conceptual and methodological frameworks. Third, the 'Analysis' presents the main empirical findings. Finally, the 'Discussion and Conclusion' explore empirical and theoretical implications specific to this analysis and for the thesis as a whole.

Taken as a whole, the universe of evidence for the thesis amounts to over 1,200 pages of parliamentary debates, policy documents as well as twenty original interviews with MPs, former MPs and members and staff of the Committee on Standards and Public Life (who were involved in the Intimidation on Public Life Review).

The first aspect of the politicisation process I explore (in chapter four) is the discursive engagement in the agenda-setting space of parliamentary debates within the parliamentary institution. UK House of Commons parliamentary debates are important

agenda-setting spaces where representations of policy problems are (re)produced in a dynamic interplay of the agendas of individual MPs, parties, the government and the parliamentary institution (Proksch and Slapin, 2015). MPs use frames to represent their ideas in order to politicise an issue as worthy of policy attention (Ilie, 2010). The UK House of Commons is particularly interesting because it provides opportunities to both the government and opposition parties to present their ideas in response to government speakers or as debate proposers themselves. As such, this is an appropriate place to start an exploration of a politicisation process.

In this part of my inquiry, I use frame analysis of parliamentary debates to examine the problem-framing of violence towards MPs to ask, 'What is the problem-framing of violence towards MPs in parliamentary debates between 2010 and 2021?'

The evidence base for this is the specific debates between 2010-2021 that specifically cover violence towards UK MPs. I apply feminist frame analysis to the study of gender and political violence to examine underlying normative principles, assumptions and effects from 'diagnosis' to 'prognosis' of problem representation (Bacchi, 2012a; van der Haar and Verloo, 2016). I analyse how MPs represent any violence they experience in this agenda-setting space. Specifically, I examine the eight House of Commons debates on the phenomenon of violence against politicians from 2010 to 2021. Debates were extracted from the parliamentary record Hansard (2021) using key word searches. I apply frame analysis to the study of gender and political violence to examine underlying normative

principles, assumptions and effects from ‘diagnosis’ to ‘prognosis’ of problem representation (Bacchi, 2012a; van der Haar and Verloo, 2016).

A key part of the politicisation story was the problematisation of the issue of intimidation towards MPs and parliamentary candidates following the 2017 General Election. In chapter five, I use a case study approach to interrogate the development process and content analysis of the influential review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which was produced between July and December 2017.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) is an advisory, non-departmental public body (different to a select committee) (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2024). Established in 1994, the CSPL advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards in public life. It regularly produces review reports with documentary and original evidence leading to recommendations on a range of issues related to standards, including government expenses and local government structures.

The research question guiding this analysis is ‘What were the key factors that influenced the Committee on Standards in Public Life (2017) Intimidation in Public Life review a) being set-up, and b) focusing on certain aspects of the problem and potential solutions?’ I analyse the review process including the key actors and evidence. I conduct thematic analysis on 589 pages of documents – including publicly available evidence submitted to the review, the final report and the committee press releases – and five original interviews with CSPL members and staff involved in the review process and report development. Using content and thematic analysis, this part of the study interrogates the

review process and problematisation of violence, including intimidation, abuse and harassment, towards MPs.

The next aspect of politicisation this thesis focusses on, in chapter six, is the actual policies adopted to address violence, including harassment, abuse and intimidation toward MPs emerged. It asks, 'How are gender and violence conceptualised in the specific policies to address violence towards MPs?'

The main evidence source that informs that this chapter is the relevant policy documents. Importantly, the policies analysed are those that were created specifically to address violence experienced by MPs (which sometimes also includes related political actors such as parliamentary staff and political party members). I am particularly interested in the policy responses by the specific actors, parliament, political parties and law enforcement.

In the analysis of policy documents, I operationalise the theoretical understandings and categorisations of gender, intersectionality and violence. A continuum consisting of four categories of gender-sensitivity is developed and applied for this purpose: gender neutral, gender-aware, gender-sensitive and gender-responsive. A similar procedure and continuum are used for the assessment of the approach to intersectionality. Policies were also coded for their understandings of violence, specifically the inclusion of the forms: physical, psychological, sexual, economic, semiotic and online.

The fourth and final aspect of the research, presented in chapter seven, explores how MPs themselves perceive the politicisation process. The research question that drives

the analysis is 'How do MPs conceive of the phenomenon and policy problem of violence towards MPs?' The evidence is sixteen original interviews with MPs which I analyse through thematic content analysis to identify MPs' reflections.

As with the rest of the thesis, this chapter is not about MPs' experiences of violence alone. Rather, analysis of experiences of violence is related to MPs' perceptions about how the problem has been politicised and how they themselves interreact with the specific policy architecture to protect them.

Figure 5. Research Design Overview



## Ethical Considerations and Reflections on Positionality

This research comes with important ethical implications. The most pertinent ethical considerations have been for the interviews as these involve human participants. In addition to the burden of time, there is a psychological risk regarding the participants discussing their experiences of violence. To mitigate the risks, I made clear that MPs were under no obligation to share their personal experiences (the Interview Guide is presented in Appendix 2.) Furthermore, the recruitment of the participants minimises the risk: I recruited those who have publicly declared an interest in the issue of violence against politicians and/or who have been recommended by political networks as being likely interested in speaking on this issue. In addition, in the interview and in the follow up/thank you email (outlined in Appendix 2), I signposted to sources of support including the parliamentary estate's own hotlines and another public source of support, The Samaritans. I made the best efforts to ensure informed consent from interviewees with the information about the research process and how their data would be used.

I also took efforts to protect the interviewees' data. With interviewees permission, I recorded the interviews on my iPhone, setting it to only save locally. I deleted this local file once I had saved it onto the even more secure university OneDrive. Both the phone and OneDrive are password protected. In the interview transcriptions, which were created and saved in the OneDrive, I removed identifiable data. I took the additional step of making a numbered participant list and storing the original named and linked list in a separate,

password protected folder. The names of interviewees are not disclosed in the thesis. I further discuss the evidence presentation in the relevant chapters (five and seven).

I gained approval from the Departmental Research Committee (DREC) and the Central University Research Committee (CUREC). Notably, some peers argued that my research would not need to go through the centralised, more comprehensive ethical approval process because I was interviewing elite actors. I chose to go through the more comprehensive ethical approval process as I felt the research topic warranted a more rigorous ethical approach. I consider that not going through the ethical process risks reproducing the problematic view that elected representatives should expect a degree of violence as an inevitable 'cost' of political participation. I consider it important for research processes (as far as possible) to not reproduce problematic views or practices.

Researching violence in politics comes psychological safety risk to me as a researcher. In order to minimise this risk, I undertook training on vicarious or secondary trauma. Originally conceptualised in response to symptoms for some staff supporting domestic violence survivors, vicarious or secondary trauma has been identified as a phenomenon that can also impact researchers studying a range of sensitive subjects (Williamson *et al.*, 2020). Techniques to protect my own psychological safety include effectively setting boundaries and developing support networks. I believe that safe research is effective research. Protecting myself means I was able to protect my research participants and the sanctity of the research evidence and analytical process.

In that spirit of safe, effective research, reflecting on my own positionality is an important analytical exercise. In my PhD process, I have grappled with an ‘insider/outside’ position and embodied the theory that positionalities are not fixed but fluid (Fujii, 2018; Esposito, 2021; Olmos-Vega *et al.*, 2023). I could appear to be a political outsider because I do not work in politics. Yet, that view would ignore the reality that I spent my early working life serving politicians; I used to wear a similar green badge as those staff members who collected me from waiting rooms in Parliament. Furthermore, my work with The Jo Cox Foundation has made me adjacent to politics in a way that could class me as an ‘insider’ – working with the political ecosystem to make recommendations to address abuse – and/or an ‘outsider’ – as part of a third sector, non-partisan charity. What is perhaps more relevant than neatly categorising my positionality is being clear that I have relevant experiences to the research.

During my various roles working in UK politics, I campaigned with politicians who wore police alarms and were accompanied by security detail. I worked with staff who spent hours reporting abusive tweets and emails. I myself managed the email account of on Yvette Cooper’s campaign for UK Labour Party leader in 2015. Some days we would get only a few emails; others, hundreds. Some messages were obviously abusive with words such as “Traitor”, “Scum” or “GET IN THE SEA.” However, it is the more insidious aggression that most bothered me. The email that has stayed with me was a one sentence message: “Go spend more time with your kids” signed off with a kiss, ‘X’, and a female-sounding name. It does not take a masters in Gender Studies to parse that this comment was specifically

targeted at a woman politician, with the assumption that her political activism threatened her 'feminine' position as mother.

In all my political experiences, one event is prominent. In June 2016, I was canvassing with colleagues for the Tooting byelection and the European Referendum campaign when our phones collectively buzzed. We looked at each other in disbelief and horror. A Labour MP had been shot and stabbed on her way to her constituency advice surgery. Hours later, Jo Cox's death was confirmed.

When I read the parliamentary transcript of 'Tributes to Jo Cox' for my DPhil research, I sobbed just as I had when I watched the debate live. Alone in a library carrel at the University of Oxford in 2022, I was transported back to a House of Commons office in 2016, clutching the hand of a fellow parliamentary researcher who was sobbing as her boss delivered a tribute to her murdered friend. It did not matter if, like me, you did not know Jo personally. Her murder shook everyone who worked in or around UK (and global) politics.

In the immediate aftermath of Jo Cox' murder, there was a lot of discourse about compassionate politics. For a short while, it seemed like this attack might indeed be a one-off, that politicians and the public would coalesce around Jo's much quoted message that we have "more in common than that which divides us."<sup>5</sup> Yet, the years that followed have seen more abuse between and within political parties, elections marked by personal insults and sexist and racist vitriol, and more death.

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<sup>5</sup> In her maiden speech, reflecting on the diversity in her constituency, Jo Cox MP said: "We have far more in common than that which divides us." This sentiment was echoed after her murder and since to campaign for community cohesion.

In March 2017, from Labour Party Headquarters down the street, I watched the police planes circle the Elizabeth Tower<sup>6</sup> as I frantically texted with my friends and colleagues who were inside. While no one inside was harmed during the Westminster terrorist attack, six people outside lost their lives, including parliamentary police officer, Keith Palmer.

In 2021, when I saw the news alert about Sir David Amess MP's murder, I needed to exit the shared PhD office to process the information alone. Unlike when I heard the news of Jo Cox' assault or the attack on parliament, I was not surrounded by people who felt the same shock, as if it could have been their bosses (or themselves). As I walked to the bathroom stall, clutching my phone, I thought "not again."

During my PhD journey, I have had the opportunity to engage with work adjacent to my research topic. The most relevant of these experiences is my involvement with The Jo Cox Foundation,<sup>7</sup> developing recommendations, raising awareness and campaigning to address abuse towards elected representatives. While this work is separate from my PhD research, the engagement I have had with political activists, police colleagues and others has undoubtedly impacted the way I relate to my independent work.

I am acutely aware that all of these experiences shape how I interact with the research and how research participants interact with me. The interviews are perhaps the

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<sup>6</sup> The Elizabeth Tower is the structure that holds the 'Big Ben' clock in the Houses of Parliament.

<sup>7</sup> The Jo Cox Foundation, set-up in the aftermath of her murder, works in issues that the late MP was passionate about, including respectful politics. I have worked with The Jo Cox Foundation's Civility Commission. For more information, see The Jo Cox Foundation (2024), Civility Commission, <https://www.jocoxfoundation.org/our-work/respectful-politics/commission/>

most pertinent part of the research process in terms of such positionality. What is perhaps most relevant is that I knew and had even previously worked with some of my interviewees, which might have made them more open and the evidence richer than other interviewees. My political views made me an insider to some (though I did not actively reveal these unless prompted or they already knew; additionally, some may have *assumed* aspects of my political views). Furthermore, my gender, accent, upbringing (actual or assumed), elite education likely made me relatable to some interviewees.

My relationship to the research also comes with unique strengths. Practically, my experience meant that I was able to gain access to elite research participants who can be hard to reach. I acknowledge my immense privilege to access research participants through my professional networks and other aspects of identity. More substantively, I approached the research with a deep expertise of the context in which the actors operated. For example, I am acutely aware of the pressures of various locations of political workspaces and inter-connected nature of actors and institutions that MPs have to navigate. This attention to context allowed me to select and interpret the most pertinent parts of my evidence, that may not have been as accessible if I did not come to the research with my related experiences.

Such positionality comes with ethical considerations. Given my relationship with the research, I am particularly careful to present my analysis not as factual, but as an interpretation of the evidence informed by my rigorous theoretical and methodological approach. While I maintain a degree of analytical distance with my research, I also

acknowledge my relationship with it. I join other scholars (Esposito, 2021; Olmos-Vega *et al.*, 2023) who reject the notion of a neutral/wholly objective researcher and argue for the importance of reflexivity of the researcher's relationship with the research. The vast majority of researchers (whether self-aware or not) draw on experiences and carry preconceptions and normative assumptions. By being transparent about my relationship with the research, I can be as rigorous as possible in my analysis.

## 4. Policy Debates – Representations of violence towards politicians in UK parliamentary debates

Note. An adapted version of this chapter has been published. *Phillips, H. (2023). What is the problem? Representations of gender and violence towards politicians in UK parliamentary debates. European Journal of Politics and Gender (published online ahead of print 2023), available from: <https://doi.org/10.1332/251510821X16862273096979>*

### Introduction

This chapter analyses the discursive engagement in the agenda-setting space of parliamentary debates within the parliamentary institution as part of the politicisation process. The chapter's specific research question is: What was the problem-framing of violence towards MPs in parliamentary debates between 2010 and 2021?

UK House of Commons parliamentary debates are important agenda-setting spaces where representations about policy problems are (re)produced in a dynamic interplay of the agendas of individual MPs, parties, the government and the parliamentary institution (Proksch and Slapin, 2015). MPs use frames as representations of ideas in order to politicise an issue as worthy of policy attention.

I analyse how MPs represent violence they experience in this agenda-setting space. Specifically, I examine the eight House of Commons debates on the phenomenon of violence against politicians from 2010 to 2021. Debates were extracted from the parliamentary record Hansard. I apply frame analysis to the study of gender and political violence to examine underlying normative principles, assumptions and effects from

'diagnosis' to 'prognosis' of problem representation (Bacchi, 2012a; van der Haar and Verloo, 2016).

The analysis finds that violence (usually referred to as abuse, intimidation, and harassment) towards MPs has been increasingly framed in parliament as 'normal' or 'expected'. The phenomenon is framed as an attack on the normative public good of democracy. Different forms of violence, but especially online, are represented as harmful. The main policy problem represented is the lack of social media regulation to be solved by the government and social media platforms. Notably, over time there has been an increasing focus on women's experiences as particularly aggressive. Yet, women's experiences are not necessarily represented as important in themselves, but because of their impact on the public good of democracy.

## Analytical Approach

Discursive institutional frameworks focus on the importance of the ideational representations of policy within political institutions: "institutions matter" (March and Olsen, 1983, p. 747) and "ideas matter" (Béland, D. (2005). Bleich's (2002, p. 1064) helpful definition is: "frames are multidimensional ideas relevant to a particular policy sphere that serve to organise information, empower certain actors, define goals, and constrain actions."

Frame analysis involves specifically and critically examining how normative principles are reflected in the representation of policy problems. Bacchi's (2012) 'What is

the Problem Represented To Be' approach encourages asking questions around assumptions, silences and effects of the problem representation, which relates to the attention that Critical Frame Analysis devotes to underlying normative principles from problem 'diagnosis' to 'prognosis' (Verloo, 2007; Dombos, 2012; van der Haar and Verloo, 2016).

In the parliamentary debates, considering gender could mean an explicit or implicit reference to how the phenomenon of violence against elected representatives is experienced differently by men and women, or a recognition of the impact of structural sexism.<sup>8</sup> Understanding gender as intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989; Choo and Ferree, 2010; Collins, 2015), the analysis considers if and how gender is presented as intersecting with other identities or oppressions such as ethnicity, race or racism. Empirically this would be realised by attention to the experiences and impacts of those of a specific identity group and/or recognition of the causal impact of structural racism or sexism.

UK House of Commons parliamentary debates are important agenda-setting spaces where representations about policy problems are (re)produced. For further context, in the UK, parliamentary business is dictated by the government but there are opportunities for opposition and individual MPs to apply to the Speaker for particular slots. Different types of debates include those in the main chamber during the regular business, adjournment debates at the end of business on an issue proposed by an individual member, and

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<sup>8</sup> Gender of course goes beyond the binary of men and women. However, gender diversity is unlikely to be considered in these specific debates about politicians as, until recently, there were no openly gender diverse MPs. Jamie Wallis 'came out' as the first openly trans MP in 2022 (Allegretti, 2022).

Westminster Hall debates on topics proposed by individuals or select committees (UK Parliament, 2022). That there are any debates specifically on a topic, and that the number of debates has increased, indicates its politicisation (Proksch and Slapin, 2015; UK Parliament, 2022).

In parliamentary debates, MPs usually act as advocates, conveying problems which impact groups in the population (Phillips, 1994; Heywood, 2004, p. 233; Proksch and Slapin, 2015), and there is rich feminist scholarship on how gendered differences impact communication styles and problem selection (Lovenduski, 2014; Hargrave and Blumenau, 2022; Siow, 2023). Yet, in debates on violence towards politicians, all MPs take on an unusual positionality of themselves being the impacted population. This dual role of advocates and impacted population may influence the way they frame the phenomenon. Exploring how MPs strategically frame the violence towards them in political discourse over time develops our understanding of the phenomenon of violence experienced by MPs theoretically and empirically.

The evidence comprise the eight House of Commons debates on the phenomenon of violence towards politicians between 2010 and 2021. This timeframe captures important events and developments, for example, the murder of Jo Cox MP (Krook, 2020) and the publication of the major UK parliament gender-sensitive institutional review, 'The Good Parliament' (Childs, 2016), the of Intimidation in Public Life Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) in 2017, and, in 2021, the second murder of an MP, Sir David Amess (since the height of the conflict in Northern Ireland).

Debates were extracted from the parliamentary record Hansard (2021) using key word searches (including 'violence + Members of Parliament' and 'abuse + public life'). This resulted in 24 parliamentary debates that mentioned violence towards politicians. The database was narrowed to the eight debates exclusively on the topic as this specificity was considered more appropriate for the exploration of the phenomenon's specific framing.

The analysis is based on identifying the problem representation of the phenomenon. Employing frame analysis (Verloo, 2007; Dombos, 2012), a combination approach of open/inductive and closed/deductive coding was used to capture elements including 'voice' i.e. who is speaking/representing the problem, and 'normativity' i.e. 'what is seen as good?' A key aspect is the 'diagnosis' of the problem which includes 'what is represented as the problem?', 'causality (what is seen as a cause of what?)', 'why it is seen as a problem' and 'dimensions of gender' ('social categories/identity/behaviour/norms and symbols/institutions') and 'intersectionality'. Similarly, the 'prognosis' of the problem is identified, which includes 'what to do', 'hierarchy/priority in goals'.

Codes were derived from the theoretical literature on gender and political violence (e.g., the significance of elections) and aspects that emerged from the evidence (e.g., the role of print media). Each intervention (speech by an individual speaker) was coded, and common frames among speakers were identified. Building upon the Critical Frame Analysis, I adopted an iterative approach to coding to ultimately develop issues frames. I used the qualitative software NVivo on the eight debates to support coding standardisation and the formulation of issue frames.

Table 2. Debates Analysed: House of Commons debates specifically on the phenomenon of violence against politicians 2010-2021

Date	Debate	Location and Length	Proposer
4 November 2014	Internet Abuse of Members of Parliament.	Chamber. Adjournment Debate. 30 min	John Mann (Lab)
20 June 2016	Tributes to Jo Cox.	Chamber. 1 hr	Jeremy Corbyn (Leader of Opposition)
12 July 2017	UK Elections: Abuse and Intimidation.	Westminster Hall. 1 hr.	Simon Hart (Con)
14 September 2017	General Election Campaign: Abuse and Intimidation.	Chamber. 1 hr 30 mins	Sarah Newton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department)
18 December 2017	Harassment in Public Life	Chamber. 1 hr	Amber Rudd (Home Secretary)
21 May 2019	Intimidation in Public Life	Westminster Hall. 1 hr 30 mins	Simon Hart (Con)
20 April 2021	Elected Women Representatives: Online Abuse.	Westminster Hall. 1 hr 30 mins	Maria Miller (Con)
18 October 2021	Tributes to Sir David Amess.	Chamber. 2 hrs	Boris Johnson (Prime Minister)

Table 3. Codebook for parliamentary debate analysis

<p><b>META/FACTUAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date and Debate</li> <li>• Text Ref (specific reference and link for that intervention)</li> </ul> <p><b>VOICE/SPEAKER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker Name</li> <li>• Speaker Gender (M, F)</li> <li>• Speaker Party (Con, Lab, LD, SNP, DUP, PC, Green)</li> <li>• Speaker Role (Minister, Opposition Front Bench, Speaker, Opposition Backbench, Government Backbench)</li> </ul> <p>Speaker Position/Title (e.g., Home Secretary, Leader of the Opposition)</p> <p><b>DIAGNOSIS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the problem? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Balancing freedom of speech</li> <li>○ Democracy</li> <li>○ Elections</li> <li>○ Expected/Regular</li> <li>○ Unexpected/Unacceptable</li> <li>○ Social Media</li> <li>○ In-Person</li> <li>○ Print Media</li> <li>○ Not new problem</li> <li>○ Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Women very impacted</li> <li>▪ Intersectionality/Marginalised women impacted</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Discrimination other than gender, but not intersectional</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why seen as a problem? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Democracy</li> <li>○ Individuals/Death Risk</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Causality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Political Divisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Brexit</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Political Parties</li> <li>○ Social Media</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Whose Problem is it seen to be/Problem holders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Government</li> <li>○ Individuals</li> <li>○ MPs</li> <li>○ Parliament</li> <li>○ Police</li> <li>○ Political Parties</li> <li>○ Politically active non-MPs</li> <li>○ Social media platforms</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Society</li> </ul> <p><b>PROGNOSIS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Codes of Conduct</li> <li>○ Education</li> <li>○ Individuals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MPs role model</li> <li>▪ MPs call out</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Law/Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Existing Laws Applied</li> <li>▪ Policy sufficient</li> <li>▪ New Law</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Parliament/MPs Security</li> <li>○ Social Media regulation</li> <li>○ Social Media platform action</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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## Analysis

The analysis identified three main frames: normalisation, social media and gender. The over-arching frame that emerged across the debates is that violence has become 'expected' in MPs' roles which in turn impacts democracy. A second frame consistently used over time is that violence towards politicians is largely an online problem and solutions include social media platform regulation. The driving gendered dimension – the third frame – is that women MPs are particularly impacted by abuse, which threatens their political participation and, as such, the normative public good of democracy. The presentation of the analysis to follow identifies the name and political party of the speaker and indicates the debate by the year and/or the month.

### A problem of normalisation: “part of our job description”, “attack on democracy”

In the first debate on the phenomenon, 'Internet Abuse against Members of Parliament,' which was held in 2014, the four speakers emphasised individuals who were victims. The debate actually downplayed the impact on MPs. Although this debate focussed on MPs, the framing presents the problem of internet abuse towards them as important because their experiences suggest such abuse is experienced by others as well. For example, John Mann (Labour) opened the debate: “I wish to raise the problems that Members of the House and many more people in our communities face from the abuse of social media”, and Luciana Berger (Labour), whose experience of abuse was one of the reasons Mann

proposed the debate, said: “we must have in mind those people to whom he alludes and who are not in this House and have to suffer in silence... We need to do everything we possibly can to tackle this issue for them.” Berger, and other speakers, adopted a positionality as advocates for others, rather than themselves as the impacted population.

From 2017, the phenomenon of violence towards MPs became explicitly framed as a problem itself. The July debate ‘UK Elections: Abuse and Intimidation’ coincided with then Prime Minister Theresa May’s announcement of an independent review into intimidation in public life (UK Government, 2017), with further debates in September, ‘General Election Campaign: Abuse and Intimidation’, and December, ‘Harassment in Public Life,’ which discussed the findings of the Committee on Standards of Public Life review. Many speakers framed the 2017 election as distinctive from previous elections in terms of abuse. For example, Alex Chalk (Conservative, Sept) declared “the tempo and tone of what happened in the 2017 election was of a different order of magnitude from what had gone before.” A few speakers, even if they agreed that the recent election was unique, suggested that such abuse was not entirely new. For example, Cat Smith (Labour) said: “abuse and intimidation have taken place during previous elections too” (Jul) and “women MPs have been speaking out about these problems with social media for years” (Sept). This suggests that the actual phenomenon was a longer-term one, before it was represented in political discourse.

By 2019, abuse was represented to have become expected. Nearly all the 15 speakers in the May debate that year explicitly framed abuse as worryingly normalised. For example, Helen Jones (Labour) said: “No one should be abused and intimidated simply for

doing their job, yet it is now unusual to come across an MP who has not received a death threat ... Apparently, tolerating intimidation and abuse has become part of our job description.” The driving representation here is that violence towards politicians is an attack on democracy. Over half the speakers explicitly highlighted intimidation’s impact on democracy. For example, Harriet Harman (Labour) declared: “This is not just criminality against individuals; even more importantly than that, it is a fundamental attack on our democracy.” This representation elevates the individual and group experiences of MPs to the systemic level of the normatively important political system. The logic seems to be that an attack on an individual public figure amounts to an attack on the political system. There is an assumption that democracy is important – more important than individuals – and fundamental to society.

Notably, while the focus remained on MPs, the later debate titles do not name MPs but use general terms such as ‘harassment in public life’ and ‘elected women representatives.’ This may indicate strategic negotiation of MPs’ positionality as both advocates and members of the impacted population by linking their own experiences with those of others in public life and, ultimately, democracy. In a typical example of such a broadening of framing, Chris Skidmore (Conservative, Jul 2017) declared: “We owe it to our democracy to make clear that intimidation and abuse have no part in our society, not only for candidates who stood at the recent general election but for future generations of men and women who are considering entering public life.” Relatedly, a common strategy is to frame MPs’ jobs as special because they are enacting democracy. For example, in the

context of online abuse, Maria Miller (Conservative, Apr 2021) argued: “...we need to recognise that the impact of that abuse is particularly concerning and unacceptable. In a free and open democracy, no elected representative should ever be intimidated...” Here, Miller links politicians to their role in enacting the normative public good of democracy.

The debates paying tribute to the two (recently) murdered MPs provide clear evidence that the ‘normalisation’ frame emerged over time. In the tributes to Jo Cox (June 2016), the eighteen speakers focussed on her as an individual. Only two referenced political violence. The Leader of the Opposition (Labour), Jeremy Corbyn lamented: “the hatred that killed her in what increasingly appears to have been an act of extreme political violence” and Nigel Dodds MP of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) said: “We in Northern Ireland ... have indeed lost friends and dear colleagues to men of violence, have felt the pain and anguish that those close to Jo are going through now...” These references indicate the frame that violence towards MPs as unique at least in recent years in a ‘peace’ context.

In contrast, in the tributes of David Amess (Oct 2021), while much of the focus was on the murdered MP as an individual there were many references to other forms of abuse. Eleven out of the thirty-one speakers, including the leaders of the major parties, referenced those in public life who were murdered or suffered near-fatal attacks<sup>9</sup>. Notably, these attacks were referenced alongside other forms of violence with several sharing personal experiences and advocating for improved security for MPs. The Leader of the Opposition

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<sup>9</sup> Jo Cox MP in 2016; Stephen Timms MP who survived a stabbing in 2010; Cllr Andrew Pennington who died in a sword attack towards Nigel Jones MP in 2000; MPs who were assassinated between 1979 and 1985 by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), Airey Neave, Robert Bradford, Anthony Berry and Ian Gow; and parliament police officer Keith Palmer who died during the 2017 terrorist attack on Parliament.

(Labour), Keir Starmer, even implored a focus on tributes, rather than their own experiences:

“I know that politicians across the country and across this House have their own experiences of threats to their security. Today is a chance to remember David, but in the weeks and days to come we must confront the threats and violence that everyone faces in enacting this country’s democracy.”

This reference to wider violence, which was not present in the earlier ‘Tributes to Jo Cox’, indicates that the political discourse moved to recognise a phenomenon of violence towards MPs as a specific problem. Again, the frame of violence impacting democracy was reiterated by many speakers throughout the debate. Importantly, two speakers specifically referenced the normalisation of online abuse. For example, Mark Francois (Conservative) said: “we are now systematically vilified day after day ... if we want to ensure that our colleague did not die in vain ... take the forthcoming Online Safety Bill and toughen it up...” This indicates a framing recognising different forms of violence, from online abuse to murder.

Notably, when the murder is referenced outside of the specific ‘Tributes to Jo Cox’ debate, it is often framed as an example of the “ultimate price” (Chi Onwurah, Labour, Sept 2017; Cat Smith, Jul 2017) in a warning for why abuse against politicians must be taken seriously. Furthermore, the fact of the murder is sometimes referenced as a missed opportunity for attending to the wider political divisions that contribute to the abuse. For example, Caroline Dinenage (Conservative, Government Minister, Apr 2021) said:

“This is one of those issues that bear out the words of our former friend and colleague Jo Cox in a most unpleasant way, because we “have far more in common than that which divides us.” [Official Report, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 675.] Is it not tragic that that is the case? It is sometimes hard to fathom how the faceless and cowardly abuse of those in the public eye has almost become part of the job description. It has become a fact of life.”

Here, Dinenage references Cox’s murder as an example of why the problem is important and that the abuse has become normal, ‘part of the job description’. The ‘more in common’ quote is from Cox’s first speech as an MP (‘maiden speech’) which was also referenced by speakers in ‘Tributes to Jo Cox’ as an example of democratic values and as a call to action to: “honour Jo’s memory by proving that the democracy and freedoms that Jo stood for are indeed unbreakable” (Conservative, Prime Minister, David Cameron, Jun 2016). The quote is used on multiple occasions throughout other debates to frame abuse and violence as a matter of democracy. As referenced in the Jun 2016 debate, in the immediate aftermath of the murder, ‘more in common’ was a mantra used in political institutions as a call for more civility in politics. Notably, as evidenced by Dinenage’s remarks, by 2021, this hopeful framing has been somewhat lacking by in recent years because such abuse is now normalised as ‘a fact of life’. Indeed, one could argue that an effect of framing the problem as one of democracy is of levelling the different types of violence, from murder to social media abuse. Just as “the attack on Jo was an attack on our democracy” (Cheryl Gillan, Conservative, Jun 2016), “online abuse is an affront to our democracy” (Maria Miller, Apr 2021).

## A social media problem: “the rise in the use of online media has turbocharged abuse”

While the link between online abuse and other forms of violence emerged over time, there has been a consistent framing of it as a social media problem. The 2014 debate focussed on internet abuse. Yet, in this debate, there was no clear link made between online abuse and other forms of violence, nor an explicit frame involving democracy. From 2017, online abuse was presented as harmful in itself. There emerged a causal framing of social media as a driver of the increase in abuse. For example, Diane Abbott (Labour, Jul 2017) expressed the view that: “the rise in the use of online media has turbocharged abuse.” The use of ‘turbocharged’ reflects the idea that abuse against politicians has hugely increased so requires political attention. A further part of the underlying logic is that the nature of social media platforms makes them rich spaces for abuse. Specific aspects of social media, especially the use of anonymous accounts and ease of posting, are cited as particularly important in enabling abuse. For example, Tommy Shepherd (Scottish National Party (SNP) Jul 2017) said: “All they need to do is switch on their phone and they can instantly and anonymously direct the most vile abuse to whomever they want...” This ease of abuse is reflected in emerging research that the unique features of social media sites, such as user anonymity and the ability for a huge volume of content, can create incivility and violence in politics (Bardall, 2013; Jane, 2017; Kosmidis and Theocharis, 2020; Krook, 2020).

While there is consensus that social media caused a rise in online abuse, there is disagreement about whether social media has also caused other types of abuse. For some,

social media abuse is contained online: people are “emboldened by their anonymity to post things that they would certainly never have the balls to say in real life” as Kirsten Oswald (SNP, Apr 2021) reflected. In these representations, it is the nature, especially the ease of anonymity, of social media platforms that leads to or furthers abuse. However, others believe that online abuse reflects an ability of individuals to perpetrate in-person abuse: “when someone can go online and tweet abuse ... and get away with it, it gives them the confidence to do so offline, on the streets” (Cat Smith, Jul 2017). The latter framing suggests that if online abuse is not dealt with by policymakers, it could lead to a rise in other forms of violence.

Notably, some speakers emphasised the role of print media in encouraging and perpetrating abuse. This viewpoint was particularly prevalent in the December 2017 debate in response to specific headlines related to the Brexit debate<sup>10</sup>. Eight out of the thirty-five speakers explicitly raised the role of print media. For example, Anna Soubry (Conservative) indicated that she has submitted to parliament evidence of “a link between a front page of *The Daily Telegraph* using the word “mutineers” and threats, including death threats” and goes on to say: “I believe in freedom of the press, but everybody has a responsibility not to incite abuse and death threats.” Similarly, Yvette Cooper (Labour) urged: “I must press the Home Secretary again on an issue that has been raised by Members from all parts of the House—namely, the need to challenge national newspapers if they do things that

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<sup>10</sup> Including: *The Telegraph*, ‘The Brexit mutineers’, 14 Nov 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/14/nearly-20-tory-mps-threaten-rebel-against-brexit-date-brutal/>

incite death threats or have an impact on the quality of our debate.” The causal role of the media’s language was made clear here and by other speakers. For example, Harriet Harman spoke of: “the toxic triangle, which is made up of the divisiveness of the Brexit issue, *The Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* identifying certain Members as targets and framing the attack on them and—facilitated by social media—the mob following.” The idea of a “toxic triangle” of multiple, inter-related causes is reflected by other speakers in other debates. For example, Patricia Gibson (SNP, May 2017) pointed to: “the culmination of that cultivation, aided and assisted by the apparent courage that anonymous postings on social media create, and whipped up by some sections of the tabloid press” and Diane Abbott (Jul 2017) argued: “we always see, at the very least, a spike in abuse after there has been a lot of negative stuff in the media.” While the traditional print media may not be presented as a main perpetrator, it is presented as at least part of the explanation for the increase in abuse.

Social media platforms are consistently presented as important actors not just in creating or worsening the problem but also in solving it. Specific solutions mentioned, sometimes explicitly but often implicitly, include improved reporting mechanisms, removing abusive content and banning abusive accounts. The 2014 debate focussed on the action of social media platforms. For example, debate proposer John Mann referenced the ‘Best Practices for Responding to Cyberhate’ developed by the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism and the Anti-Defamation League (2014) and criticised these best practices “being violated repeatedly” by social media providers. A framing strategy in later debates involved giving examples of abusive content that was not acted

upon by platforms, for example: ““put a bullet between his ears”—that is a comment that I reported to Facebook, which said it did not breach its terms and conditions” (Cat Smith, Jul 2017).

Another important actor represented as responsible for addressing abuse is the government. Notably, representations are differentiated between government and non-government speakers. While the government seemed to accept some responsibility, it framed its own action as sufficient. A common refrain by nearly every government speaker was: ‘what is illegal offline is illegal online.’ This framing of policy sufficiency was implicitly and explicitly challenged by others, including, notably by MPs of the government’s party. For example, Maria Miller (Apr 2021) echoed the government’s language to point out: “The Minister will no doubt say that what is illegal offline is illegal online ... There is no definitive figure, however, on the number of reports, the number of cases taken forward, and the number of convictions.”

There were further contestations about whether new policy is needed and/or if the existing policy architecture should be extended. For example, in 2014, John Mann expressed the view that: “We do not need new law. We need the current law to be used imaginatively to remove profiles from the internet.” Yet, in later debates, others argued for new laws. The policy intervention by Marc Francois in ‘Tributes to Sir David Amess’ suggested that the forthcoming Online Safety Bill, which would “drain the Twitter swamp,” be called “David’s law”: “What better way to ensure that a fine parliamentarian did not die in vain than to enshrine one of his last wishes in legislation forever, for the benefit of all those in public

life?” This intervention points to the significance of the call for government regulation of social media. Francois uses the event of his colleague’s murder to advocate for online regulation and elevates this solution to a public good.

Political parties have also been represented in the debates as actors with responsibility for addressing violence. Notably, in the 2017 debates, some Conservative speakers blamed the Labour Party for abuse. In an implicit blame, debate proposer Simon Hart (Jul) expressed that political party opponents had perpetrated “swastikas on election boards and offensive slogans and language on posters.” This blaming may be aligned with the customary positionality of debates being used to criticise political opponents (Proksch and Slapin, 2015). The politicisation of violence towards MPs could be, at least partly in 2017, interpreted as a political strategy on behalf of the governing party to criticise their political opponents. Some Labour speakers directly or indirectly challenged the frame of Labour as culpable, for example: “We would be doing a disservice to the democracy we all believe in if we did not recognise that this is an issue for all political parties” (Cat Smith, Sep). By 2019 and 2021, there was less explicit blame of individual parties and more focus on the need for party-specific and/or joint codes of behavioural conduct that address violence. For example, Simon Hart (May 2019) suggested: “there are the party codes, which ... have proceeded at a reasonably gentle pace...this is the time to put our foot on the accelerator a bit.”

Relatedly, another solution presented is that individual MPs (and others) should ‘call out’ bad behaviour and be a role model for good behaviour. A typical example of this

framing is: “We must make it clear at every opportunity that this sort of behaviour is not acceptable and that it is the responsibility of everyone to call it out and to work together to protect our democracy” (Amber Rudd, Conservative, Dec 2017). MPs themselves are here represented as a group of actors with the responsibility for solving the problem. In this way, they represent themselves not just as those impacted but with power to stop the abuse in service of the normative public good of democracy.

### A gendered problem: “the greatest intensity of threats”

Aligned with the normalisation frame, over time there was increased attention towards the specific experiences of women facing particularly aggressive threats. This aspect is framed as a problem because of the impact on democracy (rather than a focus of women as a group or structural gendered inequality). By 2021, there was a specific debate, ‘Elected Women Representatives: Online Abuse’.

In the 2014 debate, there were some references to individual women, but these were not explicitly linked to their gender group. John Mann referred to racism against Luciana Berger and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Conservative), Shailesh Vara, and noted the arrests made for abuse towards Stella Creasy MP “after she had supported a feminist campaign.” While such interventions may suggest gendering, there was not an explicit framing of these women being targeted specifically because they were women. In contrast, there was a group-specific or structural focus on antisemitism. For example, Mann expressed the view that: “The grotesque racist abuse from a whole

range of people in the past few weeks aimed at my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) has been a factor in my request to Mr Speaker to grant this debate.” Notably, there was no explicit reference to the structural, intersectional sexist and racist abuse experienced by Berger that specifically targeted her as a Jewish woman.

Sexism, that is discrimination based on this gender group, was usually framed as a singular oppression, rather than intersecting with other abuse. On the rare occasions the word ‘sexism’ was mentioned, it was usually grouped with other types of abuse, for example: “Intimidation, including death threats, criminal damage, sexism, racism, homophobia and antisemitism, has no place in our democracy” (Cat Smith, May 2019).

Any intersectional framing was usually implicit, framed as ethnic minority women receiving the most abuse, and often with specific reference to Diane Abbott. For example, Cat Smith (Sep 2017) said that: “research by Amnesty International (Dhrodia, 2018) found that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) ... received half of all the threatening tweets sent to women MPs...” In the next debate, the Home Secretary (Conservative), Amber Rudd declared: “Everyone in this House condemns particularly the abuse and harassment received by the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington.” Notably, this intervention did not explicitly frame the abuse as gendered and/or racialised, but with a focus on an individual.

Some interventions used a clear intersectional framing. For example, Chi Onwurah (Sep 2017) argued: “We all know that candidates are often targeted because of their gender, sexuality, class and/or ethnicity ... The gendered nature of abuse directed at

candidates reflects wider sexism in our society. Women and girls face abuse and harassment every day.” In the 2021 debate on online abuse towards women there were several interventions focusing on intersectional gendered grouping. Three speakers explicitly used the word, for example, Abena Opong-Asare (Labour) argued “Online abuse is disproportionately experienced by women from an intersectionality identity”, and there were several other references to particular “barriers” faced by women of colour.

The main gender-relevant understanding of the problem representation was that women MPs face particularly high levels of abuse, which impacts their political participation and, as such, democracy. The underlying logic seems to be that gender diversity is normatively important to democracy. While this frame was often implicit, it was sometimes made explicit. For example, Chi Onwurah (Sep 2017) warned: “We cannot allow abuse to prevent women and ethnic minorities from entering politics. This Parliament is the most diverse in history: a record number of women, LGBT and ethnic minority MPs were elected ... failure to act risks reversing the progress made.” Similarly, Maria Miller (Apr 2021) noted the “huge progress” in the UK electing women and that “Parliaments are at their best when they are diverse ... equal participation of men and women strengthens our democracy.”

Notably, in the debates women MPs seemed to drive the gendered problem representation. In this women MPs negotiate the positionality of being both advocates and impacted population. For example, Diane Abbott (Jul 2017) shared her experiences of “racist and sexist abuse” and argued: “This is not about just politicians or even women politicians. Any woman who goes into the public space can expect that type of abuse.”

Similarly, Vicky Ford (May 2019) cited Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) research to argue: “There is serious evidence that that puts women off standing for Parliament, thus directly impacting our democracy ... This is a problem not only for our democracy but for democracies across the world.” Here, the problem was being elevated to a wider, global normative ideal of democracy.

Framing increased national and global attention to the problem, in the April 2021 debate, nearly all the speakers referenced research including that of the global Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2016, 2018a) and the UK Fawcett Society (2021). In this regard, it should be noted that the third sector research and advocacy organisation, The Fawcett Society (2021) reported that 74 per cent of UK women citizens did not plan to stand to be an MP, largely because of abuse or harassment.

While the gendered dimension seems to be primarily raised by women, some men also pointed to women’s experiences, framing them as particularly egregious. For example, Tommy Sheppard (Jul 2017) reflected: “I am extremely concerned that it seems that the majority of the perpetrators of such abuse are male and the majority of the targets are female Members—or at least the greatest intensity of threats is directed towards them.” This “greatest intensity” idea was echoed by other men (including Martin Whitfield and Jim McMahon, Sep 2017). Mostly notably, in ‘Tributes to Sir David Amess’ Mark Francois said: “he had become increasingly concerned about what he called the toxic environment in which MPs, particularly female MPs, were having to operate. He was appalled by what he called the vile misogynistic abuse that female MPs had to endure online...” That he used

gender in his intervention indicates the prevalence of the frame by 2021 that women experience particularly aggressive abuse.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis has established that the phenomenon of violence (including abuse, harassment and intimidation) towards politicians has been politicised in that it has featured in parliamentary debates. A close analysis of the relevant parliamentary debates between 2010 and 2021 showed that the framing of the phenomenon shifted over time from one that was experienced by some MPs to a 'normal' part of MPs' jobs, especially for women.

Such violence is represented as important not merely because of its impact on individuals but because of its impact on the political system. MPs seem to elevate abuse experienced by themselves to democracy itself, an unquestioned public good. Violence they experience is not framed as important in its own right but because of its impact on democracy. This elevation is likely to be a strategic way for MPs to navigate the dual role of advocate and member of the impacted population. The problem is beyond themselves and risks the structural, normative public good of democracy.

While the normalisation frame emerged over time, a framing present from the start was that violence in politics is predominantly an online problem. The assumption is that online abuse is harmful. This view rests on MPs linking together different forms of violence from murder, harassment and online abuse. This seems to align with theoretical work on using a 'comprehensive' or 'expansive' definition of political violence. Interestingly the MPs

seem to suggest that online abuse is violent and impactful in its own right. As expressed in the debates, part of the cause of harm is the ease of abuse spreading, which is reflected in cross-disciplinary research about online abuse (Bardall, 2013; Kosmidis and Theocharis, 2020; Krook, 2020).

Crucially, over time, especially from 2017, the experiences of women became more salient in the framing. This gendered framing may be somewhat surprising, especially in the context of the Tributes to Sir David Amess, a man who was murdered.

In the gendered framing, a diversity logic was employed, i.e., that women's experiences of abuse are particularly important politically because of the impact on political participation, which risks democracy at a system or existential level. MPs seem to refer to the theory that increasing women's descriptive representation improves substantive policy making (Phillips, 1994), and, as such, links diversity with the normative good of democracy.

While there is some reference to other diversity groups and the intersection between them, especially by women politicians of colour in the April 2021 debate, there is an overall lack of intersectional framing in the debates. Diversity seems to largely mean women *or* other groups. This separation rather than connection between different groups' identities is perhaps unsurprising given the UK political discourse on equalities which tends to separate structural oppressions and group experiences (Christoffersen, 2021). A notable 'silence' was a specific policy solution on violence against women in politics, which has been the approach of a growing number of countries.

The framing of an overwhelmingly positive link between democracy and inclusion/diversity goes largely unchallenged in these debates. Women as a group or individuals experiencing abuse is not necessarily important itself as an issue, but because of the impact on democracy. While the norm of democracy as a public good is usually implicit, there are some suggestions that reveal the normative assumptions in more detail. For example, Chris Skidmore (Sep 2017), says: “As our democracy is built on the foundation of inclusion and tolerance, no one should be deterred from standing for office.” This has the effect of downplaying the exclusive and intolerant history of UK democratic institutions in which women, people of colour and those who did not embody the archetype of a white, male, wealthy politician were excluded (Puwar, 2004).

What explains this discursive change from characterising a political assassination as a rare event to an MP’s murder being framed as part of the wider problem of prevalent political violence – from framing political violence as ‘extreme’ to ‘expected’? What explains the specific change from a gender-neutral description of a murdered women to linking the terrorist murder of a man to women’s experiences of online abuse?

It is possible to make some first efforts at explaining how the phenomenon of violence against politicians became politicised in parliament. Part of the explanation for the gendered politicisation and the diversity logic may be the long-standing efforts of feminist researchers and politicians. As others have pointed out (Campbell and Childs, 2013; Campbell *et al.*, 2024), feminist scholarship has a long history of influencing activism and policymaking. Among UK policymakers, there has been a growing understanding of the

importance of diversity. For example, parliament commissioned the gender sensitive review 'The Good Parliament' report (Childs, 2016). Indeed, an explanation for the presence of gender dimensions in the debates could be the impact of the framing by feminist researchers and third sector groups, especially Amnesty International, the Fawcett Society and the IPU. The use of such evidence by MPs reflects the growing research on and global attention to gendered violence in politics; such global politicisation seems to at least be partially explained by feminist activism (Krook, 2020; Restrepo Sanín, 2022a). In addition, the impact of the #MeToo movement, including the specific movement at Westminster (Julios, 2022), even though this was not focussed on MPs as victims, could have contributed to more awareness and focus on gendered power dynamics and the experiences of women.

Another and possibly related explanation is a more cynical view that MPs use the role of women in a simplistic and even harmful way. The centring on women as particularly impacted by violence could be interpreted as a kind of paternalistic, sensationalised "benevolent sexism" (Glick and Fiske, 2001) that presents women as victimised and in need of protection. This is arguably a perverted mirror of what feminist groups would advocate for, viewing what is needed as a systems-based institutional transformation of gender dynamics in order to address the roots of the problem.

Another possible factor that explains the phenomenon's politicisation includes the growing role of social media in politics, which had led to a change and worsening of the problem that needs to be addressed politically. As referenced in the debates, the rise in social media use is seen to have caused an increase of abuse through the nature of the

platform that allows anonymity and (abusive) content to spread easily, its lack of regulation and the ongoing expectation of MPs presence on the platforms (Baxter, Marcella and O'Shea, 2016; Greenwood *et al.*, 2019; Ward and Mcloughlin, 2020). The ongoing reproachments of social media platforms may also indicate the government and other political actors aiming to shift responsibility for addressing the problem.

Furthermore, discrete events are likely important parts of the explanation of politicisation. The 2016 murder of Jo Cox evidently raised awareness of the risks of violence. It is likely that ongoing divisions related to the 2016 European Union Referendum also generated abuse and attention to abuse. Yet, notably, it was not until 2017 that there was a specific debate on abuse towards MPs, which suggests that it was the murder coupled with other factors that led to the politicisation. As indicated in the debates, MPs' experiences of abuse during the 2017 General election were important in prompting political attention to the issue.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (2017) Review into Intimidation after the General Election seems particularly influential on the discursive institutional change, as its finding seemingly informed the problem framing in the multiple parliamentary debates in 2017 and in subsequent years. An exploration of the review process will be the focus of the next chapter.

To conclude, this chapter has offered a specific analysis of how the phenomenon of violence towards MPs is framed by them as policymakers in parliamentary debates. This chapter has provided insight into one part of the politicisation process, which sets a

foundation for the rest of the thesis. The findings confirm and develop emerging understandings by MPs that there are gender differences in how men and women MPs experience violence, identifying a specific problem of violence against women in politics (as one of a number of problematics). Crucially, the chapter moves beyond the evidence of the phenomenon to consider its political impacts. By applying feminist frame analysis to gender and political violence, this research confirms that violence towards politicians, including an increasing focus on the experiences of women, has been politicised in particular terms over time as a normative policy problem in the UK.

## 5. Policy Committee – Case Study of ‘Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life’ (CSPL)

### Introduction

The previous chapter established the changes in policy debates over the decade between 2010 and 2021. One of the factors that seemed to influence, and was perhaps influenced by, these changes and developments was the setting up and work of Committee on Standards of Public Life (CSPL) review into intimidation in public life following the 2017 General Election.

This chapter conducts a case study of the review process from its set-up in July 2017 to the evidence collection process to the publication of the review report in December of the same year. The chapter seeks to explain the factors that influenced the review’s establishment and its focus in terms of content i.e. its ‘diagnosis’ – how it represents the problem – and ‘prognosis’ of the problem – how it represents the solutions, including though policy recommendations. Explanatory factors may include discrete events and other factors that influenced the agency of key actors.

The research question is: ‘What were the key factors that influenced the Committee on Standards in Public Life (2017) Intimidation in Public Life review a) being set-up, and b) focusing on certain aspects of the problem and potential solutions?’ I conduct thematic analysis on documents – including publicly available evidence submitted to the review, the

final report and the committee press releases – and original interviews with CSPL members and staff involved in the review process.

This chapter fits into the overall thesis in two, related ways. First, this case is important in itself as part of the politicisation process. Second, understanding this case as an example of the ways the phenomenon was politicised may have implications for other parts of the overall politicisation process explored throughout the thesis.

The analysis concludes that various, inter-related key factors that led to the set-up of the review include the initiative of Prime Minister Theresa May prioritising this issue after the 2017 General Election, following a longer-term series of developments, including the tension during the 2014 Scottish Referendum.

Perhaps the most interesting and important aspect of the review process is the committee's consensus in its response to the evidence collected for the review. This led to the committee particularly focusing on social media and the related gendered dimensions of the review report. The interviewees made clear that the committee's final report and recommendations were informed by the process of collecting evidence, some of which was surprising to them.

Rather than relying on their pre-conceptions about the problem, the committee was heavily influenced by the evidence collected by the review. Particularly influential evidence was the committee's interactions with key actors, including social media companies and Diane Abbott MP's parliamentary staff.

## Analytical Approach

As described in chapter three, the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) is an advisory, non-departmental public body (different to a select committee) (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2024). Established in 1994, the CSPL advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards in public life. The membership is purposely ideologically diverse, made up of a politically independent chair, four independent members, and three political members (recommended by the leaders of Labour, Conservative and the Scottish National parties). It regularly produces review reports with documentary and original evidence leading to recommendations on a range of issues related to standards, including government expenses and local government structures.

The CSPL (2017) Intimidation in Public Life review was produced shortly after the 2017 General Election. As part of its review process, the Committee launched a public call for evidence and proactively sought out evidence from actors it deemed relevant to the issue of intimidation in public life. These actors included researchers, political parties and social media companies. The resulting review report was split into six Chapters: 'Chapter 1 – Intimidation in public life,' 'Chapter 2 – Social media,' 'Chapter 3 – Political parties,' 'Chapter 4 – Law, policing and prosecution,' 'Chapter 5 – Taking responsibility,' and 'Chapter 6 – The impact of intimidation.' The 'package of recommendations' included 22 suggested actions for actors including Government, political parties, National Police Chiefs Council, College of Policing, social media companies and press regulation bodies, the

Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) and Impress. Appendix 3 summarises the evidence submitted to the review and the report recommendations.

The evidence base for this chapter consists of documentary evidence and original interviews with Committee members who were involved in the review process and report development. I conducted an initial documentary analysis followed by the interviews. I then returned to the whole evidence base to triangulate the evidence.

The documentary evidence includes the final review report and the Committee's publicly available documents relating to the review process i.e., evidence submitted to the review, and Committee analysis pre- and post- report publication, as well as the government's response. This over-time evidence allowed me to interpret the reasoning of the Committee as articulated in the report regarding its approach/content. The documents are of varying length, from a single page press-release, a two-page letter, to the 88-page report, bringing the total documentary evidence to a total of 589 pages. In the analysis, I cite the documents straightforwardly, e.g. 'Political Parties Roundtable' and 'Conservative Party Written Evidence. The full list of documents is in Appendix 3.

As referenced earlier, the interviews were with members or staff of the Committee involved in the review process and report development. The Committee at the time of the review consisted of seven members and there were four staff members who did the actual report writing, so I had a potential sample of eleven. This was reduced to nine as one person had passed away and another was on long-term leave. My final interview population was five. Confidentiality precludes me from identifying which members or staff I interviewed,

and, indeed, whether my interviewees were committee members or staff working for the committee. The interviews suggested that members and staff worked closely together and were all key in the execution and framing of the report, so there is no real limitation to the analysis by not indicating the specific role of each interviewee.

Initial interview recruitment was via email to the publicly available addresses of the Committee and staff members and through leveraging professional networks. Snowball sampling was also adopted: interviewees were asked to share my interview request with other potential participants. Interviewees were asked about their perceptions of the reasons for the development of the report and how the Committee proceeded with its work, and any contestations among the committee during the review process.

My coding approach was iterative. I initially open-coded, which resulted in identifying various factors – for example the 2017 election, political parties' role in addressing the issue and the influence of social media. I then arranged the codes into more overarching themes, including 'critical actors' and 'key events.' This iterative approach allowed me to interpret the pertinent aspects relevant to understanding the key factors that led to the development of review and the content focus of the report. A codebook summary is in Appendix 3.

Following the initial documentary analysis, I updated my interview guide (in Appendix 2 to include questions based on what I had found in the documentary evidence, for example on the focus of gender and online aspects of the problem. My analysis of interview transcripts followed a similar coding approach as the documents to triangulate

the evidence to identify key aspects of the review process. The interviews often provided further context and explanatory detail from what could be extrapolated from the documents. The combination of documentary evidence from the time of the report and reflective interviews some years after allows a comprehensive interpretation of an explanatory story about the review set-up and process.

## Analysis

The analysis is organised into three sections. The first section interprets the key events and initiatives of actors that led to the review set-up. The second section explains the key factors that influenced the review process in terms of defining the important aspects of the problem of intimidation in public life. The third section develops these factors which influenced the review report's focus and potential solutions through policy recommendations.

### Review Set-up – Key events and actors

The evidence indicates that events surrounding the 2017 election were important in influencing the initiation of the review process. Earlier events and other institutional contexts likely played a role as 'pre- conditions' to the politicisation of the wider problem of abuse towards MPs.

The significance of events surrounding the 2017 election as a reason for the development of the report development was suggested throughout by the documentary evidence. For example, the press release launching the review states that the review

“follows reports of abuse experienced by Parliamentary candidates who stood during the 2017 General Election” (Cabinet Office, Press Release, 12 July 2017). The review report itself reasons: “Our evidence confirms the prevalence of intimidatory behaviour during election campaigns in recent years, including and especially at the 2017 general election” (Review, p.27).

The interviews provided further detail of the 2017 General Election as a factor in the review initiation. As participants see it, a key reason for the initiation of the review process seems to have been MPs themselves sharing their experiences and suggesting that this problem be an issue on the policy agenda. As the previous chapter outlined, the evidence for this chapter confirms that parliamentary debates were a key agenda-setting space for the politicisation of this phenomenon. A specific debate was the Westminster Hall Debate in July 2017 tabled by Simon Hart. When I asked about what led to the review being commissioned, one interviewee explained in detail:

“As I recall it, a very specific chain of events ... the exchange of letters, I think with the Cabinet Office, it's published when they asked us to do it and set the terms of reference ... shortly before that, there was a Westminster Hall debate, I think, led by Simon Hart ... strangely, because Westminster Hall debates have the tendency to be very inconsequential, I think that was like the kind of immediate trigger ... the broader thing was the 2017 election ... why the committee was asked to at that time. But the most immediate cause, I think, was that there was this debate and ... this is just an assumption that they didn't have anything concrete to point to in terms of actually they're doing ... And governments and other institutions, Parliament, is very good at, is to get someone to review it!”  
(P16)

The events surrounding the 2017 election point to a development that included the problem of abuse itself, cross-party awareness/consensus of important problem, which

prompted many MPs to share their experiences to raise awareness, and then Prime Minister commissioning the review. The 2017 election seems then to be a key factor underlying or precipitating the review process.

Of course, the election did not happen in a vacuum. The evidence reviewed for this chapter indicate that earlier events of Jo Cox's murder in 2016 and the heightened political tension as revealed and exacerbated through the Scottish Independence and European Union membership referendums seem to be important in setting an environment in which such a high-profile, influential review could take place.

The relevance and explanatory significance of Jo Cox's 2016 murder is especially highlighted by both the documentary evidence and interviews. For example, the report's epigraph is Jo Cox's famous "more in common" quote,<sup>11</sup> which indicates the impact of the 2016 murder on the creation of the report and the wider politicisation of the issue. One of the interviewees reflected that the committee had considered dedicating the report to Jo Cox, but decided a formal dedication may be perceived as inappropriately partisan. Yet, the decision to include the quote "felt important" by the Committee and seemed to "resonate across the political spectrum because she was an MP" (P19). The murder is therefore part of the explanation of the review's initiation.

Yet, the murder was not the core critical event that led to the creation of the report and the broader politicisation of the problem. Rather, it was this incident coupled with the

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<sup>11</sup> "While we celebrate our diversity, what surprises me time and time again as I travel around the constituency is that we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us." – Jo Cox MP in her 'maiden speech', June 3, 2015. [*Official Report*, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 674-75.] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/search/column?VolumeNumber=596&ColumnNumber=674&House=1>

2017 election that led to the report and broader problem politicisation. As an interviewee explained:

“[the review] wasn't triggered by or as a result of the murder of Jo Cox, but certainly it was in all of our minds as we did the work. And it was in all of the minds of the MP's that we talked to, people in public life, you know, she had been murdered going about her ordinary business as a constituency MP, and everybody, there was a cross-party political horror at what had happened to her ... Of course, Jo Cox's murder was in the background and suffused a lot of the evidence that we received, and we were respectful of it, but it wasn't because she had been murdered” (P19).

While this interviewee (and others) stress that the review was not initiated because of the murder, one might interpret from this evidence that the murder was a 'pre- condition' to the politicisation of the wider problem of abuse towards MPs. The shock or “horror” of the murder likely made those active in public life more aware of the risks and more attuned when abuse occurred.

Other preceding events are also likely to have played a role in this longer-term politicisation, especially the heightened political tension as revealed and exacerbated through the Scottish and European Union membership and Scottish Independence referendums.

The 2014 Scottish Independence referendum seems to be particularly significant in CSPL choosing to frame of intimidation as a growing problem, which threatens democracy. The referendum is cited as important in the body of evidence from the submitted evidence, roundtable discussions and confidential interviews I conducted. For example:

“That doesn't mean everything started the 2017 election ... this very much started with the Scottish referendum in terms of like social media. That was the sort of first proper social media political event, and people noticed

a sort of turn to nastiness ... But then only some people would have experienced that. And then I guess lots of MPs had a similar you know, an experience in 2017 that they wouldn't have had in in 2015 or certainly in in 2010, and that they found that contrast, obviously very surprising. So yeah, I think it may be as simple as that" (P16).

"As was initially evident in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, there has been a step change in recent years in conduct that crosses the line beyond free speech, to behaviour that seeks to intimidate and abuse." (Conservative Party Written Evidence)

"[The Scottish referendum] was a turning point of violence and nastiness ... it gradually kind of seeped through politics, because it was regarded as acceptable" (P17).

The language around "step change" and "turning point" indicate the perceived significance of the 2014 referendum in increasing the level of abuse, due to perhaps the aforementioned normalisation of abuse in politics. This interviewee P16 (like other interviewees) seems to suggest that the abuse during the 2014 referendum did not immediately lead to an overall politicisation of the problem because it was only experienced by certain colleagues who were active in Scotland. Seemingly, It took the widespread experience in the 2017 General Election, likely coupled with the awareness of the possibility of extreme physical attacks from Jo Cox' murder in 2016 and the divisive Brexit referendum campaign, for the problem to become important to review. These events contributed to the process which led to the salience of the events surrounding the 2017 General Election that promoted actors to make decisions, leading to the review process and report development.

Then Prime Minister, Theresa May, was clearly an important actor as she commissioned the review. As the press release stated, "The Prime Minister has asked

the Committee on Standards in Public Life to conduct a review into the issue of intimidation experienced by Parliamentary candidates” (Cabinet Office, Press Release, 12 July 2017).

Furthermore, the CSPL members were also important as agenda-setting actors. Significantly, the commissioning of the review by the Prime Minister was unusual. Ordinarily, the Committee decides its own work agenda independently. A Prime Minister asking the committee to carry out a piece of work, as with this review, is relatively rare. Interviewees confirmed that the committee carefully decided whether to take on the work, rather than immediately agree to the Prime Minister’s request. The main consideration was if the topic was in the remit of ethical standards. As an interviewee explained:

“It was maybe slightly unusual for CSPL because it wasn't directly related to ethical standards. When you read the report, I think you can see the committee tried quite hard to link it to its remit ... there is a section on the responsibility of public office holders ... even though the subject matter in principle is about what other people were doing to public office holders” (P16).

The section of the report referenced by the interviewee is Chapter 5, entitled ‘Taking Responsibility’, includes recommendations for MPs around “opposing and reporting intimidation” and “setting the tone of the debate” (p.70-76). The interviewee (P16) went on to say: “it was probably not naturally sitting in the remit, but there was question of who could credibly do this?” The decision to take on board the review indicates the role of CSPL members as key actors and of the perceived salience of the topic.

Notably, the then Committee chair, Lord Bew, is an academic expert on the Northern Irish conflict and played an advisory role to the formal peace process (Bew, 2023). Such a

deep understanding of the history of political violence in the UK may have played a role in the committee's decision to agree to the review on this topic.

## Review Process – Problem 'diagnosis' through evidence collection

Perhaps the most interesting and important aspect of the review process is the committee's consensus in its response to the evidence collected for the review. This led to the committee particularly focusing on social media and the related gendered dimensions of the review report. The interviewees made clear that the committee's final report and recommendations were informed by the process of collecting evidence.

Although the Committee was of the view that the issue of intimidation towards MPs was important, interviewees reflected that they did not realise the full extent of the problem until collecting evidence. For example, one interviewee made clear the "shock" amongst the committee as the evidence came in: "[The Committee] were current affairs geeks and even we, but even we had not fully understood or absorbed the full extent of how serious an issue it had become" (P19). By 'serious' the interviewee seems to mean the prevalence of the abuse and its impacts on democratic political participation.

The nature of the committee's purposeful cross-partisan and cross-sectoral composition may lead to an expectation of tension or disagreement in the review process. However, all the interviewees maintained that there had been no real contention between members in the review process. There were initially different perspectives in regard to the

nature of the phenomenon and what should be the focus of the policy recommendations, but the process of evidence collection seems to have led to consensus.

The most prominent differing perspective was in relation to causality, and in particular the importance of social media in exacerbating abuse. Interviewees reflected that they as members or staff on the committee were not aware of the significance of social media. One interviewee gave credit to a particular member of the committee in raising this aspect of the problem with the rest of the committee. Reflecting on the social media aspect, they said: "I didn't understand one key segment of the issue ... once [NAME] got on to it, the rest of us, thought [they're] completely right, we're going to have to talk about this." (P20). What is particularly interesting is that differing perspectives ultimately, by the process of evidence collection and discussion, led to consensus among the committee.

The evidence submitted to the review also influenced the committee to focus on the social media aspect of the problem. For example, an interviewee reflected on the evidence from politicians on the role of social media:

"It was clear that [politicians who gave evidence] felt that something had shifted, that things felt different last few years. And the fact that you know, people are able online to post this stuff anonymously, it was all contributing to a pretty vile space ... But the committee hadn't really been considering this space before ... once we were asked to do it then these issues were coming up very quickly when people spoke to us. I don't think before that the committee had necessarily a committee view on this sort of space" (P18).

This interpretation aligns with other interviewees who expressed that it was the review process in terms of collecting evidence that influenced the focus of the final report. Further

to my original interviews, an illustrative example of the influence of the increased use of social media and the prevalence of online abuse in the documentary evidence submitted to the review is: “Abuse of parliamentary candidates is not a new phenomenon, but evidence would suggest that with the growth of social media, candidates are more exposed and open to abuse which is taking place on a larger scale than even five years ago.” (Intimidation in Public Life, Written Evidence, Submissions 1-39, Submission 34, All-party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism, p.59)

A key reason for the consensus that social media was a major part of the problem seems to have come from the committee’s experiences with representatives from the companies. All the interviewees candidly recalled their experiences with the social media companies. For example:

“I don't think it's a big secret that we met a bigger resistance from the social media companies ... It took all the efforts of the secretariat to persuade them this [providing evidence] would be a useful thing for them to do. The meetings with them were challenging, I suppose. They were very much defending what they saw as their role, that they weren't regulators. It wasn't up to them to decide what went on social media sites.” (P18)

The tension between the committee and social media companies seems to have been present throughout the review process – from the “resistance” of social media companies to participate in the review to the “challenging” evidence-collecting meetings to the emphatic language of the report.

Such evidence from the interviews sheds light on the tension that was apparent in the documentary evidence. For example, the transcript note of the CSPL meeting with

Facebook indicates a clash on the roles of responsibility for the social media company. CSPL members (JM and JR) asked the Facebook representative (SM) for the data on excluding reports of abuse to law enforcement:

“JR: How many times in a year in England would that be operated or the UK?

SM: I’m afraid I don’t even know the number. If we had I’m not sure we could share it but it’s a handful it’s not going to be....

JR: Could you share anonymised data with us?

SM: Not in terms of the number of reports of certain types, no. What I can say is that we do get millions of reports every week.

JM: How many in the UK, how many in England? How many would you have had in month of election in England?

SM: That’s not data we have.

JM: You don’t keep that data?

SM: We don’t have data that would tell us that? [sic]

JM: You don’t keep performance, you don’t do data reports on how many you’ve had in a particular period of what type of incident?

SM: No.

JM: How do you allocate resources then, how do you know how many people are needed to be reported to?”

(Note of Meeting with Facebook)

This excerpt demonstrates the differences of opinion between CSPL and the social media platform on their roles and responsibilities of data collection. Reflecting on one meeting with a social media company, one interviewee said: “I remember my slow-witted surprise. And then I remember my irritation with these dreadful answers” (P20). The CSPL’s experience with and their perception of resistant social media companies seems to be an important factor in the review process.

Another, related, important focus that came out of the review process was the gendered dimension of abuse towards MPs. When I asked the interviewees if the report’s

focus on gender and diversity was expected from the outset of the report process, they said that such a focus had not been planned, but came from the evidence. For example:

“It came out in the evidence, because obviously as well as Jo Cox's terrible murder, there had also been the attack previously on Stephen Timms, so we didn't know that it would be such an issue for people with protected characteristics” (P19).

“I think that [focus on gender] definitely wasn't there at the beginning. I think that came out from the evidence more. I remember the committee ... being impacted by the evidence of Diane Abbott. The Fawcett Society, as it happened, had done a recent little bit of work on it, there had been a little bit of work, more work done on threats against women [by] Amnesty International” (P16).

The finding from the interviewees that a gendered understanding of the problem was not part of the committee's initial thinking points to the significance of the gendered framing. The committee members perhaps had assumed that the problem of violence impacted both men and women: by 2017 there had been the fatal attack on Jo Cox and the near-fatal stabbing on Stephen Timms. The framing of women being particularly impacted in the review likely reflects both the nature of the problem and a growing understanding of the importance of gender differences by those submitting to the review, especially in relation to diversity of democratic representation.

A particular piece of evidence that was recalled by all of the interviewees was the evidence submitted about or on behalf of Diane Abbott. The committee relied on the Amnesty International report (Dhrodia, 2018), which indicated that Abbott received more Twitter abuse than all of the other women candidates in the 2017 election combined. The influence of this third sector research influenced the committee to collect further

evidence: as one interviewee explained, “Amnesty International prompted us then to go talk to Diane's office ...” (P19). This interviewee went on to explain the committee’s conversations with the staff:

“[the staff said] every day [they] put on gloves – that is advised by the parliamentary and diplomatic police officers ... and hand over any correspondence, which was a threat or felt a risk ... [a staff member] said, “I get in in the morning – we never let Diane see Facebook or Twitter until we've sorted it. We flip through, we eat our porridge...” I said, “this isn't normal” and they said “it's our normality, it's Diane's normality. She got sexist, racist, totally, totally misogynistic abuse, as well as for her politics day in, day out it had become her normalcy...”” (P19)

The CSPL’s member’s evident surprise about the experience of Diane Abbot’s office further indicates that the process of collecting evidence was crucial in focusing on the gendered aspects of the problem. This shows the CSPL members’ shift in understanding of the prevalence and even ‘normalisation’ of the problem.

Other evidence submitted to the review process focussed on the gendered nature of the problem. For example, the prevalence of sexism was a focus of all the political parties’ contributions as well as academics’. An illustrative quote from the evidence to the review is: “There is the sexism: nearly every female MP in this great House will, during her time, be threatened and abused on Twitter about rape” (Political Parties roundtable).

The interviewees echoed the importance of diverse participation to democracy. For example, when I asked about what they saw as the key problem frames of the report, one interviewee clarified: “the democracy and the inequality are maybe linked ... Democracy loses if you know there's not a representation and because there's inequality and that women and ethnic minorities are targeted more that obviously contributes to that” (P18).

## Review Report – Problem ‘prognosis’ through policy recommendations

The report’s opening of the executive summary is illustrative of the committee’s view of the seriousness of the problem and its ‘diagnosis’:

“Intimidation in public life presents a threat to the very nature of representative democracy in the UK. Addressing this intimidatory, bullying and abusive culture matters. It matters for the diversity of our public life, it matters for the way in which the public can engage with representative democracy, and it matters for the freedom to discuss and debate issues and interests. ... The widespread use of social media has been the most significant factor accelerating and enabling intimidatory behaviour in recent years.” (p.13)

The report makes clear its view that intimidation in public life is problematic because of its impact on democracy. Closely related is the threat of diverse representation because women and other groups already underrepresented in politics. The final key focus is that abuse in public life takes place particularly online and because of the rise in use of social media.

The report places significant emphasis on online abuse, including an entire chapter dedicated to social media. The opening paragraph of the social media specific chapter reflects the view of the importance of social media in politics:

“Social media has come to play a significant role in British politics. Widely used social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook have become important ways to share political ideas and information. Elections are now played out online, as well as in the offline world.” (p.31)

This description is neutral or even positive about the role of social media as an avenue for information sharing and political participation. The chapter goes on to praise the potential

positives on political participation: “Social media can be a democratising force” (p.31). Yet, this description quickly makes way for the reality of the harms of social media: “these platforms of debate and discussion can and do become places of intimidation” (p.31). For example, the review goes on to partially blames the design of the social media platforms:

“The instantaneous and direct nature of communication online has shaped a culture in which the intimidation of candidates and others in public life has become widespread, immediate, and toxic. This is exacerbated by the ability to hide behind the anonymity of social media profiles.” (p.32)

The report points to the various aspects of the design on social media and the way that they have influenced a problematic political culture in which intimidation is perhaps normalised.

Social media companies are framed as largely responsible for the harm of such abuse through their platform design and reluctance to change their practices. A key part of CSPL’s argument is social media companies’ lack of transparency on data of abuse on their platforms. For example, noting the apparent lack of data collection, the CSPL report argues:

“The companies’ failure to collect this data seems extraordinary given that they thrive on data collection. It would appear to demonstrate that they do not prioritise addressing this issue of online intimidation.” (p.41)

The emphatic language of “extraordinary” is reflected throughout the chapter and report when discussing social media companies. CSPL argues that the lack of data collection and reporting as “unacceptable” (p.41) and “shows a lack of respect to users” (p.42).

The committee’s dissatisfaction towards social media companies is further evident in the review report recommendations. Social Media Companies was the group with the largest number of recommendations. In addition, most of these recommendations state they “must” act as opposed to the softer, suggestive “should” for most other actors.

Recommendations (listed in Appendix 3) include a requirement on preventing, addressing and reporting on abuse, as well as supporting users. For example, CSPL urges a requirement to “publish UK-level performance data on the number of reports they receive, the percentage of reported content that is taken down, and the time it takes to take down that content, on at least a quarterly basis” and suggests companies “actively provide advice, guidance and support to Parliamentary candidates on steps they can take to remain safe and secure while using their sites.” The Committee urges responsibility to address the problem with the social media companies.

Moving from this ‘diagnosis’ to ‘prognosis,’ the report urges multiple and coordinated action by a range of actors in order to “address the full breadth of the problem we face.” (p.7) The report makes clear that “Our recommendations stand as a package. They should be implemented together, as a comprehensive response to an issue of central importance to our representative democracy.” (p.13) The complex interplay of gender and online dynamics impacting democracy mean that a complex interplay of actions is needed, which the report sets out with twenty-one recommendations (which are summarised in Appendix 3).

In his opening letter to the Prime Minister, Lord Bew, Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, lists the relevant actors and urges cooperation: “Those across public life must work together to address this problem: we must see greater energy and action from social media companies, political parties, Parliament, the police, broadcast and print media, and from MPs and Parliamentary candidates themselves.” (p.7) Here and

throughout the report, the CSPL authors particularly urge action on the part of political parties and social media companies.

The actor with the largest number of recommendations (eight) is social media companies followed by political parties (five). With three recommendations each are government and law enforcement (grouped as the National Police Chiefs Council, Crown Prosecution Service and the College of Policing). Press bodies (e.g. IPSO and Impress regulators and news organisations) have two recommendations on codes of conduct.

With its focus on the leadership of political parties, the committee seems to preempt the risk of partisanship with Lord Bew's opening emphatically stating: "Political parties will need to work together to address intimidation in public life; they should not use this report and its recommendations for partisan purposes or political gain" (p.7). It seems that, at least in parliamentary debates discourse, political parties leadership and MPs heeded the call: as analysed in the previous chapter, the debates discourse was largely cordial with a very limited use of partisanship framing.

In its justification of its recommendations, the report downplays the role of legislation. It maps existing legislation and argues "We have seen no evidence that the current criminal law is insufficient. New offenses specific to social media are unnecessary and could be rendered outdated quickly" (p.16) It does recommend other legal measures related. It urges social media regulation to make companies liable for social media content. It suggests electoral law changes to remove the requirement for candidate's addresses to

appear on ballot papers and possibly a new offence of intimidating campaigners (both of these electoral law changes have subsequently been enacted).

What seems more important than legislation from the CSPL's analysis is the proper application of existing legislation and the update or introduction of institutional policies particularly within political parties and law enforcement bodies. The five recommendations for political parties focus on the effective creation and implementation of behaviour codes and support for candidates. The three recommendations for the law enforcement bodies relate to improved information and training on the application of laws for the police officers and political candidates.

Taking a step back, all of the interviewees reflected on the longer-term impact of the review. One interviewee reflected: "often our reports might not attract most public interest, but this one did ... most people that we wanted to speak to really went out of their way to find time" (P18). This person went on to say, of the overall report topic:

"I think it was the first report that really addressed this issue, something that it's got to be done about it actually ... Its impact was immediate and important. I think that was shown in the way that the government responded to the report in a very positive and meaningful way, which is not always the case at CSPL".

Another interviewee commented on the long-term impact:

"What makes this slightly unusual is that we realised that it was a big deal or whatever we published would probably be big news, because normally you're kind of competing to make something relevant ...I think even though we thought it'd be high profile, it's turned out to be a very significant piece of work that has stood the test of time" (P16).

The fact that the review was unusually high-profile compared to the committee's other work indicates its significance as an important report, especially in terms of politicising the topic of violence towards politicians. It points to the importance of the committee members as actors who identified key aspects of the problem and called for solutions in the review process and beyond.

In particular, all the interviewees expressed the view that a key impact of the review was changing the conversation on social media regulation. As one interviewee reflected "The general role of social media [is] now a cliché of public debate. It wasn't quite when we started." (P20). Another interviewee adds detail to this reflection:

"I think one of the most, the most significant outcome of the committee's report was that it shifted the dial on social media regulation ... the committee felt that the burden and regulation should be on [the social media companies] ... that created the conditions in which you can go and get something like the Online Safety Bill ... I mean maybe it would have happened anyway, but I think that is probably the most significant outcome from the committee's review in that it widened that set of possibilities" (P16).

Those interview participants involved in the review made clear that once they started the review, it became quickly evident that social media was a key driver in contributing to the problem of abuse in politics because of the interrelated factors of the platform designs that exacerbated abuse, the expectation of its use in politics, and the platform leadership resistance to change. As touched upon earlier, a major aspect of the review is the agenda of committee members in recognising and prioritising the issue of social media regulation.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The key factors that led to the set-up of the review include the initiative of Prime Minister Theresa May prioritising this issue after the 2017 General Election, following a longer-term series of developments, including the tension during the 2014 Scottish Referendum. The key factors that influenced focusing on certain aspects of the problem and potential solutions – especially in terms of social media – was the evidence submitted to the review, especially the tense interactions with representatives from social media companies and the testimonies from MPs’ offices, especially Diane Abbott’s.

The review process led to a report that was characterised by a driving interpretation that intimidation in public life is problematic because of its impact on democracy. Closely related to this interpretation was the threat of diverse representation because women and other groups are already underrepresented in politics. The final key underlying position is that abuse in public life takes place particularly online and because of the rise in use of social media.

A key aspect of how the review report defined the problem was that it is gendered in terms of women experiencing particularly aggressive abuse. The finding that a gender-differentiated understanding of the problem was not part of the committee’s initial thinking points to the significance of the gendered framing. The committee members perhaps had assumed that the problem of violence impacted both men and women. The framing of gender in the review perhaps speaks to the overwhelming gendered nature of the problem

– and/or a growing understanding of the importance of gender by those submitting to the review, especially in relation to diversity of democratic representation.

Notably, while “diversity” is sometimes linked to multiple characteristics, gender and specifically the experiences of women seem to be the main focus of the problem definition. The report does indicate some attention to an intersectional framing, for example indicating: “The intimidation experienced by those who fit in more than one of these groups [female, BAME or LGBT] can be even worse” (p.28).

The report making an explicit link between gendered abuse and its impact on representative democracy is potentially valuable, but this focus risks downplaying the impact of abuse on the individuals and their identity group, and the deep-rooted structural dynamics at play. The report stops short at specifically identifying the root, structural causes and manifestations of such abuse. For example, while it cites “significant evidence of intimidation which is motivated by prejudice or hate” (p.73), it frames the abuse as linked to “their personal characteristics” (p.73) rather than explicitly referencing group-based hate and the *structural processes* of sexism and racism.

The lack of *structural* focus to gender and diversity in the diagnosis of the problem is also reflected in the prognosis. The recommendations are largely gender-neutral, except one: “Political parties must take steps to provide support for all candidates, including through networks, training, and support and resources. In particular, the parties should develop these support mechanisms for female, BAME, and LGBT candidates who are more likely to be targeted as subjects of intimidation.” This suggestion of support mechanisms,

while potentially valuable to support individual and groups when they have experienced incidents abuse, does not attempt to address the underlying dynamics that lead to such abuse in the first place.

The review process and report, while extensive, placed most focus on the social media drivers of the problem which included platform design and the resistance of social media companies to address abuse. Therefore, the recommendations are focussed – one might say, skewed – towards social media companies. The rise of social media may be too simplistic an explanation of rising abuse, without a recognition of the deep structural inequalities that existed before politics went online and continue to exist. Furthermore, the focus on social media companies may also risk other actors – such as government, the police and, of course, perpetrators – shirking responsibility.

Notably, many of the recommendations of the review, particularly those for political parties and law enforcement/police bodies, have been adopted in some way. In 2020, the Committee released a brief update report and tracker of the recommendations (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2020b). The developments point to the significance of this review as part of the story of the broader politicisation of problem of violence, including intimidation, harassment and abuse, of UK MPs. The next chapter focusses on some of those resulting policies.

## 6. Policy Architecture – Specific policies to address violence towards UK politicians

### Introduction

So far, the thesis has explored discursive institutional change over time and undertaken a case study of the CSPL Review into Intimidation in Public Life. This chapter deepens the inquiry into the politicisation of the phenomenon of violence against MPs by appraising the policy responses that have been put in place. The research question asks, ‘How are gender and violence conceptualised in specific policies to address violence towards MPs?’

As outlined earlier, policy is understood comprehensively as the rules, guidance and institutions developed by specific actors towards a set of aims. Crucially, policies overlap in conception and practice. MPs’ workplace encompasses various contexts, including parliaments, constituencies, political party events, as well as online spaces such as social media platforms where politicians are increasingly expected to carry out their roles. Given this variety, MPs interact with different policy actors and mechanisms, as evidenced by the CSPL review in the previous chapter.

The policies analysed in this chapter are those that were created *specifically* to address violence experienced by MPs<sup>12</sup> by parliament, political parties and law

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<sup>12</sup> The relevant target population of these policies sometimes also includes related political actors such as parliamentary staff and political party members.

enforcement. My literature review and empirical research presented in the thesis so far indicates that it is these institutions and actors have the specific responsibility for responding to the phenomenon of violence experienced by politicians. While long-standing criminal policies do form part of the policy response, the focus of this chapter is on those policies that were developed primarily and specifically to address violence against MPs. Appendix 1 presents the broader policy architecture and the specific policy documents.

To conduct the analysis, I developed a specific analytical framework that incorporates variations in gender and violence. For analytical purposes, I have three types of categorisations, pertaining to: gender responsiveness, intersectionality responsiveness and violence forms comprehensiveness. I set-up a normative ideal policy as 'intersectionality responsive', which aims to respond to intersectional, gendered inequality in politics, and includes all forms of violence i.e., physical, psychological, sexual, economic, semiotic and online. Other categories used include gender and intersectionality 'neutral', 'aware' and 'sensitive.'

I find that phenomenon of violence towards MPs has been politicised with an outcome of a specific policy architecture. The specific policy architecture has developed over time from primarily a security response to individual incidences, to a collective response by a range of policy actors, including political parties and parliament, who have implemented preventative and punitive behavioural rules. On the basis of the application of the analytical framework, I argue that, while important for the safety and security of politicians, the policy architecture's focus on protective security and individual behaviour

risks undermining the underlying structural drivers of the phenomenon and preventing the necessary transformation of political institutions.

## Analytical Approach

Feminist policy analysis offers insights through interrogation of how ideas are reflected in policy and highlights the importance of 'naming' specific problems in policy adoption (Bacchi, 2012a; Htun and Weldon, 2018). An important contribution of feminist academics and activists has been identifying new policy responses to long-standing phenomena, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment (Mazur, 2017; Boyle, 2019). While policy response and adoption are not equivalent to policy implementation, there is value in cataloguing and analysing policy statements and documents, especially for phenomena that are defined as 'new' (Htun and Weldon, 2018). Violence, including abuse, intimidation and harassment, experienced by politicians is one such 'new' policy problem in the sense of the phenomenon being problematised and specific policies created for specific policy actors.

The policy actors for this policy area have complex relationships with each other in terms of their responsibilities and responses to the phenomenon of violence experienced by MPs. Their responsibilities and responses can overlap. For example, the Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation team (PLAIT) (as part of Operation Bridger) is a police unit based in parliament, so here parliament and police overlap. The Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC) is a joint police and National Health Service unit. The 'Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections' was produced by law enforcement actors, Crown Prosecution

Service (CPS), National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the College of Policing, in partnership with the Electoral Commission.

There are also important distinctions within groups of actors. For example, while 'political parties' can be conceptualised as one group of actors and share a policy of a joint code of conduct, there are important ideological and operational distinctions between different parties. In addition, the Independent Complaints and Grievance Service (ICGS) and the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), while based in Westminster, operate largely independently. Furthermore, law enforcement or security actors include separate but related actors including the NPCC and the CPS.

The universe of evidence for this chapter consists of the documents specific to the policy measures addressing violence experienced by MPs. I identified the policies from the parliamentary debates analysis as well as the catalogues of policy in the CSPL Review and related documents (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2017, 2020b; Committee on Standards in Public Life and Jo Cox Foundation, 2019) and nascent academic work (Krook, 2020; Julios, 2022; vawpolitics, 2022). The evidence universe, summarised in the table and outlined more comprehensively in an appendix, consists of 11 policies comprising more than 40 documents.

The evidence is as comprehensive and relevant as possible for the analysis. Some external limitations should be noted. One such limitation is that not all the full versions and/or past versions of the policies are publicly available. For example, while the policy document that could be located for Operation Bridger (National Police Chiefs' Council

(NPCC), 2016) appears gender neutral, it may be that the fuller confidential strategy reads as gender-sensitive (though, evidence from the MPs' interviews as outlined earlier suggests that this is not the case). While we know when the original political party policies were developed, for the most part only the current, and not past, versions are presented, which prevents a more detailed analysis of the evolution of these individual policies' understandings of gender and violence.

Policies were initially analysed as stand-alone with the most core policy document set used. However, where there are important temporal developments and the previous versions of the policies are accessible, such as for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) security package, change over time is considered for specific policies.

Table 4. Summary of the Specific Policy Architecture to Address Violence Experienced by MPs

Note. A fuller outline of the policy architecture including individual policy documents is in Appendix 1.

Policy	Date Policy Adopted	Date of Document(s)
Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC)	2006	2022
Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) Security package	2009	2009-2022
Operation Bridger including Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team (PLAIT)	Dec 2015	13 July 2016
Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS)	2018	2019-2021
Labour Party Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct for its members	2018	2018-2022
Conservative Party Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct for its members	2017	2017-2022
Liberal Democrats Party Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct for its members	2017	2017
SNP Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct for its members	2017	2022
Intimidation in Public Life: joint statement on conduct of political party members	2020	2020
Responding to Intimidating Behaviour: Information for Parliamentarians	Mar 2019	Mar 2019
Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections	Nov 2019	Nov 2019 and 2021

I conducted a close content analysis of the policy documents as follows. I first familiarised myself with the evidence in terms of the policy document's actors, aims and assumed policy problems as interpreted from its content. This involved conducting content and discourse analysis to interrogate normative meanings in the context of the document, informed by Bacchi (2012)'s 'What is the problem represented to be?' approach and 'Critical Frame Analysis' (Verloo, 2007; Dombos, 2012; van der Haar and Verloo, 2016).

Bacchi (2012) suggests specific questions, which I adapted for this research: 'what is the policy aim(s)?' and 'who are the assumed perpetrators/victims?' 'what actors are responsible?' These questions are specific and important to advancing understanding of gender and violence in the context of the research question guiding the analysis as a whole. Following Bacchi, I identified the explicit mentions and implicit indications of gender and violence, as well as the implicit assumptions. Furthermore, in my analysis, I aim to interrogate the policy aims and the relationships between gender, intersectionality and violence.

I then applied an analytical framework to appraise the individual documents' understandings of three aspects: gender, intersectionality and violence. As outlined earlier in the overall theoretical framework chapter, this approach is particularly informed by the feminist institutionalist scholars and practitioners who go beyond gender sensitive to gender- responsive' or -transformative approaches (Mackay and Krook, 2015a; UNFPA and UNICEF, 2020), which can be applied to that policy to ascertain whether it just includes

women but extends to transforming gender relations towards equality. The coding strategy is further detailed in Appendix 4.

Thinking normatively, in order to respond to the structural nature of violence against MPs and transform gender relations, an intersectional approach would be necessary. An intersectional approach recognises that gender intersects with other oppressions and identities, such as race, to create unique sets of oppressions (Hankivsky, 2012; Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013; Kuperberg, 2018).

While I hold that an intersectional understanding of gender is the 'ideal' high point, I also interrogate whether policies only examine gender without an intersectional focus. I create separate (but complementary) categories of gender and intersectionality analysis that are on a spectrum of four steps or types: from neutral to aware to sensitive to responsive. In terms of gender and intersectionality, the apex of understanding is intersectionality responsive.

The continuum consisting of four categories of gender-sensitivity/responsiveness is applied to the policy documents. The normatively 'weakest' category is 'gender neutral'. Policy is assessed as such if there is no recognition of gender in relation to the problem of violence. Documents with entire 'silences' on gender are included in this category. The second category is 'gender-aware' which means that gender is recognised as a factor in relation to the problem of violence, but not necessarily as a risk factor that makes violence more likely or grounds it in gender inequality/gender relations. Included in this code were policies that reference the protected characteristics of The Equality Act, with no further

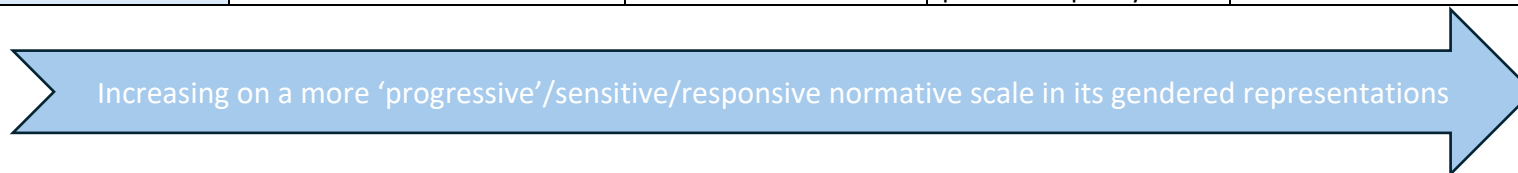
discussion about how those of certain protected characteristics may experience violence differently to others.

The third gender category is 'gender-sensitive'. Policies classified thus recognise that individuals or groups of certain genders carry a particular risk factor in terms of violence because of inequality. Any reference to disproportionate impacts/risks on particular gender groups and/or reference to gender and power dynamics in the policies' documents allowed the policy to be categorised as 'gender-sensitive'. The final category is normatively the strongest, 'gender-responsive'. As well as understanding the unequal gender power dynamics, a gender-responsive policy has a stated aim of responding to gender inequality.

A similar procedure and continuum are used for intersectionality. An 'intersectionality-neutral' policy has no recognition of the intersection of gender and other inequalities (though it may demonstrate awareness of single inequalities on their own e.g., race). 'Intersectionality-aware' means intersecting characteristics are recognised in relation to the problem of violence. An 'intersectionality-sensitive' policy recognises intersectional inequality in relation to the problem of violence i.e., intersecting characteristics can impact incidence of violence because of power inequality. An 'intersectionality-responsive' policy has a specific aim of responding to intersectional gender inequality.

Table 5. Theorising Gender and Intersectionality in Policy Documents to Address Violence in Politics

<b>Representations of Gender and Intersectionality</b>				
	Neutral	Aware	Sensitive	Responsive
<b>Gender</b>	Defines the problem in generic terms. No recognition of gender in relation to the problem of violence. Documents with entire 'silences' on gender are included in this category.	Gender is recognised as a factor in relation to the problem of violence, but not necessarily as a risk factor that makes violence more likely or in relation to gender inequality/gender relations	Certain gender individuals or groups have a particular risk factor in terms of violence because of inequality are coded as 'gender-sensitive'.	Policy has a stated aim of responding to gender inequality
<b>Intersectionality</b>	No recognition of the intersection of gender and other inequalities (though it may demonstrate awareness of inequalities on their own e.g., race)	Intersecting characteristics are recognised in relation to the problem of violence	Recognises intersectional inequality in relation to the problem of violence i.e., intersecting characteristics can impact incidence of violence because of power inequality	Specific, stated aim of responding to intersectional gender inequality



In terms of categorising violence, I follow the approach informed by the literature outlined earlier. As part of the content analysis, I coded for policies’ understandings of violence: physical, psychological, sexual, economic, semiotic and online. Unlike with gender and intersectionality, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Any reference to any of these forms allow the policy to be coded as including the particular forms.

**Table 6. Categorising Forms of Violence in Policy Documents**

Physical	Includes physical violence i.e., bodily harm e.g., references ‘force’, ‘security’, ‘assault’
Psychological	Includes psychological violence i.e., harm to mental or emotional state e.g., covers bullying, harassment
Sexual	Includes sexual violence i.e., unwanted sexual behaviour e.g. (sexual) harassment
Economic	Includes economic violence e.g., property damage
Semiotic	Includes semiotic i.e., symbolic or image-based violence towards members of marginalised groups.
Online	Includes violence that happens in online spaces such as email and social media platforms e.g., reference to ‘communications’, social media abuse

*Categories adapted from Kuperberg (2021), Krook (2020) Jane (2017), Lewis et al., (2017) and Bardall (2013).*

Given its inherent attention to group-based denigration, semiotic violence is only identified in policy documents that are at least gender-sensitive. For example, the Labour Party’s ‘Code of Conduct: Antisemitism and other forms of racism’ (2022, p. 137) includes a mention of semiotic violence in “denigrating or offensive racial depictions”, explicit because of the words ‘denigrating’ and ‘offensive’ with relation to a racial group. The ‘Intimidation in Public Life: joint statement on conduct of political party members’ (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2020a) is coded as including semiotic violence because of its reference to “sexualised language or imagery”; as the policy is gender-sensitive, this

indicates an understanding that hate may be based on women (and those of other marginalised identities) as a group to reinforce inequality.

Importantly, from the theoretical literature on violence, I would not expect the policy documents to necessarily explicitly state 'violence' for each form. Familiarisation with the evidence allowed me to make inferences based on sector-specific language and context. For example, references to 'security' in the IPSA and police documents tended to suggest protection from physical forms of violence. A document that includes physical violence references bodily harm such as 'force', 'security' or 'assault'. Psychological violence indicates harm to mental or emotional state; the policy document will likely mention bullying and harassment. Mentions of 'harassment' in codes of conduct that were developed during the #MeToo and localised #WesminsterToo movements suggests inclusion of the sexual form. A document that includes sexual violence may reference unwanted sexual behaviour, sexual misconduct or (sexual) harassment. Policy that covers the online form includes violence that happens in online spaces such as email and social media platforms. The document may directly reference social media abuse or more implicitly reference 'communications.'

I have developed this categorical approach with an acute awareness of its limitations and the debates about operationalising gender and intersectionality. The limitations of such a categorical approach include risking not fully realising the complexity of intersectionality such as the differing power dynamics between individual identities and social structures (Nash 2008) and risking an ineffective 'one-size-fits-all', 'buzzword' (Davis 2008).

Yet, overall categorisations allow us to go some way in revealing the understandings of gender and intersectionality in policy documents. As is suggested in best practice, these categorisations were developed in a context-specific way (Hankivsky, 2012). This analytical framework is specific to the interrogation of policy documents that address the phenomenon of violence experienced by MPs in the UK. This approach also allows me to more clearly build on existing feminist frameworks, like that of Gender Sensitive Parliaments, that have historically exclusively focussed on gender.

As is the case for developing categories on gender and intersectionality, a categorical approach to violence is not without limitations. A risk here is simplifying the potential complexity of the understandings of violence and, crucially, the relationships between gender, intersectionality and violence through a 'tick-box' approach.

To incorporate the relationship between gender, violence and intersectionality, I only code 'semiotic' violence for those documents that are at least gender sensitive as semiotic violence demands an understanding of power group inequalities. Furthermore, in my analysis, I aim to interrogate the policy aims and the relationships between gender, intersectionality and violence.

The 'ideal' policy is intersectionality responsive with all the forms of violence (a 'comprehensive' understanding of violence). While the policies/actors/institutions have different aims, powers and mechanisms, I maintain a normative ideal that all the policies *could* be gender and intersectionality responsive with a comprehensive understanding of

violence and potential targets. This does not mean that I *expect* the policy documents to reflect my ideal.

Given that different actors are involved, a nuanced set of empirical expectations is important. I develop such expectations for individual policies and overall policy development from related literature and the policy context. Given the complexity of the relationship between actors and policy responses, the expectations for each policy document or actor differ.

From the political parties' literature, it seems reasonable to expect parties with more 'progressive' ideologies to be more gender-sensitive compared to more conservative actors (Harmel and Janda, 1994; Poguntke *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, for this research, the Labour Party and Scottish National Party may be expected to be more gender and perhaps even intersectionality sensitive than the other parties.

Given the prominence of physical violence in general violence law in the UK compared to other forms (Hearn *et al.*, 2020), we might expect security/police policy to only cover physical violence. We may also expect a lack of gender sensitivity, given the literature that finds the (UK) law can lack a structural gender inequality understanding of violence (Strid *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, we expect the police units (FTAC and Operation Bridger including PLAIT) and the IPSA security package to focus on physical violence and be gender and intersectionality neutral.

Considering the universe as a whole and the state of policy awareness in the UK, it may be too much to expect that any document or actor would go beyond intersectionality

awareness. Existing research suggests that the UK policy actors, even when they display a degree of gender-sensitivity, lack an intersectional awareness. This has been attributed to the fact that the UK Equality Act separates different identities, including gender, race and disability (Christoffersen, 2021). This leads me to expect none or very few policies to be intersectionality sensitive or responsive.

For the policies that are treated as behavioural, i.e. the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme and the party codes of conduct, we may expect them to focus on psychological and sexual forms given that they are more dealing with workplace violence and were created in response to sexual harassment concerns (Collier and Raney, 2018, Julios 2023).

Given the earlier findings on the development of the problem-framing, we might expect to see an evolution over time with newer policies paying more attention to gender and multiple forms of violence including online.

The remainder of the chapter is organised into sections that chart the policy architecture: FTAC, Operation Bridger, IPSA, ICGS, Political Parties, CPS, and, finally, the joint guidance by a range of actors. Each sub-section analyses the way the relevant policy frames the problem and its placing regarding the gender, intersectionality and violence categories. The discussion section concluding the chapter will offer an overview analysis in response to the research questions and expectations.

## Analysis

### Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC): police's gender-neutral response to violence by "lone individuals" with psychological health needs

As outlined earlier in the thesis, in 2006, a new institution, FTAC was established in partnership between the Metropolitan Police Service and the National Health Service (NHS). The policy documents analysed are the collection of information on the website about the aims and operations of the institution.

This centre is specifically concerned with the aspect of violence in which "fixated individuals" are perpetrators. In this context, the analysis suggests FTAC seems to frame the environment in terms of one-off incidences of violence (defined as harassment, stalking and threats) perpetrated by "lone individuals" (Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, 2023b) with specific psychological needs (often "schizophrenia, delusional disorder, depression and bipolar disorder" (Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, 2023a)).

While focusing on psychological violence, especially stalking, harassment and threats, the policy also covers physical, sexual and online forms. The policy puts forward the view that physical or sexual violence is rare e.g., "the stalking of public figures as a prelude to sexual attack is uncommon" (Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, 2023a). Online violence is implicitly covered with references to "threatening communications" (Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, 2023a). Economic and semiotic violence are not evident with no reference, for example, to property damage or the use of images. Even if images were

mentioned, the recognition of semiotic violence is impossible since the policy does not recognise group-based structural inequalities in violence.

FTAC offers a prime example of gender- and intersectionality neutral policy. The policy documents do not mention any structural/group-based differences, such as gender, in terms of risk factors for perpetrating or experiencing violence. For example, both “lone individuals” (Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, 2023b) and “prominent people” (Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, 2023a) have no gender or other details but are used generically, suggesting an assumption that neither gender nor any other identity are crucial factors. Even descriptions of sexual forms of violence make no reference to gendered dynamics. For example, the document indicates a potential type of incident as “persistent, unrealistic and inept attempts to establish a friendship or sexual relationship with a public figure” (Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, 2023a) using gender-neutral language.

Given its focus on specific individual acts of gender-neutral violence, I also conclude that FTAC frames or interprets the problem of violence against MPs as one of individual incidences, rather than an issue impacting MPs as a group.

### Operation Bridger: Police and Parliament’s gender-neutral response to physical violence that threatens democracy

In 2015, Operation Bridger, the “national plan for providing MPs with security advice” (National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC), 2016) was established by Parliament and the police. The specific policy document that could be found in relation to Operation Bridger

is a guidance note outlining the policy, written by the Specialist Operations Unit of the Metropolitan Police for the Chief Constables' Council. Some content in this document is redacted, presumably for security reasons.

My analysis indicates that this document is gender- and intersectionality-neutral. Notably, while there is a focus on "crimes", the document also refers to the importance of MPs reporting and the police providing guidance to "incidents" and "non-urgent cases" (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), 2016). There is reference to different forms of violence, with a particular concern following Jo Cox's murder and "emerging threats" including "threat of sexual violence" but with silence on these as potentially gendered (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), 2016). The recognition of "communications" (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), 2016) indicates that psychological and online forms of violence are covered. Economic and semiotic violence are not evident.

Yet, in contrast to FTAC, Operation Bridger represents the problem of violence as a significant risk and potentially impacting all MPs. Reflecting on attention to an increased violence that could impact MPs collectively, the public introduction to the classified policy document states that the role of an MP "does present unique vulnerabilities and risk if they are to continue to practice open and transparent democracy by being available to their constituents" (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), 2016). The policy problem is framed as a collective issue and that is important to a normative ideal democracy.

## Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA): A gender-neutral expansion of security in response to a growing, collective problem of violence

The document analysed for the IPSA scheme was that providing information about the scheme on the IPSA website and information on the security package/“security assistance”<sup>13</sup> in each of the fourteen editions of the scheme from 2009 until 2023.

As outlined earlier, IPSA has made various changes over time. Significantly, in January 2016, IPSA made changes to the security package which seems to have included a removal of the cap on security spending for MPs, previously limited to £2,000 per MP.<sup>14</sup> Security funding is now also reported collectively, rather than by individual MP “to reduce risk to the MP, their staff and their families” (IPSA, 2022a). Since 2017, IPSA defers security funding decisions to the police: “will fund the cost of security measures as recommended by the National Police Chiefs’ Council”<sup>15</sup>. While the initial and perhaps remaining overall aim of the IPSA scheme is to prevent abuse of public funds, the specific security funding is now about protecting MPs, staff and families.

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<sup>13</sup> All IPSA scheme versions, Weblinks in Appendix 1.

<sup>14</sup> The IPSA Scheme is renewed every year. The early editions, 2009-10 and 2010-11, stated “The limit for Security Assistance will normally be £2,000 in any financial year” First Edition of the Scheme (2009-10): and Second Edition of the Scheme (2010-11): A 2022 information page indicates that the “security budget is uncapped”. It is not made clear when this uncap occurred. From 2011, the scheme did not indicate a cost, but there is not a clear statement of when it was uncapped. According to 2017 Freedom of Information Request, changes to security were rolled out in January 2016, which may have been the cap. The 2016-17 edition of the scheme includes “new arrangements” which seem to include “Funding is available under Security Assistance for costs incurred in line with the security options package issued by IPSA.” (These weblinks are available in Appendix 1)

<sup>15</sup> E.g., IPSA (2021-22, p52) and in versions of the scheme since 2017-18. Weblinks in Appendix 1.

The focus on “security assistance” suggests an assumption of physical violence. Economic violence is also covered with regular references to “measures relate to a property”<sup>16</sup>. However, more recent versions of the scheme from 2020 state “security measures may also be those unrelated to specific properties” (IPSA, 2021, 2022b), which could be a reference to violence that not only in physical form but, for example, online. Like FTAC and Operation Bridger, the IPSA policy documents are gender and intersectionality-neutral with no explicit attention to gender or other identities/risks.

These policy developments, especially moving to uncap and collectively report security spending, suggest a conceptualisation of security for MPs as a growing and important problem that impacts MPs collectively (in a gender-neutral way).

### Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS): Parliament’s intersectionality sensitive response to ‘workplace’ violence

The UK Parliament ICGS (2022) was established in 2018. This takes forward the UK Parliament Behaviour Code and separate policy and procedures for ‘Bullying and Harassment’ and ‘Sexual Misconduct’ which covers all MPs and staff in parliament (whether victims or perpetrators) (The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS), 2019a, 2019a, 2019c). The aim of the policy is to “provide a fair, transparent and consistent framework for reporting, investigating and responding to allegations of bullying and

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<sup>16</sup> IPSA all versions of the scheme each year. Weblinks in Appendix 1.

harassment” and “sexual misconduct” (The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS), 2019c, sec. 1.7, 2019b, sec. 1.7).

Based on my analysis, the UK Parliament ICGS can be categorised as both gender- and intersectionality-sensitive. For example, it explicitly understands bullying and harassment in terms of power dynamics, “as both a cause and a consequence of inequality and power difference”, and outlines the gender implications of sexual violence: “Sexual misconduct can happen to anyone and can be carried out by anyone, but the research is clear that it is disproportionately carried out by men against women” (The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS), 2019c, sec. 1.5). Furthermore, this policy recognises intersectional inequality as in the following statement: “Characteristics such as race, sex and sexuality can intersect with each other in ways that create specific issues...” (The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS), 2019c, sec. 1.6, 2019b, sec. 1.6). It does not meet the gender- or intersectionality-responsive thresholds as transforming these power relations is not a stated aim.

Unlike the policies outlined so far, the ICGS comprehensively covers violence. For example, “Physical or psychological threats or actions towards an individual or their personal property” (The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS), 2019b, sec. 2.5) covers physical, psychological and economic forms, and online is referenced with “online communications, including social media.” Since the document is gender-sensitive, semiotic violence can be said to be covered implicitly with the reference to image-based violence, e.g., “Sending, distributing or posting detrimental material about other

people, including images, in any medium” (The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS), 2019b, sec. 2.5).

## Political Parties’ Codes of Conduct: gender-sensitive responses to violence

Another notable development during the period in question was that political parties became important policy actors in addressing violence. In particular, the four main parties introduced or developed their complaints institutions for holding members responsible for standards of conducts (Conservative Party, 2017a; Liberal Democrat Party, 2017b; SNP, 2017; Committee on Standards in Public Life and Jo Cox Foundation, 2019; Julios, 2022; Labour Party, 2022).

The aims of the codes are to set “minimum standards of behaviour” (Conservative and SNP) or “minimum code of conduct” (Labour). While the Liberal Democrats’ Code (2017b) does not state a specific aim, its preamble suggests a similar aim: “We expect our members and registered supporters at all times to behave lawfully, honestly and with integrity.”

These policy responses focus on behaviour, with punishments including loss of party membership and limits on standing for parliamentary selection. While all the political parties had some prior behavioural rules, specific behavioural codes of conduct and policies focussed on preventing and addressing harassment (and other forms of violence) emerged from 2017 and were new. For example, initially agreed and planned in 2017, the

parliamentary Joint Statement on Conduct of Political Party Members was published in 2020 (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2020a).

The Labour Party is the only policy actor that can be characterised as having gender-responsive policy. It has multiple behavioural codes of conduct including specific rules to address sexual harassment and gender discrimination, Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Afrophobia and Anti-Black Racism. The Code of Conduct: Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination (2017) has a stated aim to be hostile towards gender discrimination: “The Labour Party strongly believes that no one should feel disadvantaged, discriminated against or harassed due to their sex or gender either inside the party or in the wider society. The Labour Party will create an environment that is overtly hostile to sexual harassment and gender discrimination.”

Furthermore, the Labour policy is also judged as intersectionality sensitive. To give some evidence for this conclusion, the Codes of Conduct give an example of identity groups intersecting in relation to violence: “Black women can also be victims of “misogynoir”, which is misogyny directed towards Black women where both race and gender play roles in bias and discrimination” (Labour Party, 2022, p. 137). Notably, the sexual harassment and gender discrimination policy specifically references the Amnesty International research into online violence against women MPs under “sources of information about Afrophobia and anti-Black racism” (Labour Party, 2022, p. 138).

The Labour Party policy also adopts a comprehensive understanding of violence: physical e.g., “unwanted physical contact” (Labour Party, 2017); psychological e.g., “every

day and cultural stereotyping and assumptions, as well as structural and systemic racism” (Labour Party, 2022, p. 137); economic e.g., “offers of rewards in return for sexual favours”; sexual e.g., “sexual assault or rape” (Labour Party, 2017); and even semiotic e.g., “denigrating or offensive racial depictions” (Labour Party, 2022, p. 137). This gender-responsive and intersectionality-sensitive policy understands violence in relation to group-based structural inequality, so the terms ‘denigrating’ or ‘offensive’, here, are related clearly to racist depictions which are symbolically/semiotically violent.

The Conservative Party (2017a, 2017b, 2017b) has a range of policies that cover violence including the Code of Conduct, Social Media Complaints Rules and Equal Opportunities policy. Analysis suggests that these policies can be characterised as gender-aware as they reference the protected characteristics of The Equality Act, but also as intersectionality-neutral given that they do not recognise these characteristics as intersecting. The Code of Conduct (Conservative Party, 2017a) displays some attention to power dynamics but not in an explicitly gendered way: “Power does not always mean being in a position of authority, but can include both personal strength, influence and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation.” The Code’s definition of harassment and bullying covers physical, psychological and sexual forms explicitly and economic implicitly e.g. “Bullying can be physical, verbal or non-verbal” and “Harassment may involve conduct of a sexual nature” (Conservative Party, 2017a). While online violence is not clearly mentioned in some of the policies, the existence of social media rules indicates that it is covered.

The Liberal Democrat Party (2017b, 2017c, 2017a) has codes of conduct in place, including a specific online one. The language is quite general so forms of violence cannot be clearly extrapolated, i.e., “Members or Registered Supporters of the Liberal Democrats must treat others with respect and must not bully, harass, or intimidate” (Liberal Democrat Party, 2017b). Given the context of the creation of the code in response to accusations of different forms of violence, including sexual harassment, we can assume physical, psychological, economic and sexual violence are implicitly covered. The Members Code of Conduct does explicitly reference online behaviour: “Our responsibilities as party members apply not only to our personal conduct but also to our conduct in communications, including electronic ones and with the media in all its forms” (Liberal Democrat Party, 2017b). The online code of conduct (Liberal Democrat Party, 2017c) also references the protected characteristics of The Equality Act so can be characterised as gender-aware, but intersectionality-neutral.

Similarly, the Scottish National Party (SNP)’s Code of Conduct (2017) uses general language in relation to gender and violence, e.g. “No member shall abuse, harass or bully or maliciously defame any other member whether via the media or otherwise” and “Every member has a responsibility not to discriminate in his or her conduct on the ground of race, colour, gender, religious belief or non-belief or sexual orientation.” We can assume physical, psychological and sexual, economic violence, as well as in-person and online, are implicitly covered, and characterise the policy as gender-aware, but intersectionality-neutral.

In another relevant development, a range of political party actors, together with the Committee on Standards in Public Life and The Jo Cox Foundation, also developed a joint code of conduct. This is the 'Intimidation in Public Life: Joint statement on conduct of political party members' policy code (2020a, app. A), which explicitly recognises the impact on different groups: "intimidation is disproportionately likely to be directed towards women, those from ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBT candidates" so can be categorised as gender-sensitive but intersectionality-neutral as it does not indicate the intersections between these groups. Again, it is not categorised as gender responsive as it does not explicitly aim to transform these specific gendered phenomena.

The joint party code comprehensively covers different forms of violence. For example, online violence is covered with "abusive online and offline communications" (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2020a, app. A). Physical violence is referenced with "threatening violence or other unlawful force" (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2020a, sec. 5.a). The psychological form is indicated by "engaging in bullying, harassment or victimisation, or unlawfully discriminating against another person or group" (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2020a, sec. 5.b). Sexual is covered with "the use of hateful or sexualised language or imagery" (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2020a, sec. 5.d). Economic is included with "damaging property" (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2020a, sec. 5.d). Even semiotic is included in the document with the reference to "hateful or sexualised language or imagery" (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2020a, sec. 5.d) and "discriminating against another person or group" (Committee on Standards in Public

Life, 2020a, sec. 5.c). As the policy is gender-sensitive, this indicates an understanding that hate may be based on women (and those of other marginalised identities) as group to reinforce inequality.

### Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)'s 'Responding to Intimidating Behaviour: Information for Parliamentarians': gender-aware response to growing violence

A further relevant set of developments dates from 2019 on when security actors produced institutional guidance for MPs on facing threats. In 2019, the CPS (2019) produced 'Responding to Intimidating Behaviour: Information for Parliamentarians'. The purpose of this document is to educate politicians on ways to respond to violence/abuse using the existing legal and security framework. The document outlines what laws and mechanisms MPs can use when faced with criminal abuse, such as the Protection from Harassment Act, Criminal Justice and Courts Act (which had amended the Malicious Communications Act 1998) and Criminal Damage Act.

The foreword states that the guidance was "developed in a context in which Parliamentarians have been the targeted victims of criminal conduct" (Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), 2019, p. 2). This reflects an understanding that violence towards MPs is a growing phenomenon.

The CPS represents the problem of violence experienced by MPs – or at least the aspect of the problem it is addressing – as largely gender-neutral criminality. For example,

the document's stated aim is gender and intersectionality neutral as follows: "information pack for Parliamentarians to assist you and your staff to recognise and report potential crimes in England and Wales" (Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), 2019, p. 2).

The one exception to its silence on gender is its description of hate crime: "where the offence is motivated by hostility towards race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or transgender, or there is a demonstration of hostility towards the victim based on any of these characteristics, this must be treated as an aggravating factor" (Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), 2019, p. 11). While it seems to recognise the marginalisation of gender and sexual minorities, it does not explicitly reference these power dynamics nor the power dynamics between men and women; nor does it make any reference to intersecting identities, such as by race, sexuality and gender. Even sexual violence, which has gendered dimensions, is not covered.

Physical and economic violence are explicitly covered, as is psychological violence with the inclusion of hate crime. Online violence is explicitly covered in communications offenses: "Communications, on or offline, which contain excessively abusive or threatening language" (Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), 2019, p. 6).

### **'Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections': joint security/police actors' gender-sensitive response to growing violence**

A final relevant development is another joint initiative: the 'Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections' which was produced by the Electoral Commission,

Crown Prosecution Service, National Police Chiefs' Council, and College of Policing (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) *et al.*, 2019, 2021). The development of this policy in addition to the stand-alone document by the Crown Prosecution Service reflects a growing police and security policy attention to the issue of violence experienced by MPs.

The aim of the guide is stated as follows: “provides practical advice based on the past experiences of candidates and policing and personal security advice” as well as “legal definitions and details of what might constitute a breach of criminal law in order to inform and assist candidates with any contact they may have with Police and the wider criminal justice system” (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) *et al.*, 2021, p. 3).

Notably, the 2021 document seems to position itself between presenting the problem of ‘serious’ violence against MPs as rare but recognising MPs’ increasing concern:

“Over 50 MPs stood down at the 2019 UK General Election, many saying this was at least in part due to abuse they had received ... For the majority of candidates, and for most of the time, these pressures will not impact on your personal safety. However, there have been occasions where candidates have been exposed to unacceptable levels of harassment and intimidation.” (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) *et al.*, 2021, p. 3).

The relevant security actors are likely aiming to reassure MPs that they are likely safe but that their concerns are being taken seriously. This aim is similar to the assertion in Operation Bridger document that indicates that, for police actors: “It is important that we retain the confidence of MPs” (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), 2016). This aim reflects the positionality of police actors to work with and retain trust of MPs (analysis on the implementation of these policies in terms of trust between MPs and police actors will be offered in the next chapter).

Like CPS's stand-alone document, the 'Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections' covers a range of violence such as assaults, making a threat to kill, harassment or stalking offences, hate crime, communications offences. As well as explicitly including physical, economic and psychological violence, this document also covers online violence: "In addition to occurring in public life, these behaviours and actions can primarily occur in virtual ('online') spaces" (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) *et al.*, 2021, p. 3). Neither semiotic nor sexual violence is included.

Unlike other law enforcement/security policies, such as FTAC's and CPS's stand-alone documents, this joint guidance can be characterised as being gender-sensitive in recognising that "Women in particular suffer a disproportionate level of unacceptable behaviour" (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) *et al.*, 2021, p. 3). However, notably, the legal guidance section referencing the stalking legislation does so without reference to gendered risks. Like the CPS document and other policies, while it is silent on intersectionality, it does reference characteristics covered in hate crime legislation. (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) *et al.*, 2021, p. 9).

Table 7. Overview of Findings for the Policy Architecture Document Analysis

Policy	Actor(s)	Date	Policy Purpose	Gender	Violence
Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC)	Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and the National Health Service (NHS)	From 2006	“to assess and manage the risks from lone individuals who harass, stalk or threaten public figures.” (Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, 2023b)	Gender & Intersectionality neutral	Physical, Psychological, Sexual, Online (Not: Economic, Semiotic)
Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) Security package	Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) [Parliament]	From 2009 (change in security funding 2016)	“to reduce risk to the MP, their staff and their families” (IPSA, 2022a)	Gender & Intersectionality neutral	Physical, Economic, Online (Not Psychological, Sexual, Semiotic)
Operation Bridger including Liaison and Investigation Team (PLAIT)	Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Parliamentary Parliament	From 2015 (PLAIT set-up in 2016)	"national plan for providing MPs with security advice" (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), 2016)	Gender & Intersectionality neutral	Physical, Psychological, Sexual, Online (Not Economic, Semiotic)
Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS)	Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) [Parliament]	From 2018	“Provide a fair, transparent and consistent framework for reporting, investigating and responding to allegations of bullying and harassment” and “sexual misconduct” (The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme	Gender-sensitive Intersectionality-sensitive	Physical, Psychological, Sexual Economic, Semiotic, Online

			(ICGS), 2019c, sec. 1.7, 2019b, sec. 1.7)		
Labour Party Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct	The Labour Party	From 2017	“set the minimum code of conduct expected by the Party of all its members” (Labour Party, 2017)	Gender-responsive Intersectionality-sensitive	Physical, Psychological, Sexual Economic, Semiotic, Online
Conservative Party Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct	The Conservative Party	From 2017	“sets out the minimum standards of behaviour the Party expects from all its members ... and its representatives” (Conservative Party, 2017a)	Gender-aware Intersectionality-neutral	Physical, Psychological, Sexual Economic, Online (Not Semiotic)
Liberal Democrats Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct	The Liberal Democrats Party	From 2017	Expectations on behaviour of members and candidates	Gender-aware Intersectionality-neutral	Physical, Psychological, Sexual Economic, Online (Not Semiotic)
SNP Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct	Scottish National Party (SNP)	From 2017	“sets out minimum standards of behaviour which the Party expects from every member of the Party” (SNP, 2017)	Gender-aware Intersectionality-neutral	Physical, Psychological, Sexual Economic, Online (Not Semiotic)
Intimidation in Public Life: joint statement on conduct of party members	Political Parties	2020	“sets out the minimum standards of behaviour we expect from our party members at all times” (Committee on	Gender-sensitive Intersectionality-neutral	Physical, Psychological, Sexual Economic, Semiotic, Online

			Standards in Public Life, 2020a, sec. 5.a)		
Responding to Intimidating Behaviour: Information for Parliamentarians	Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)	2019	“information pack for Parliamentarians to assist you and your staff to recognise and report potential crimes in England and Wales” (Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), 2019, p. 2)	Gender-aware Intersectionality-neutral	Physical, Psychological, Sexual, Online (Not: Economic, Semiotic)
Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections	Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), The Electoral Commission, College of Policing	From 2019	“provides practical advice based on the past experiences of candidates and policing and personal security advice” as well as “legal definitions and details of what might constitute a breach of criminal law in order to inform and assist candidates with any contact they may have with Police and the wider criminal justice system.” (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) <i>et al.</i> , 2019, 2021)	Gender-sensitive Intersectionality-neutral	Physical, Psychological, Economic, Online (Not: Sexual and Semiotic)

## Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis indicates that the policy architecture to address violence in politics has evolved through different iterations. These varied in terms of their institutional features and the underlying interpretation of the problem as gendered. An initial primarily gender-neutral security policy with a focus on individual victims and perpetrators developed into a multi-faceted policy architecture, including a focus on collective security measures for all MPs, and behavioural rules in parliament and political parties. The expectations set out for how different institutions, actors and documents conceptualise gender, intersectionality and violence are somewhat met.

The documents cover more forms of violence than perhaps expected. I had assumed that the police policy would focus on physical forms, but all the police documents cover a range of forms. The behavioural policies, i.e., the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme and the party codes of conduct, also exceeded expectations for the range of types of violence covered. Reflecting the findings of other chapters indicating the problem framing of online aspects of the phenomenon, all the policies cover online forms of violence.

In terms of gender, as expected, the behavioural policies were all at least gender-aware. Perhaps surprisingly, not all the police/security policies are gender neutral. While FTAC, Operation Bridger and IPSA documents seem to have a primarily gender-neutral understanding, the later CPS's stand-alone document and security joint guidance document can be said to show gender-awareness and gender-sensitivity respectively.

As expected from the political parties' literature, the 'progressive' Labour Party is more gender-sensitive or responsive compared to its conservative counterparts. Yet, some may be surprised by the lack of gender-sensitivity on the part of the Scottish National Party (SNP) which is, arguably, also considered to be a 'progressive' party (although it is currently undergoing change in regard to its policy positions).

Perhaps unsurprisingly given that it is the most complex response, only two actors could be said to have achieved the high standard: intersectionality sensitive policy. These are the Labour Party and the ICGS. Aligning with other research about the lack of intersectionality in UK policies (Christoffersen, 2021), many of the other policy actors reference protected characteristics of the Equality Act, but do not reference their intersections.

As well as being intersectionality sensitive, the Labour Party is the only actor of those considered with a gender responsive policy as that is defined in this thesis. Instead of placing the onus on individuals not to discriminate, as in many of the other policies, the responsibility is on the party as a whole to create an environment that prevents discrimination. Perhaps this finding is unsurprising given the Labour Party's historical and ongoing focus on inequalities, including those rooted in class and gender. However, rather than ideology, scandal and regulation might be a driving explanatory factor. The Labour Party began to change its policies in response to various racism scandals, which led to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2023) conducting a multi-year

investigation. It found that the party had engaged in anti-Semitic harassment and discrimination, and mandated policy change.

The only other actor that explicitly recognises intersecting structural inequalities between groups as the root of violence is the ICGS. Like the Labour Party's sexual harassment and anti-racism rules, this policy was created in response to a scandal, specifically sexual harassment. Because of this scandal, parliament purposely brought in gender experts to develop the policy (Julios, 2022), which likely explains the attention to intersectional gender power dynamics.

Overall, policy to address the specific phenomenon of violence experienced by MPs can be said to have evolved over time to be largely more gender-sensitive and comprehensive in its coverage of different forms of violence. Over time, actors such as parliament and the police created new institutions, including a specialist response team in parliament, information gathering reports and guidance documents. This institutional change drove a change in the policy architecture from an approach that primarily located violence as being within the purview of security (especially police) actors to a multi-faceted architecture including different types of policy approach and a widened range of actors, especially seeing the introduction of behavioural policies in political parties.

Relatedly, there has been a shift from a focus on one-off events to a focus on all MPs as potential victims, suggesting a significant broadening towards a structural understanding. For example, FTAC framed the problem as one of unique 'lone individuals' but by 2016 there was a specific police unit dealing with threats towards MPs and security

spending was uncapped “so there is no barrier to MPs getting the security measures they need” (IPSA, 2022a).

Furthermore, conceptualisations of violence and gender seem to have evolved over time. The understanding of violence has expanded to beyond being seen as criminal and recognised to take a range of non-criminal forms including sexual harassment and online abuse. Aligning with my findings, Krook (2020) criticised the early FTAC as lacking attention to gender. My analysis suggests this has changed. While security policy has remained largely gender-neutral, an important exception is the newer Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections, which suggests an evolution in gendered understanding in at least recognising that women tend to be impacted disproportionately. This evolution is clear in the development of the recent behavioural policies, which are all at least gender-aware.

While important for the safety and security of politicians, the policy architecture’s focus on protective security and individual behaviour risks undermining the structural drivers for the phenomenon and prevents the necessary transformation of political institutions. In particular, the burgeoning of codes of conduct as a policy response could be interpreted as a positive progression of the policy architecture expanding beyond protective security measures to more preventive behavioural policies, which can be conceptualised as akin to workplace policies. Rather than a problem solely for security actors, a range of actors including political parties are viewed to have an important role in addressing the problem of violence experienced by MPs. However, this type of response

could reflect an assumption of violence as only caused by individual bad actors rather than recognising and addressing structural intersectional gendered inequalities.

This development of the policy architecture can be said to reflect the worsening nature of the problem and/or the increased awareness of the problem. The growing responsibility of parliament and political parties as policy actors may also reflect a recognition of politics as a workplace, i.e., that MPs should be protected as workers to carry out their roles in parliament and in political party activities. The next chapter will explore MPs' reflections on the evolution of the policy architecture.

## 7. Policy Reflections – MPs’ constructions of the phenomenon and policy problem

### Introduction

Having analysed the politicisation process and related developments throughout the thesis, this final empirical chapter brings in the voices of MPs themselves through original, confidential interviews. The research question is ‘How do MPs understand and construct the phenomenon and policy problem of violence towards MPs?’ The analysis aims to shed light on how MPs perceive of the problem of violence as well as its politicisation. As well as sharing their understanding of violence, they offer some evaluation of how effective the specific policies have been in addressing their experiences of violence.

The analysis indicates that the main themes in how MPs perceive the phenomenon are that it is a worsening problem in its prevalence and severity, especially on social media; it is a gendered issue in terms of women experiencing both more violence than men and particular forms of abuse; and is an important problem because of its impact on individual well-being and democracy.

The main aspect of the policy problem framing from the MPs’ point of view is that attitudes about how to address the phenomenon have changed in terms of the increase of the number of actors and institutions responsible, with an ongoing tension of how to balance between ensuring open access of MPs to the public and managing security risks. In terms of their critique, MPs expressed different views of the effectiveness of the policy

architecture, especially in how it responds to the different forms of violence and the gendered experiences of women MPs.

## Analytical Approach

The analysis conducted thus far, especially the document analysis presented in the previous chapter, inform the approach in this chapter. I aim to interpret MPs' opinions on how effective the policies are in terms of addressing gendered dimensions of the problem as they understand it and different forms of violence. The chapter enquires for example, in the view of MPs, if police actors, despite their largely 'gender-neutral' documents, recognise that women may experience particular sexual threats; if MPs think that the policy effectively protects them from experiencing violence and holds perpetrators to account; and as more institutions have introduced more policies, if MPs feel that the policy architecture has improved over time.

It is worth reemphasising here that MPs' workplaces include not only Parliament, constituency offices and political party events, but also social media platforms. As has been demonstrated, given that the MPs' workplace is multi-locational and diverse, the policy architecture to address violence they experience is multi-faceted. It involves a range of actors including political parties and parliament who have implemented preventative measures, including codes of conduct, and punitive behavioural rules, such as complaints mechanisms. The policy architecture has evolved over time, especially in paying more

attention to gender (usually meaning the experiences of women) and multiple forms of violence, especially online.

Crucially for the analysis of this chapter, I understand that fieldwork and its analysis can be 'messy' (e.g. Mazur, 2017). Policy beneficiaries may not be aware of policy scope and change. Furthermore, aims of policy may not be 'felt' by policy beneficiaries. The application of a policy can vary from the intentions in the written policy document. Those actors implementing policies – 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 2010) – have power to change the policy in practice. Policy application may differ depending on factors such as these actors' values, beliefs and positionality in relation to the policy beneficiaries.

As referenced earlier in the thesis, I accept that a broad concept of violence may not be universally recognised or understood by MPs. Many may purposely differentiate between 'harassment', 'abuse' and 'violence' for example. I counteracted potential conceptual slippage in the data collection: in the recruitment materials for the interviews as well as when conducting the interviews, I made clear that I was interested in "violence, including abuse, intimidation and harassment". Interviewees may not themselves adopt a broad concept, for example identifying physical forms as "violence" and online forms as "abuse". However, for the purposes of my analysis informed by my theoretical framework, I continue to adopt a broad application of violence.

When conducting the interviews, I also made explicit my broad conception of policy. At the beginning of each interview, I said, "I am understanding 'policy' broadly to include criminal policy but also institutional actions such as parliament and political parties" and

throughout the interview, asked specific questions about the range of actors and institutions.

This chapter relies on the evidence of fifteen original interviews with MPs and former of MPs. The sample was MPs who – on the basis of public information – have an interest and/or expertise and/or experience in policy and violence (including abuse, harassment and intimidation) experienced by MPs. Sample selection and data collection therefore involved “purposive” and “snowball” sampling (Becker *et al.*, 2012, p. 288). The initial ‘purposive’ sample included those MPs and former MPs who have discussed their experiences in multiple parliamentary debates and/or in other public contexts, such as in media interviews. I decided on this sampling frame in order to focus on those with knowledge of the policy response to the issue as well as to align with my personal ethics of only approaching those who had already indicated some willingness to discuss this sensitive issue.

As well as contacting MPs and former MPs directly, I approached some via personal professional networks, including individual activists, staff and volunteers from the Labour Party, Conservative Party and the Scottish National Party (SNP), and formal networks of the Fabian Women’s Network (FWN) (2023), Labour Staff Network (LSN) (2023), Labour Women’s Parliamentary Staff Network (LWPSN) (2023b), Conservative Women’s Parliamentary Staff Network (CWPSN) (2023a), and The Jo Cox Foundation. I contacted these networks virtually and attended in-person events (specifically at the Fabian Women’s Network and a Labour Women’s Network events in London in January 2023, and the Jo Cox

Civility Commission launch in January 2024). Furthermore, at the end of the interviews, MPs were asked to recommend others to participate in the research. This snowball sampling allowed me to gain access to MPs that may not have been as publicly vocal about the topic but had discussed the issue with others.

Between December 2022 and April 2024, I attempted to recruit the 95 MPs and former MPs who qualified on the basis of the sampling criteria. Around half did not respond. Many responded politely declining for reasons including time constraints and that they had already spoken about the topic. Some network contacts communicated to me that particular MPs did not want to discuss their experiences or had a policy of only assisting direct constituents with student research.

The research applies a feminist, relational interpretative approach to interviewing (Mazzei and O'Brien, 2009; Fujii, 2018). This means that I did not hide my positionality or reactions. For example, I expressed my genuine compassion and/or surprise when they shared their experiences of violence and policy response. It is also trauma-informed, which means centring the needs and experiences of the researched in how much and what they communicate about violence they experienced (Fujii, 2018; Campbell, Goodman-Williams and Javorka, 2019; Esposito, 2021). I did not push interviewees to share experiences. If I asked a question about their experiences, I prefaced with language such as 'only if you feel comfortable sharing...' or 'you do not have to answer this...'

The resulting dataset consists of fifteen original elite interviews with MPs and former MPs. As is best practice with research that uses relatively small samples, I am careful

not to over-claim the significance of my findings (Kezar, 2003; Fujii, 2018; Esposito, 2021).

The sample includes participants from different parties, genders, ethnic identities, ages, constituencies, length of service etc. The disaggregated characteristics of the fifteen interviewees are:

- Gender: five men, ten women
- Party: ten Labour, three Conservative, two Liberal Democrats
- Current/Former MPs (at time of the interview): eight sitting MPs, seven former MPs
- Region of Seat: four London, one North East, four North West, one Scotland, two South East, one Wales, two West Midlands
- Other identities: one openly homosexual, three ethnic and/or religious minorities.

These characteristics are disaggregated here due to confidentiality concerns, especially as there are relatively few MPs of certain groups. It would particularly be helpful to be able to reflect on the experiences related to particular ethnic and/or religious minorities – for example Muslim, Jewish, Afro-Caribbean, South Asian – but I do not do this due to high risk of identification.

I made several other decisions regarding evidence presentation, which come with drawbacks for the analysis but are necessary for confidentiality and anonymity. For some of the specific examples of violence, I have taken out some potentially identifiable details, which means that the experiences may not be presented as detailed as they were during the interview. When citing the interviewees, I use the gender-neutral ‘they’. I use names only when it is particularly relevant to the point being made; this does not necessarily mean I have interviewed the named person or that they are the person being quoted.

In line with a feminist approach, I understand that victims of violence are “experts” in their own experiences (Esposito, 2021). This does not necessarily mean that what they say should be taken at face value. Factors such as memory fallibility, unconscious bias and wanting to ‘please’ the interviewer may impact the veracity of the content (Fujii, 2017; Mazzei and O’Brien, 2009). Furthermore, I am applying a specific normative analytical and theoretical framework that may not be shared by the participants. In my analysis, I attempt to strike a balance between honouring the interviewees’ experiences, while applying a critical eye.

To interpret the interview transcripts, thematic analysis was used. An iterative coding approach was adopted for this purpose, informed by feminist content analysis (Verloo, 2007; Dombos, 2012) and the theoretical framework of the thesis. I started by creating an initial codebook based on the theoretical and empirical work from the rest of the thesis, which I updated as the interviews and analysis proceeded.

As an example of my coding strategy, the codes relating to ‘policy’ capture the specific policy and/or policy actor the MPs discuss. Sometimes the perceived policy or policy actor is not accurate. MPs refer to parliamentary security when the actor responsible would have been the police. The policy literature finds that it is not unusual for there to be a disconnect between which part of a policy architecture is responsible for a particular policy and the perception/understanding of the policy responsibility on the part of the policy beneficiaries (Varone, 2016; Cairney, 2020b). When this occurs, I code for both the perceived policy/policy actor and the accurate ones.

MPs' own interpretations of policies are captured in codes such as on 'policy change over time', 'policy impact', and 'policy effectiveness', including if and how gender has been considered. For 'causes of policy,' I code for when MPs express their view of factors which explain why the problem was politicised/became a policy problem, such as the CSPL Report and the murder of Jo Cox.

The group of codes relating to 'experience of violence' includes 'form of violence' and 'identity form and/or impact' with a focus on gender and/or other identities. For example, all the interviews reflected on that women experience particular forms and impacts.

During the interviews and preliminary analysis, I updated my codebook. For example, while I did not initially intend to ask their views about what policy should be, this naturally came up as a topic in the first few interviews, so I began to ask a specific question which provided a helpful clarification to some of their concerns with the current policy responses. In offering other solutions to address the problem of violence towards them there is an explicit or implicit perception that current policy is ineffective. As I progressed with the coding, I added new codes, for example 'impact on family' to capture the reflections on the phenomenon and policy impact. Once all the transcripts were coded, I extracted and organised the content into specific themes to answer the research question. Appendix 5 provides a more detailed overview of the codes with examples of coded text.

## Analysis

The analysis begins with an overview of how the MPs perceive the phenomenon of violence against them, before presenting their reflections of the policy problem. There was consensus across the interviewees that violence is a worsening problem in its prevalence and severity, especially on social media; it is an and important problem because of its impact on democracy and it is a gendered issue in terms of women experiencing both more violence than men and particular forms of abuse. There was more variation in the characterisations of the policy problem. All interviews indicated that policy has changed but some had more knowledge of the changes. Yet, MPs have different views on how comprehensive or effective the policy response has been to deal with the complex nature of the problem.

### A worsening phenomenon

All of the MPs interviewed expressed the view that the problem of violence towards MPs had increased in prevalence and worsened in severity to a point in which it has become 'normalised'. In typical examples of this sentiment, P11 lamented, "there's an element of people being resigned to it, that it's just part of the job being at risk," and P1 explained, "abuse towards politicians has become the norm, where it's expected that it's 'part of the game', this is part of your life." There is a strong sense that abuse is simply to be expected as an MP.

There was consensus also that the emergence of social media had worsened the problem. The following is a typical example of describing this type or form of abuse:

“Obviously because of social media, I think there is a change in the levels of abuse. I think a lot of that is via social media, but because MPs have to make their e-mail addresses accessible, I think that it's too easy for keyboard warriors to ... send abuse to MPs ...but obviously I got it, sort of it all ways, if you like, including anonymous letters” (P14).

Here, in a view that was widely held, this MP attributes the worsening of abuse to social media but also other online forms of email, and ‘off-line’ abuse such as letters. Notably, like other interviewees, this MP characterises social media as an ‘obvious’ part of the problem increase.

As further context of the online characterisation, many interviewees commented on the perceived “expectation” for MPs to be on social media to communicate with their constituents and the wider public. As one interviewee expressed it: “there is a sort of unspoken pressure now and an expectation for Members of Parliament to be online” (P3). Another MP, who had served for a long time, commented on the change social media brought to the role, especially for younger colleagues: “it wouldn’t be acceptable not to [be on social media]” (P17). Social media is part of MPs workplace, in addition to Parliament, constituency offices, constituency events and party events. This means that it is difficult for MPs to withdraw from social media.

Many interviewees referenced the aggressive political culture of polarisation and distrust of political establishments that has been building in recent years that – in their view - has led to abuse of politicians, and, by extension, democracy. For example: “Brexit was a

real catalyst for MPs being targeted and being seen as legitimate targets” (P14). Several MPs referenced “dehumanisation” (P4, P5, P13, P15) by not only their abusers but also by how mainstream media reports on MPs generally. Several expressed the view that violence was only going to get worse, indicating an inevitability of ongoing abuse towards politicians. For example: “I fear Jo and David will be joined by a third and a fourth and a fifth, and I don’t know, I don't know what stops it” (P13).

Most of the MP interviewees implicitly or explicitly indicated this fear of attack or assassination when carrying out their roles, and referenced the ongoing impact of grief of losing colleagues and friends. Another example that is suggestive of this common feeling is from one MP who was dealing with concurrent legal cases against abusers. They shared that, following the murder of Sir David Amess, a particular MP of a different political persuasion “rang me pretty much every Sunday to check on my cases ... And every time, I was just like, are you alright? Your friend has just died ... I'm still not over Jo being killed” (P5). It is important to remember that not only were their friends murdered, but they are doing the same job as their colleagues were doing when they were killed. All these MPs linked their individual and group experiences as impacting democracy. For example: “if we live in a representative democracy, how can it be representative if a representative lives in fear of their life?” (P13).

## An important phenomenon

All the interviewees framed the phenomenon and policy problem as important on different levels: individual, group and societal. Violence impacts MPs' individual political participation; it negatively impacts the well-being of political staff and family; and, most importantly, violence undermines democracy.

Interviewees were clear that violence had impacted their individual political participation. Many commented that the prevalence and severity of online abuse pushed them and other MPs to reduce their online political participation, for example limiting their use of online platforms or even not using social media at all for a period of time. For example, an interviewee reflects on their and their colleagues' different decisions regarding social media use:

“those that are not on social media as MPs, that decision not to be on it is more to do with online abuse ... Recently, I switched off my [Twitter/X and Facebook/Meta] comments ... It's not ideally what I would have wanted to do, because you know in an ideal situation you do want to see the criticism. I've never believed in censorship in that way” (P12).

This sentiment, also echoed by others, indicates that changes to online political participation are not “ideal” in a democracy where elected representatives should be actively engaging with the public. Many MPs were keen to emphasise the positive aspects of social media that allowed them to engage with constituents but that often, abuse meant that they could not fully participate in this way. The significance of withdrawing from social media is demonstrated when P12 goes as far as calling their own actions “censorship”.

Almost all the interviewees reflected on the impact of abuse on those around them, such as their family and staff. For example, another interviewee reflected on changing social media practices:

“I didn't read my social media ... it just became impossible and that was when my staff started doing it and then soon after that we moved to a situation where we didn't read all the comments ... The mental health of my staff suffered hugely ... They did it on rota. They were only doing a day a week each, but it was just ... horrible” (P2).

Other MPs shared that their staff actually protected them from knowing about violence towards them, for example P11 recalled, “I said to my staff, all this talk about murder threats, I mean, I haven't had any. And they said, uh, we just don't tell you.” The interview narratives reveal that social media abuse can be extremely impactful even on those to whom the abuse is not specifically directed.

The interviewees reflected on the negative impact the prevalence of abuse and insufficient policy response has on individual and, crucially, group political participation and well-being, and that this has worsened over time. In particular, MPs expressed a concern about abuse's impact on the lack of diversity in politics. Several MPs commented on women not wanting to stand. For example:

“It is extraordinary how much progress we have [on women's representation]. But the combination of things including this [violence] I think is possibly diminishing the effect of those things that we did and maybe turning the clock back” (P17).

This interviewee is expressing the concern of individual women not standing to be politically active having an impact on diverse representation, and as such democracy, more broadly. The problem is seen to be important because of its larger impacts.

## A gendered phenomenon

In addition to the consensus on the gendered impacts on diversity in democracy, all the interviewees were of the view that the phenomenon of violence in politics was differentiated by gender and other inequalities. A typical reflection is:

“Women get it worse, ethnic minority MPs get it worse, LGBT MPs get it worse. Anyone with a disability gets it worse. Anyone with any kind of protective characteristic does get it a million times worse than, let's say, a straight white man” (P3).

As well as commenting on equalities groups, many MPs pointed to the same specific individuals who have experienced abuse because of their identity, for example, “Diane Abbott gets more abusive tweets in one day that others do. ... it all goes after both her gender and her race” (P2). The interviewees seemed to recognise some aspects of the intersectional aspect of violence in politics that is reflected in other research.

Some interviewees offered explanations for these gendered experiences. For example, some reflected on structural gendered inequalities: “I'm not saying that misogyny didn't always exist, but if you think classically of violence and abuse and aggression suffered by politicians, it is largely has [its] base of terrorism ... there's very specific nature of women” (P5). Similarly other interviewees point to wider, intersecting societal discrimination being reflected in politics: “structural discrimination exists ... power structures and the intersection of different oppressions are very much a feature in how it [violence] plays out in society, but also how it plays out in politics at every level” (P12). These interviewees

recognise that the problem of violence in politics is not just gendered in form and impact, but also in cause.

Several MPs pointed to the lack of awareness among men in politics of how severe the problem was for women. These MPs perceive that while men may understand factually that women experience more abuse, they may not fully appreciate what that means in practice. An illustrative reflection is: “It is true that men experience this too. It's just not in the same way, in the same intensity, generally. And I think that is kind of understood on a head level, it's not understood on a on a heart level” (P2). Another specific example is: “I would have male colleagues saying ‘oh, I've just seen this terrible message’. And I’m like, I get hundreds of these a day...their experience of just a fraction of this...” (P15). This example points to the perceived differentiated nature of abuse and the lack of understanding among men. In addition, another interviewee lamented the “the lack of solidarity of the male MPs” (P14).

Yet, others did believe that men had become more aware of the experiences of women over time, with important policy implications. Reflecting on why the problem had been politicised over time, one interviewee commented, “I think one of the things that have happened is that more of the men have become aware of it” (P17). The buy-in of men is perceived as important to raise awareness and make change in culture and policy.

## Evolving attitudes, formalising policy

MPs reflect on the evolution of attitudes towards violence towards MPs becoming integrated into a multi-faceted policy architecture. The most compelling evidence for this point is from those MPs who had served for a long time and experienced abuse in the early 2000s. They explained that the ad-hoc security guidance they received then is now formal policy. For example, one interviewee recalls on an experience with abuse in the early 2000s:

“The police were actually quite helpful to me at that time. I don't think they dealt with this as a general policy ... ironically, a lot of the things they told me were things that appeared years later as policy...”

They go on to describe the newer policy guidance:

“...there was advice on how to handle yourself, I think that was after the murder of a MP, and that was different, but, to me, I sort of smiled to myself, because, thinking, ‘well, I know all this, this is all happened to me before’. I did all this sitting by the door, never be on the same side of the table when you're in the constituency, never be on your own. It was all familiar to me because of all the advice been given to me personally, but, in recent years, those security measures were given to MPs in general by the Parliamentary authorities” (P4).

These reflections of P4 (and others) indicate a change, an expansion, of policy actors and institutions (as confirmed by other evidence in the thesis). Reflecting on dealing with their experience of abuse in the early 2000s, P4 said, “I didn't think of it as something for the parliamentary authorities.” Similarly, another interviewee shares their views on a similar time period: “there wasn't very much help available at the time, although I did get a lot of help from the local police” (P6). The context here is that in the early 2000s, the main policy

response took the form of the police dealing with abuse on ad hoc basis. Parliament later became a policy actor enacting formal policy.

One MP, who had served since the 1970s, recalled that their experience with parliamentary security was a “different world” (P17) from now in terms of the level of security, and recalls a time when Downing Street, the location of the Prime Minister’s residence, was open to the public. Similarly, those who had served as cabinet ministers in the early 2000s reflected that, although they had had security, the threat was specific to terrorism and extremism, rather than other forms of abuse. For example, in comparing experiences from then to now, one interviewee reflected “it never crossed my mind that this was about members of the public physically or verbally abusing me...(P10).” This reflection points to the expanded understanding as regards who could be a perpetrator and, as such, an expanded policy framework.

Noting the role of the police, most of the interviewees commented on how the police had expanded their role for the specific issue on violence towards MPs. In a typical example, one MP explained: “There always would have been a policing and security team that dealt with security for want of a better word for the parliamentarians but that has definitely become a much more crystallised thing” (P5). This ‘crystallisation’ suggests a development of a specific policy architecture, changing from a problem that demanded one-off, individual incident responses to a conceptualisation of the problem as impacting MPs collectively, which required a more comprehensive, multi-institutional response.

Another key institutional element was, of course, Parliament. In reflecting on Parliament taking on a policy role to prevent and address abuse, a significant number of the MPs pointed to the specific agency of Sir Lyndsay Hoyle, House of Commons Speaker. Currently in post, he has been working on the issue since 2015, also in his former roles as Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Ways and Means Committee. In a typical example describing his impact, one interviewee reflects on the change of MPs routinely having security in their homes and offices:

“...that was a change, but it didn't happen easily. It needed a lot of pressure. Because at one stage when the parliamentary authority started to be involved in all this, and you had to say, why you were concerned and what was the level of threat and ask police ... that is really very off-putting to have to go through a whole procedure like that. ... when Lindsay Hoyle was speaker, he pushed them to act much quicker. And then there was a stage when all MPs would have security alarms in their premises” (P4).

This reflection indicates the importance of the Speaker as a ‘critical actor’ in policy change. Another interviewee specifically reflects on the tension between different policy actors: “[He was] fighting the people who fund it, and how it was delivered. And, in the end, [he] got people to move along and so we moved more quickly” (P9). The Speaker had to “fight” (P9) with the various other actors, including the police and parliamentary security, to create change. Another MP who had served for a long time reflected that before Hoyle was Speaker: “I remember saying to people who make decisions about who gets cars and all that kind of things, ‘you lot don't take MPs’ security seriously and you won't until some MP has been murdered’, as indeed turned out to be the case” (P17). In the words of another interviewee, “the worst of it is that somebody has to die to make people jump” (P9). All of

the interviewees reflected on the murders of Jo Cox and Sir David Amess as important events that changed attitudes and policies about the problem of violence towards politicians. They recalled how the murders of MPs led to immediate changes by parliamentary security and the police.

Notably, other than changes immediately following the murders, few MPs could recall the exact times when all the specific policies changed. One reflected that the changes to parliamentary security “felt incremental” and said, “I think IPSA has progressively done more” (P6). This lack of specific details could reflect that the change was slow and incremental and that the implications of the murders took time to penetrate a policy response.

Relatedly, in the past, the general opinion was that policy used to be considered on a case-by-case basis in terms of resourcing. For example, one interviewee clarified that the language of ‘cap’ to describe the previous security spending might be a little misleading as MPs could have historically gained more resource if they could prove they had a particular need:

“It kind of wasn't capped, but capped, and I know that sounds bizarre. So, the thing was that it was a judgement call on what you are having. So, it wasn't quite that you could only spend this much. [They] had to take into account was somebody taking the Michael<sup>17</sup> by having all these new windows put in. So, it was a bit of that ...” (P9).

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<sup>17</sup> ‘taking the Michael’ or ‘taking the Micky’ is a colloquialism for an action that is unserious or unfounded

This reflection indicates that as these MPs recall, security policy used to be more ad-hoc – “a judgement call” – rather than, as seems to be the case now, have a clearer set of guidelines and resources.

A specific change that several MPs mentioned as helpful was the change in the way IPSA reports security expenses. As one interviewee explained:

“One of the issues has been that if MP's avail themselves of help with security, then that appeared in the IPSA accounts against them. I think that that has now been changed ... that probably makes it been easier to take advantage of it, because nobody wants to be denounced in the local paper” (P6).

This change from IPSA reporting security costs against individuals to collectively has been key in allowing MPs the (actual or perceived) political capital to take up security measures. The reference to being ‘denounced in the local paper’ refers to journalists and political opponents using the amount individual MPs spend as part of accusations of misuse of public funds.

All interviewees reflected somewhat on the need to ‘balance’ MPs’ security with their accessibility to their constituents. The UK political system is relatively unique in that MPs meet directly with constituents regularly, often weekly at constituency surgeries. Several interviewees shared the surprise on the part of constituents or foreign counterparts regarding the accessibility of MPs, such as: “[they] will say to me, ‘in my country, you would ... always have a crowd of people around you, and here you're just in the supermarket like anybody else’” (p17).

This 'openness' of British democracy presents a policy issue for dealing with the risk of violence. As one interviewee reflects:

"I think that the UK is struggling at the moment to know how far to protect its MPs. What is reasonable. Most MPs want to walk down the streets and say hello to everybody ... do all that sort of stuff which you should normally be able to do, and I hope they will be able to continue to do it, but it carries a risk now and it didn't 20 years ago" (P11).

This respondent specifically reflects on the worsening of the phenomenon over time. It seems that attitudes have changed in that the issue is taken seriously, but the norm that it is now risky for MPs to remain accessible persists.

All the MPs who had served before the security changes happened took the opportunity of the interview to reflect on the impacts to their constituency surgeries. Some reflected negatively on their earlier security precautions. For example:

"Frankly, when I think about in my first you know two terms how insecure my office was ... we moved to one that had a video phone entry ... [before] you could walk right in the front door of my office and right into my office and right into where my staff were with no lock or anything, and by the time you're in there, by the way, there's like there's no other exit, and there's no CCTV and there's no one outside would be able to see anything going wrong. I mean like when you think about that in the context now..." (P2).

Others also spoke of their past practices, such as having surgeries on their own (P6, P10, P11), that would definitely 'not happen today'. These reflections suggest that not only has practice changed, but also norms or attitudes towards security.

## A comprehensive policy response?

While interviewees agreed that, on the whole, attitudes have changed over time and that there has been an expansion of policy and policy actors dealing with the matter, there was some disagreement on how comprehensive or effective the policy architecture is in dealing with violence towards MPs. Interviewees have different views about how effective the police, Parliament and political parties have been in dealing with the complex nature of the problem. MPs were unanimous in their view of the ineffectiveness of social media and the helpfulness of civil society and other informal mechanisms.

In particular, MPs showed mixed perceptions about law enforcement/police actors. Reflective quotes are: “Some people are really very bitter about the response of their local police forces, whereas others have no complaints” (P17) and “I have quite a positive relationship with the security and with police ... loads of Members of Parliament really slag off the police” (P5). In the interviews MPs generally seemed to praise their local police but criticised others; for example: “my experience was in [region], very good; experience with [region], terrible, my experience of [region], mixed; [my region], very good” (P15). There seems to be a perceived ‘post-code lottery’ when dealing with police forces.

More than one MP discussed specific incidents in which the police responded effectively, for example by dispatching officers quickly to their home (P8, P15). Some respondents specifically praise the changes in policing of online abuse: “The reaction of the police has massively improved with regard to social media. They do take it seriously. Where they can find people, they do try” (P5). Yet, a few MPs made specific comments on the

ineffectiveness of the police and courts keeping them informed of cases and they have only found out because they “read about it [in the news]” (P5, P15).

Similarly, MPs indicated divergent views in the effectiveness of Parliament’s security policy responsiveness to specific incidents. Two starkly different opinions are reflected in these observations: “There isn't any support in Parliament ... you essentially have to deal with it yourself” (P1) and “I am confident that I could report it to the police or report it to the House [of Commons] and action would be taken” (P3). The differences in experiences from complete confidence to complete lack of confidence could suggest a difference in how specific policy actors in the security and other parliament teams responded to these individual MPs and/or improvement in policy response over time (though these interviewees served at similar times). It could also reflect differing expectations about what ‘support’ means and should mean. For example, the interviewee who felt alone in dealing with abuse may have expected that parliament act more like an employer and provide clear, immediate pastoral and practical support, which they felt has been lacking in their experience.

A related area in which some believe Parliament policy is seen to be lacking is in terms of mental health resources. While there has been some improvement in mental health support offered by Parliament, some interviewees were of the view that well-being policy remains insufficient. For example: “there are some support services in the House for Parliamentary staff ... if that can be extended to family, that should be because this [dealing with regular abuse] takes a massive toll” (P3), echoed by “there was absolutely no support

for my husband or my daughter” (P14). As well as staff and family, there is an emotional impact on MPs themselves, which some MPs perceive is not always recognised by policy authorities. For example: “after Jo's murder, what we got was practical steps to keep safe, but there wasn't anything to help with the emotion of it or the anxiety” (P7). This reflection indicates broader findings in this thesis that violence towards MPs has been developed as a security policy problem and not necessarily one that requires a more multi-faceted response.

Only a couple of interviewees were satisfied with how their political party responded to abuse. One of the more positive replies said: “I haven't felt a lack of support, and so now I wouldn't be pressing for more” (P6). The other satisfied interviewee was only now content after years of perceived gross ineffectiveness of dealing with abuse (as discussed in the previous chapter, the Equality and Human Rights Commission put the Labour Party into special measures for its anti-Semitism):

“The complaints procedure was interfered with [by the office of then Leader] ... that's why one of the recommendations the Equality and Human Rights Commission made that the Labour Party – well not recommendation, but requirement – was that they set-up a different complaints procedure ... It's not entirely independent, but I think it's OK” (P4).

Others were less satisfied with political parties' policies: “political parties themselves don't even ... takes it seriously” (P15). Echoing this opinion, most interviewees were critical of not only their party but all of the parties; for example, “I genuinely don't think that there is much between the parties” (P11).

As these quotes touch upon, party leadership is perceived as being important for tackling abuse by many interviewees. For example, one interviewee says: "I think that leadership really matters in this area" and went on to praise the current leadership: "Rishi is careful about his language, Keir is careful about his language" and to criticise former Prime Minister Boris Johnson: "I called him out several times in the Chamber about his language. He just didn't care... And it has consequences making people angry" (P11). These reflections are echoed by other interviewees who praise and criticise specific leaders and call on political party leadership in general to model better behaviour and take the problem seriously.

Most of the interviewees made some distinction between policy responding to abuse that was criminal and that which does not meet the criminal threshold – expressing that both should still be addressed. An example of this nuanced distinction is:

"...if you are talking about physical safety, I think there the lines are clear ... you shouldn't be vulnerable or it be okay for someone to threaten with going to kill you or...throwing something through your office... the harassment thing is maybe more difficult, not the harassment thing, the abuse thing. Maybe the abuse when someone calls you something. How much of this is legitimate political argument than a personal encroachment? ... I think you do have to draw the lines, but it isn't always as clear cut. It's a difficult one. It doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. I'm not suggesting that." (P4)

This interviewee, like others, points to the distinction between criminal and non-criminal being important but nuanced and challenging to define for policy. The MPs also reflected on the importance of policy to respond to the impact of "legal but harmful" (P15) abuse. In particular, most MPs recognised that the Parliament and police had procedures for dealing

with 'low-level' incidents because these can reveal a pattern of behaviour that could lead to criminality: "[PLAIT] both take action on the individual issues and investigate them further and also they therefore act as a bit of an intelligence gathering because sometimes what you get is somebody who is abusing multiple MPs, so you get a kind of pattern spotting thing." (P2) Reflecting on a specific incident, "I had somebody who was a nuisance to me, and it didn't even bother me, but what I didn't realise was, until [PLAIT] joined up the dots, was he was targeting an MP ... 150 miles away from me. This same person is operating two areas. Then it became against three MPs, and that's how it went..." (P9). These reflections point to a perception of a positive experience of increased police and parliament coordination.

All the interviewees specifically criticise social media companies as ineffective policy actors. A typical view expressed was: "the inconsistency and the application of guidelines on these websites [social media platforms]" (P5). One interviewee specifically pointed to government attitudes changing over time with regards to internet regulation: in the late '90s and early '00s, "[government] felt was that trying to regulate the Internet would be a disaster...but things have moved on and become clear that you can't not do something" (P6). This over-time view echoes the analysis from the Committee on Standards in Public Life case earlier in the thesis that social media regulation, now perhaps seen as an obvious necessity in political circles, used to be a radical and unattractive idea.

While all seem to agree on the need for regulation, there is disagreement on the effectiveness of current policy solutions. At the time of most of the interviews, the Online

Safety Act (2023a) was progressing through parliament as the Online Safety Bill. The interviewees expressed divergent opinions to its effectiveness, ranging from being very optimistic – characterising it as the “missing piece” (P8) of the policy architecture – to lukewarm – “the jury’s out” (P7) – to extremely critical – “no potential to help the abuse that I suffer” (P5). Given how new the Act is, MPs have not had an opportunity to use or test it as policy beneficiaries in responding to abuse.

Further to formal policy mechanisms, several MPs cited the reliance on civil society, to tackle abuse. For example, P5 explains:

“There are people who manage and monitor our social media [in Parliament] ... and in fact CST<sup>18</sup> ... and Hope Not Hate<sup>19</sup>, there are a variety of different organisations who work in this sort of counter terror space ... that flag things up to us as individuals as well when they're found as part of broader schemes of looking into red flags, the dark places of the Internet”

Another interviewee (P1) mentioned the training provided by the Labour Women’s Network (LWN) (2021) for candidates to address abuse experienced on the campaign trail “I think that the training is good. I think it's a sad situation where you're having to train people to be resilient to do their jobs.” This reflection echoes the normalisation aspect of the problem that was evidence in the parliamentary debates analysed earlier in the thesis.

Relatedly, some pointed to the importance of the third sector in raising awareness and pushing formal policy change. For example: “it wasn't well accepted that women got it worse than men ... until that research [by Amnesty International (2018)], the problem

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<sup>18</sup> Community Security Trust (CST) monitors and reports anti-Semitic abuse specifically, but also other abuse it comes across. P3 also referenced the helpfulness of this organisation. <https://cst.org.uk/>

<sup>19</sup> Hope Not Hate monitors far-right extremism <https://hopenothate.org.uk/>

wasn't quantified in a way that meant that you had a credibility talking about it" (P2) and: "I think the fact that [The Jo Cox Foundation] and other organisations had started to talk about it [need to address abuse] even before David Amess [was murdered], then that people thought, 'oh, there is something in it'" (P10).

Several MPs reflected on supplementing perceived policy gaps with informal networks: "There is a kind of camaraderie ... across parties, particularly among the women. There's a shared kind of understanding. But that's not really a substitute for really being helped to deal with [abuse]" (P2) and "different staff officers...support each other because they know what it's like, but that isn't necessarily an institutional understanding" (P2). This reflection points to the perception that some MPs have that the policy architecture does not (and perhaps cannot) address the problem.

While in agreement about the importance of gender as a feature of the phenomenon, the interviewees recounted different experiences about if and how gender and other inequalities are reflected in policy responses. Two excerpts that capture nuanced differences of opinion, particularly in relation to the parliamentary and police responses, are:

"there's a reliance on a kind of process and there's an under-appreciation of the cultural undercurrent and foundation of this problem ... this problem is not that people are abusing MPs, that people are abusing women MPs in particular ... Parliament, probably does try to send a message, but it's a bit more in the kind of old school security institutional mindset, like women need protection. It's kind of good, but it's a little bit patronising, rather than empowering" (P2).

"Operation Bridger ... isn't in any way specific to [the] issue of women. It has quite a lot of focus on it but no, that's not like written in ... whether it's written,

it's not written down, in practice there is definitely the sense ... that keeping an eye on the women issue is a big thing" (P5).

The interviewees agree that the written policy does not explicitly mention gender but that they have experienced (a degree of) gendered awareness in the policy response due to a degree of gender-awareness among the security actors. Yet, the interviewees disagree on the impact of how gender is integrated in the policy response. P2 believes the protectionism of women to be "a little bit patronising" while P5 seems to appreciate the "keeping an eye." P5 directly compares the written policies to how they work in practice. Their analysis suggests that, at least in their experience, the "street-level bureaucrats" do demonstrate some degree of gender-awareness. Conversely, P2 criticises the security actors for not recognising the structural gender dimensions but focusing on an insufficient protective response that does not address the core, gendered problem. Interviewees seem to present a different expectation in what the policy architecture should be addressing – specific incidents or structural concerns.

Other interviewees specifically reflected that the overall policy architecture to address violence experienced by MPs did not adequately account for gender and other inequalities. For example:

"There's already supposed to be policies and frameworks put in place to deal with discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics. We have a whole Equality Act dedicated to it. But I don't see those mechanisms being employed to protect the MPs, which worries me..." (P3)

This MP is specifically commenting on the need to integrate the existing policy equalities framework into the policy. Others argued for the need to frame the overall policy

architecture in terms of (in)equalities: “I think there's, you know, in terms of framing your policies, the wider framing has got to be what's happening in terms of gender equity...” (P7). These interviewees criticise the framing of the newly developed policy architecture to address abuse experienced by MPs as not being gendered, especially in operationalising existing equalities policies. Others specifically lament the lack of attention to race, for example, “there is more of a focus more on abuse towards female politicians, and there isn't always a recognition about race” (P1) and “we are like a million years behind in terms of race” (P2). Notably, P2 further reflected “what happened to Jo Cox in 2016 did prompt a big change, but not in the culture.” They seem to believe that there was more policy for security, but this was not informed by an understanding of the root causes, such as structural inequalities.

Multiple interviewees reflected on the masculine culture of Parliament, political parties, and the police as having a negative impact on experiences and responses to violence in politics. Continuing the point about political male-dominated “ruthless culture” P2 said: “You can have a good process – it's necessary – but it's just not sufficient. If the process is existing within a culture and within power structures, then the process will not deliver good outcomes if those are not also changed.” In another example specifically on Parliament: “you have a culture of men, generally, who do not change with the world...Parliament is a bit unventilated is the word by these kinds of pockets of incredible anachronism” (P11). This interviewee points to this persistent, masculine culture as a barrier to attitude and policy change to deal with abuse.

Some interviewees specifically point to women in leadership as important actors in addressing violence in politics. Multiple interviewees praised Jo Swinson as the female leader of a party (the Liberal Democrats) (P2, P15). Another pointed to the importance of the security and whips leadership in MPs' experience of navigating the policy architecture of abuse: "a good woman in the whips office...makes a world of f\*cking difference" and "[the] safety and security team at Parliament ... by no accident that has in my time been run by two different women" (P5). These reflections point to the perceived importance of having female actors individually and having a supportive, gender-sensitive culture in political parties to support MPs, especially women, experiencing abuse.

Notably, most MPs recognise their own role or agency in using policy and the trade-offs this comes with. Several MPs comment on the temporal impact of dealing with abuse. For example, one interviewee confessed that "sometimes you don't really bother [reporting abuse] because if you spend time doing that, it takes away from delivering on your cases [for] constituents" (P1). Another MP admits not using available policy: "I drive my staff mad. I won't wear with my panic alarm ... because it drives me crackers that I have to live like that." (p13). These reflections point to the trade-offs that policy beneficiaries consider when deciding whether to engage in available policy.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has explored how UK MPs construct the phenomenon and policy problem of violence towards MPs. The phenomenon, as perceived by the MPs interviewed,

is worsening in its prevalence and severity, especially on social media, and it is gendered in terms of women experiencing both more violence than men and particular forms of abuse. While there is some attention to the intersectional experiences, particularly with regard to race, the experiences of women as a group are centred in MPs' constructions of the gendered nature of the problem. The phenomenon is framed as important to address in policy because it risks undermining democracy. While MPs do reflect on the impacts of abuse to them personally, they stress that the problem has larger implications for democracy itself, particularly in terms of diverse representation (again, usually meaning women's representation).

Interviewees reflect on changing attitudes to the necessity of taking the problem seriously with an increasing number of policy actors sharing responsibility for promoting security and well-being. Perhaps the most interesting revelations were the over-time reflections by those who recalled taking ad-hoc security advice, which eventually became formalised in policy. This aligns with the analysis of the previous chapters that there was a change in policy from an ad-hoc reactive response for individual incidents to more proactive policy architecture for MPs as a group.

A tension in this policy problem, as framed by the MPs, is the need to 'balance' the accessibility of politicians to the public with the security risks. While it is important to take abuse towards MPs seriously to safeguard democracy, so too is it imperative to ensure the 'openness' of the democratic process.

The MPs' reflections seem to point to an expectation that Parliament should serve and act as a workplace to them in providing practical and pastoral support. These reflections seem to support a conceptualisation of violence towards MPs as workplace violence that requires the action of the various workplace actors and, crucially, institutional change.

MPs revealed divergent experiences of their interactions with the policy, especially in terms of the police and parliamentary authorities, and views about whether the policy architecture reflected the gendered nature of the phenomenon and whether it was comprehensive to address the complex problem. MPs do agree, however, that political parties and social media companies are seen largely as ineffective policy actors to address the urgent phenomenon.

The narratives of experiences often pointed to individual actors, such as individual security and police officers, rather than, necessarily, institutional actors, which suggest the importance of 'street level bureaucrats' (e.g., Lipsky, 2010). In particular, the findings of apparent mismatch between policy documents and practice reflect theories around the 'messy' nature of policy in practice (e.g., Mazur, 2017). Some policies that in the previous chapter were found to have gender-neutral policy documents are, as explored in this chapter, apparently gender-aware or sensitivity in practice because of specific 'critical actors' or 'street level bureaucrats'. 'Operation Bridger is gender-neutral in policy documents but the actors responsible for implementing policy display gender-awareness – i.e., understand that women have different experiences than men and may need different support. Likewise, gender- or intersectionality-sensitive documents may not be sensitive in

practice. For example, some had perceptions of the Labour Party, which has a gender-responsive and intersectionality-sensitive, as particularly inadequate at dealing with violence relating to gender and race.

Several MPs point to larger cultural problems of politics making it challenging for policy to respond to the growing problem of violence. These reflections align with theories of Feminist Institutionalism, which pose that the masculine-coded formal and informal 'rules of the game' (Mackay and Krook, 2015b) make it difficult to make change towards gender-equal political institutions.

In the next and final chapter, I will develop the feminist institutional analysis in the synthesis of the evidence and analysis throughout the thesis to interrogate the politicisation process of the phenomenon of violence towards MPs in the UK.

## 8. Discussion and Conclusion – Representations and explanations of the politicisation of violence towards MPs in the UK

### Introduction

In this final chapter, I synthesise the analysis from the thesis as a whole and critically reflect on the research questions: ‘How and why has violence (including abuse, intimidation and harassment) towards MPs become politicised in the UK 2010-2021?’ and question ‘Has the phenomenon been politicised in a gendered way and, if so, how and why?’

The phenomenon of violence towards UK MPs has been politicised as a policy problem over time. Violence towards MPs used to be conceptualised in the UK as one-off incidents perpetrated by terrorists and mentally ill people to be dealt with by security forces. Now, the issue is framed as a multi-faceted policy problem that threatens all MPs and can be perpetrated by members of the public in various ways from physical attacks to social media abuse.

The reasons for politicisation are complex but arguably follow a timeline from the tension of the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum. The murder of Jo Cox MP, while an important event, was not the primary catalyst for politicisation and policy development. Critical in the politicisation process are the initiatives of key actors, including MPs themselves sharing their experiences, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, pushing for security increase and then Prime Minister Theresa May commissioning

the Committee on Standards in Public Life to carry out a review into intimidation in public life following the 2017 General Election.

The problem is framed in the policy ecosystem as gendered in that women MPs are seen to be more likely to face more aggressive forms of abuse and may temper their political participation, which, with diversity an established norm, threatens representative democracy. It is this threat to democracy – the intimidation to our political system – that has become the driving problem representation of violence towards UK MPs.

Taking the evidence and analysis together, I argue that a key part of the explanations for the gendered politicisation is the long-term ‘gendering’ of discursive and discrete political institutions. An attention to gender in political institutions has been an important condition that has allowed for the emergence of gender as a key discursive frame in the problem of violence towards MPs. This ‘gendering’ of institutions has involved: substantive representation (e.g. increase of number of women MPs), parliament as an institution (e.g. Good Parliament Report) and policy making (e.g. development of violence against women legislation).

The politicisation of the phenomenon has certainly been politicised in a gendered way. The problem framing did, over time, recognise the particularly aggressive abuse directed at women and the implications for democracy. Arguably, these gender differences and dynamics were considered in some ways in the policy responses.

Yet, I critique this politicisation process from a feminist institutionalist perspective. The phenomenon has been gendered in a largely individualist, protectionist way, without a

diagnosis of structural inequalities and related prognosis that political institutions should be transformed. What is represented as a problem of democracy could be alternatively represented as a problem of power inequalities that requires more profound structural transformation beyond security and behavioural change. A more comprehensive problem framing could allow for feminist institutional theories and interventions to better integrate violence in the imagined and realised transformation of discursive and discrete political institutions. In particular, the theory and practice of Gender Sensitive Parliaments (GSP) could better integrate and address the growing phenomenon of gendered violence in politics.

The rest of this final chapter proceeds as follows. First, I synthesise the findings throughout the thesis into a politicisation timeline. Second, I critique the politicisation process through a feminist institutionalist lens. Finally, I reflect on my own research and possibilities for future academic and advocacy efforts.

## An Emerging Politicisation Process

This section will detail of the evolution of the politicisation process, synthesising the evidence throughout the thesis. First, Figure 6 summarises the findings by chapter and the overall conclusions.

The policy debates analysis found that violence towards MPs has, over time, been increasingly framed as a policy problem to be addressed and an attack on the normative

public good of democracy. There is an increasing focus on women's experiences as particularly aggressive and threatening representative democracy.

In the CSPL Review, I find the key factors that led to the set-up of the review include the initiative of Prime Minister Theresa May prioritising this issue after the 2017 General Election, following a longer-term series of developments, including the tension during the 2014 Scottish Referendum. The committee's focus on gender inequality seems to be because of the evidence submitted to the review, including testimonies from MPs' offices.

The policy architecture analysis indicates an evolution from a focus on security for individual victims and perpetrators to a multi-faceted policy architecture, including a focus on collective security measures for all MPs, and behavioural rules in parliament and political parties. While the individual policies vary in their application of gender, the policy architecture overall has evolved from a largely gender-neutral response to more gender-sensitive

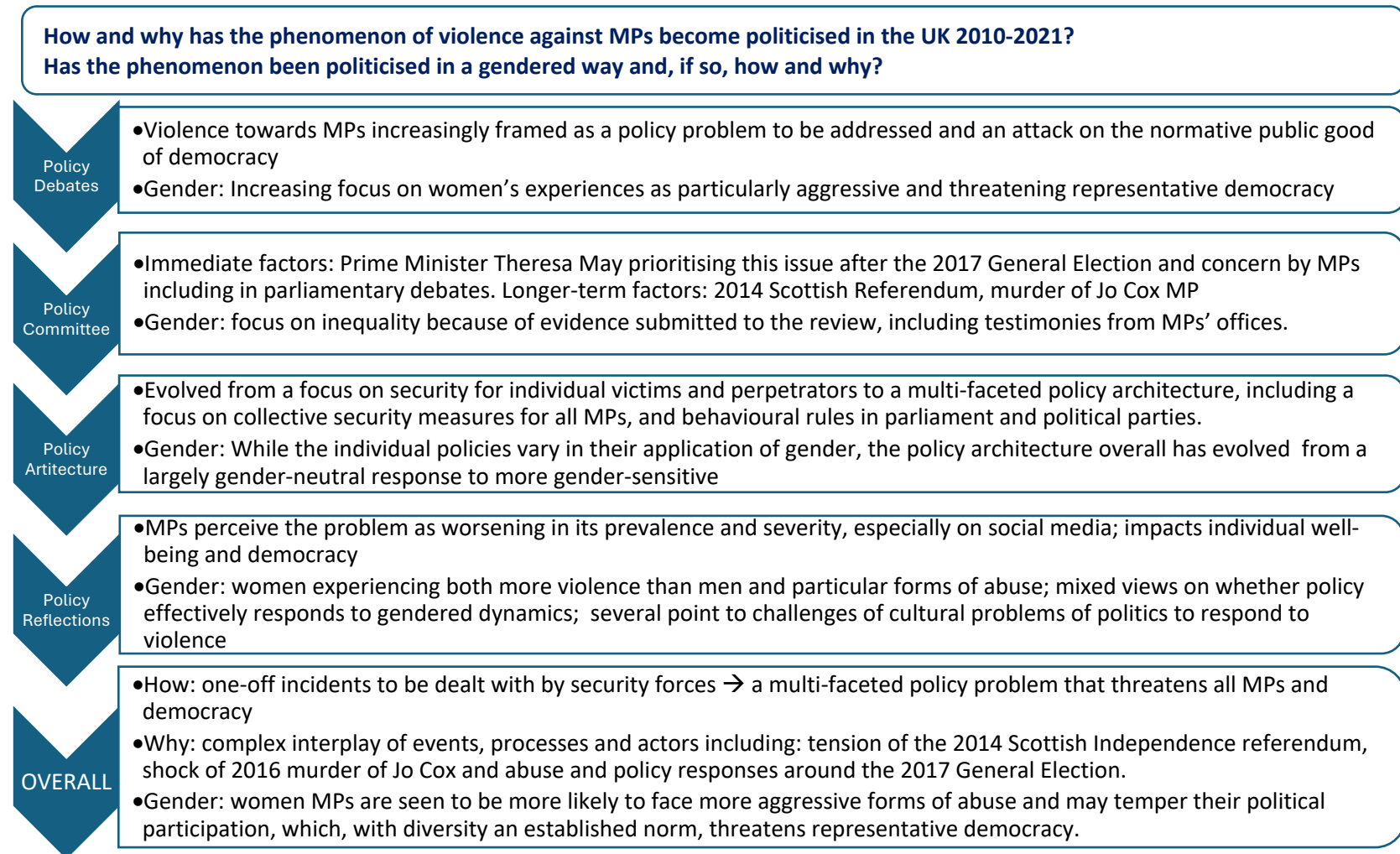
The MPs interviewed perceive the problem as worsening in its prevalence and severity, especially on social media; impacts individual well-being and democracy. They construct a gendered problem with women experiencing both more violence than men and particular forms of abuse, but with mixed views on whether policy effectively responds to gendered dynamics. Several MPs point to overall cultural problems of politics making it challenging for policy to respond to the growing problem of violence.

Synthesising these findings, It is clear that the phenomenon of violence towards MPs has been politicised as a policy problem over time i.e. a process of political institutional change, discursively in documents and concretely in policy responses.

In particular, the phenomenon has been politicised as a problem that threatens democracy. Violence towards MPs was initially represented as an individual, gender-neutral problem of predominantly physical threats that demanded a security response. Over time, problem representations evolved to conceptualise a widespread problem impacting MPs as a group, not only physical forms but also especially occurred with regularity online. A key part of the politicisation has been linked to the rise of social media. Platforms design means that abuse is more likely to spread.

The other key part of the politicisation story is its gendered framing: the framing here is that women face particularly aggressive abuse so women may exit from politics, which, in turn, seems to be most problematic because it threatens the diversity of politics i.e. women experiencing such abuse threatens the normative good of democracy. As I will outline, the reasons for politicisation are complex but follow a timeline from the tension of the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum, murder of Jo Cox MP and abuse faced in the 2017 election, and, crucially MPs reactions to this abuse, leading to the CSPL report and policy change.

Figure 6. Overall Findings



I interpret the politicisation as having been in three inter-related chronological phases. First, 'pre-politicisation' until 2014 sets the historical, status quo for the problem. Violence towards MPs was seen as rare events of physical violence towards individuals, perpetrated by terrorists and, rarer still, those with specific mental health needs, that required a security/police policy response.

In the second phase, 'emerging politicisation,' between 2014 and 2016, key processes and events – especially the 2014 Scottish referendum, the 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2016 murder of Jo Cox MP – created conditions for violence towards MPs to be specifically politicised.

The final (ongoing) phase is that politicisation is crystallised, which occurred from the General Election in 2017. Events and the initiatives of key actors around the 2017 election, including the creation of the CSPL report, were key in this problem of violence towards MPs being on the political agenda. The emerging policy architecture that had focussed on security actors expanded to cover a range of actors including political parties and the Electoral Commission, and covered a variety of forms of violence including online. By the end of 2021, with the murder of Sir David Amess MP, the problem of violence in politics is an established part of the political agenda, framed as an important, gendered and online problem that threatens democracy.

## Until 2014: Pre-Politicisation – Emergence of conditions

Until 2014, in the ‘pre-politicisation’ stage, the problem of violence towards politicians was seen as rare. As outlined earlier in the thesis, the policy response was characterised by security responses to rare incidents perpetrated by terrorists or ‘fixated’ individuals. The securitisation of parliament and government involved specific security teams in response to threats by republican Irish terrorism and then extremist Islamist terrorism. Violence was assumed to be predominantly physical in form. Other forms of violence, such as psychological effected through stalking, did also emerge somewhat in the development of the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC), but such violence was still seen as rare and isolated, perpetrated by specific individuals with mental health conditions.

In this period, the issue of violence towards MPs was not a specific issue seen as worthy of political attention. MPs viewed threats of violence as threats to them individually because of their specific positions as senior in the government or promoting certain policy issues. Even the high-profile incidents of violence against specific MPs in this time period – the 2000 sword attack on Nigel Jones MP, which resulted in the death of his aide and councillor, Andrew Pennington and the near-fatal stabbing of Stephen Timms MP in 2010 – did not lead to a politicisation of a group-based, democratic threat.

Yet, during this period, several conditions for the eventual politicisation of the phenomenon were being put in place. For example, social media was starting to become a location where politicians were expected to participate and a medium through which others in the political eco-system – journalists, political activists and constituents – received

political information. Social media was initially seen by policymakers as a positive, 'new public square' in which the government should not get involved through regulation. Yet, the design of social media platforms meant that abuse was easily amplified and went unacknowledged by platforms and policymakers, at least initially. This period saw a gradual development of both the importance of social media in the political ecosystem and the abuse that did not yet have a name (and soon would host the development of a whole lexicon including 'trolling', 'doxing' and 'deep fakes'). The eventual politicisation of the phenomenon of violence towards MPs as an online problem emerged, at least partly, due to this condition that was gradually emerging.

Furthermore, the interview evidence suggests that, as early as 2010, Speaker, then Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, Lindsay Hoyle, was campaigning internally in Parliament for increased security provisions. While not yet part of the mainstream political agenda, these processes and the initiative of this key actor created further conditions for the eventual politicisation of the problem.

## 2014-2016: Emerging Politicisation – Key Processes and Events

The second phase of the process that can be identified is the early stages of politicisation, from 2014 until 2016. This emerging politicisation is evident in the first specific parliamentary debate on the topic, 'Internet Abuse of Members of Parliament' on November 4, 2014. While this development suggests some emergence of the specific issue of violence towards MPs, as analysed earlier in the thesis, this debate framed the problem

as important not explicitly because of its impact on democracy nor as a specific phenomenon (this did not happen until 2017) but as one which particularly impacted women and that particularly occurred online.

Months before this first debate was the 2014 Scottish Referendum. Although not immediately identified as involving a particular issue of abuse towards elected representatives, in my interviews, MPs and CSPL members reflected on the significance of this election. It was arguably one of the first campaigns in the UK in which social media was integral with its own online language such as “cyber-nats” to refer to those supporting independence<sup>20</sup> in uncivil ways. Some of those I interviewed were of the view that its importance was not immediately recognised because it was a campaign only affecting some MPs (in Scotland) and not others. Furthermore, social media campaigning was not as widespread or indeed understood at this time as it would be in subsequent years, that is, the online abuse was not recognised.

In late 2015 and early 2016, significant policy developments indicate a further emergence of violence on the policy agenda. December 2015 saw the creation of the national security plan Operation Bridger to protect MPs. The immediate trigger for this event was apparently the increase in threats of violence towards MPs following the parliamentary debate on intervention in Syria. Furthermore, in January 2016, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) made changes to the security package which seems to have included a removal of the cap on security spending for MPs.

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<sup>20</sup> In this context, ‘nats’ is a derogatory abbreviation for Scottish nationalist supporters

Notably, my interviewees could not recall exactly when the security responses increased, which suggests that there may have been a myriad of factors at play which led to these changes, and that these changes emerged gradually, and were not necessarily front and centre of MPs' minds.

An event that was central in their minds by all accounts was the murder of Jo Cox on June 16, 2016, shortly before the European Referendum, the first murder of an MP in peacetime. In response, Operation Bridger was expanded to establish a new unit, the Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team (PLAIT) in parliament to coordinate with local police services on security threats to MPs.

Yet, as evidenced throughout the thesis, the murder of Jo Cox MP is only one contributor to the politicisation process. While this event immediately shocked the political ecosystem and led to some policy change, it cannot alone explain the politicisation of the overall problem.

Even the polarised 2016 Brexit referendum and murder of Jo Cox did not seem to immediately lead to increased policy discussion around a specific problem of abuse towards elected representatives. However, much like the 2014 referendum, it is likely that the context of increasing political polarisation (Donoghue and Kuisma, 2022) played a part in increasing abuse towards MPs generally, which acted as a condition for the ongoing and eventual politicisation of the problem.

Throughout this period, there was also increasing political interest in gender diversity in politics and an emerging norm, in the UK and around the world, that having

women parliamentarians in particular was 'good' for democracy. The increase in the number of women MPs in the New Labour government in 1997 was coupled with feminist academic and advocacy activity around creating new theories and practices for increasing women's representation (Campbell and Childs, 2013). Over time, efforts moved from simply getting women into politics to changing political institutions. Parliament's commissioning of The Good Parliament Report (2016) is one clear example of the tensions between normatively and practically connecting diversity with democracy. The eventual politicisation of the phenomenon of violence towards MPs as a gendered problem can be traced to this development of norms around diversity on politics – a long-term gendering of political institutions.

As evidenced throughout the thesis, the problem of violence toward politicians is framed as an important political issue because of its impact on democracy, which includes a threat to diverse descriptive representation. Diversity is not necessarily a good in itself but important because of its benefit to democracy. This norm is most clearly stated or formed in the parliamentary debates and in the CSPL report, and comes through in the MPs interviews.

### From 2017: Politicisation crystalised – Policy expansion

The third and final (ongoing) phase is politicisation being crystalised through outcomes of discursive and discrete institutional change. The discursive 'problem' was established on the policy agenda and led to discrete policy change. Events around the 2017

election, including the creation of the CSPL report, were key in this problem of violence towards MPs being on the political agenda.

In the lead up to and during the election campaigns, several processes provided further conditions for politicisation. The March 2017 Westminster terrorist attack in which police officer Keith Palmer was murdered while protecting parliament crystallised the ongoing threats towards MPs. Furthermore, several third sector/civil society groups, for example the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Fawcett Society and Amnesty International, had been conducting research on the experiences of violence among women in politics. As evidenced in my analysis of parliamentary debates and the CSPL case study, the latter's research on online abuse during the election was particularly influential in politicising the phenomenon generally and framing it as online and gendered in nature.

Following the 2017 election, a series of events crystallised the politicisation of the problem. MPs shared their experiences of abuse, and a cross-party consensus of the problem developed, to be seen especially in the 2017 parliamentary debate tabled by Simon Hart. The Prime Minister and her trusted policy actors prioritised this issue as a policy problem and ask CSPL to conduct a review.

The CSPL members had an interest in the issue and in consensus agreed to go forward with the report. The CSPL members gathered evidence from political parties, MPs, and civil society to develop a report highlighting the urgency of the problem. The high-profile publication of CSPL report, largely because of its criticism of social media companies,

lead to increased politicisation of this topic. Several parliamentary debates and policy change followed.

Around this time, the #MeToo movement was emerging, which arguably led to awareness of gendered power dynamics in politics (Krook, 2018b; Julios, 2022) and, coupled with the pressure from CSPL and others, led political parties to revise codes of conduct and Parliament to set up the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS). While there were varying degrees of gender-sensitivity in these policy documents, their development indicated the growing equalities and gendered framing in the politicisation of violence in politics.

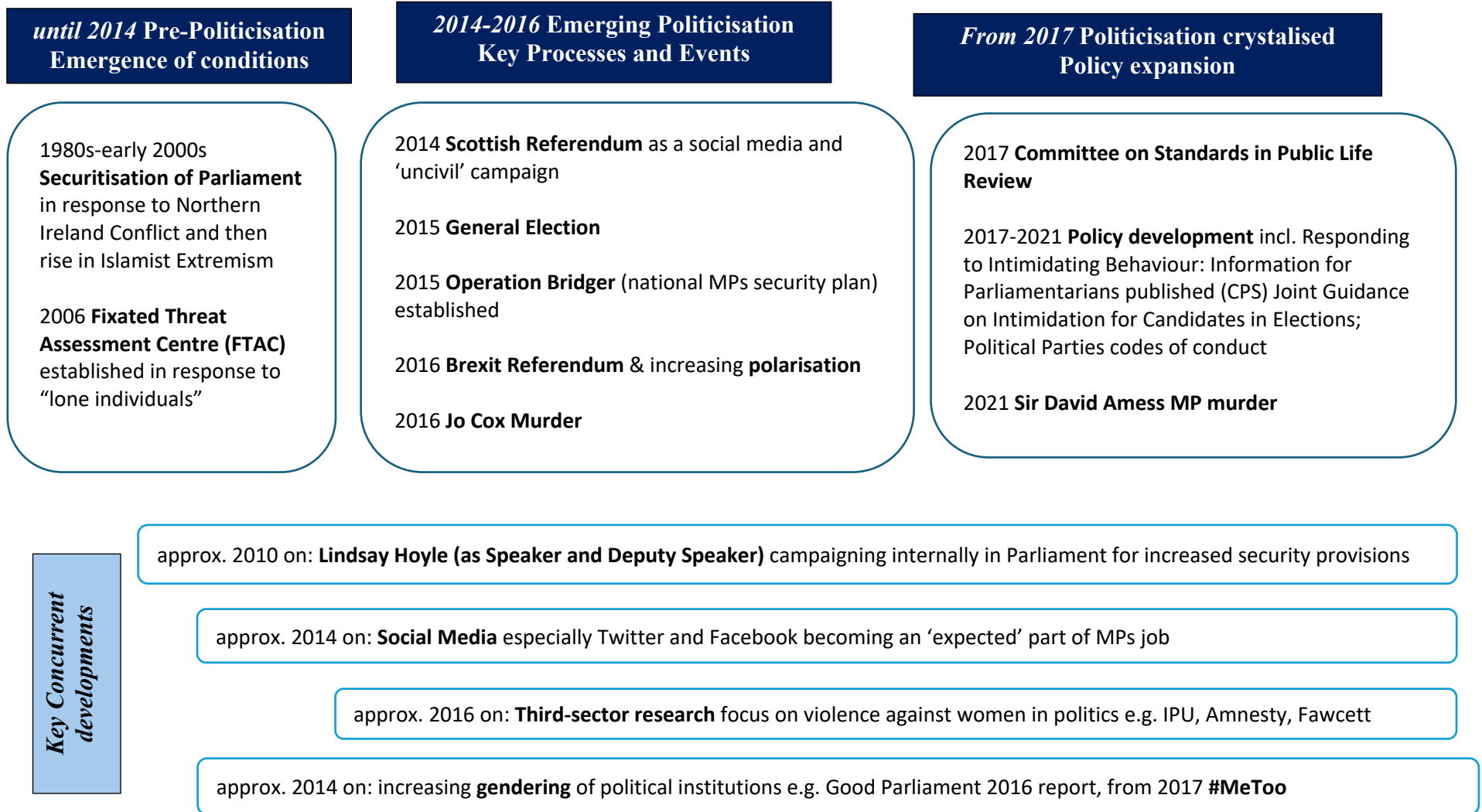
These developments also paved the way for the 2019-2020 investigation of the Labour Party by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which led to the Labour Party reforming the way it dealt with antisemitism and other complaints, which, as demonstrated earlier in the thesis, also, relatedly, seemed to make the documents more attuned to gendered aspects of the problem.

In 2019, security actors produced guidance for MPs on facing threats. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) produced 'Responding to Intimidating Behaviour: Information for Parliamentarians'. The 'Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections' (2019 and 2021) was produced by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), The Electoral Commission and College of Policing.

From 2017, the problem was predominantly framed as an online one – even in the context of another murder of a MP and other high-profile physical attacks. It seems that the

CSPL report was key in terms of framing the problem as an online one, especially with the responsibility of social media companies to change and for increased online regulation. Most notably, the Tributes to Sir David Amess MP parliamentary debate linked his murder to regular online attacks faced by all MPs, especially women. The problem of violence in politics as an important, gendered and online problem was an established part of the political agenda.

Figure 7. The Politicisation Process of Violence Towards UK MPs Over Time



## A Gender-Responsive Politicisation Process?

Having mapped the politicisation process over time, here I apply the overall theorising of gender in the politicisation process on the gender-responsive scale outlined earlier. The politicisation of the phenomenon has certainly been politicised in at least a gender-aware and a somewhat gender-sensitive approach. It falls short of being gender responsive. I argue that the phenomenon has been gendered in a largely individualist, protectionist way, without a diagnosis of structural inequalities and related prognosis that political institutions should be transformed.

The politicisation of the phenomenon has certainly been politicised in a gendered way in a way that arguably changed institutions, therefore the overall politicisation problem representation is certainly not gender neutral. Moving along the normative scale then, we can say the overall politicisation process is at least gender-aware. Over time, the political eco-system, including various actors, such as Parliament, the police and political parties, has developed policy along the lines of workplace protections for MPs to carry out their roles – from guidance, security protections to behavioural codes of conduct. More recent policy responses do tend to recognise women and/or marginalised individuals as at particular risk of violence.

Importantly, the politicisation of the phenomenon of violence towards MPs has expanded the definition of violence beyond merely physical and pays some attention to

forms that particularly impact different genders. The problem framing did, over time, recognise the particularly aggressive abuse directed at women and the implications for democracy.

Some aspects of the policy framing could be conceptualised as gender sensitive. Gender is considered in relation to structural inequalities in relation to violence in politics some of the policy documents in particular, and new institutions have emerged – such as behavioural codes of conduct and specific police resources – to address political violence.

Yet, I would argue that the politicisation process falls short of the gender responsive ideal as it has not generally connected addressing political violence to tackling structural inequalities. The policy problematic has a whole has been more individualistic rather than structural in nature i.e. targeting individual perpetrators and victims rather than the political institutions. The policy problematic does not tend to implement a ‘continuum’ thinking in the nuanced connections of different forms of violence.

The driving problem representation of the politicisation process is that violence towards MPs is akin to an attack on democracy. All other aspects of problem framing lead back to this key driver. That women parliamentarians experience abuse is not necessarily represented as a problem itself but a problem for democracy. That social media companies have not prioritised safety is important primarily because it risks democratic engagement.

An assumption of the problem representation is that both the ideal and current practice of democracy is a normative good and should be safeguarded. The underlying view is democracy should be descriptively and substantively representative of its public. What

representative democracy is and should be – what exactly we should be safeguarding – is not made clear.

A long history of feminist literature has argued that the way democracy has been conceptualised and practised has meant that women and anyone not an archetypal male leader is seen as an interloper, a “space invader” (Puwar, 2004). In my analysis, while women are included as part of the problem representation as victims to be protected for the sake of democracy, there is rarely recognition of the broader structural power dynamics at play that have resulted in the marginalisation of women.

Similarly, while there is some recognition of other marginalisations, a truly intersectional representation of the complex power dynamics operating in and characterising political spaces and society more broadly is not present in the problematisation of this phenomenon.

The centring on women as a group without institutional attention risks advancing paternalistic benevolent sexism. Rather than simply protecting women, a feminist institutional transformation would suggest that democratic institutions be transformed. Rather than democracy being protected as status quo, it should be changed to be more inclusive, diverse and safer.

What is missing is a problem representation and policy response is an attention to structural transformation. The Feminist Intuitionist theory and practice of Gender Sensitive Parliaments (e.g. Childs, 2016, Mackay and Krook, 2015a) could be further updated to integrate individual and structural protections from violence, with an

understanding of the different power dynamics at play. Beyond a focus of sexual harassment sexual harassment policies (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018b, 2022), the Gender Sensitive Parliament framework could interrogate how a range of violence impacts a range of actors in the variety of locations of the political workplace.

What is represented as a problem of democracy could be alternatively represented as a problem of power inequalities that require even more structural transformation beyond security and behavioural change. A more comprehensive problem framing could allow for feminist institutional theories and interventions to better integrate violence in the imagined and realised transformation of discursive and discrete political institutions.

## Critical Reflections on the Research

In this final section, I reflect on the strengths and limitations of my theoretical and empirical work and suggest avenues for future research and advocacy.

Theoretically and empirically, this thesis has contributed to the growing literature on gender and political violence by moving beyond measuring the phenomenon to understanding its political impacts. Its novel theorising of problem representation and politicisation is an important contribution to the emerging field.

The explicitly feminist framework has allowed me to analyse the gendered power dynamics of the problem which, as argued, are a crucial part of understanding political institutions (and society). The integration of gender is also an important strength, especially

in a social sciences context in which gender is not necessarily routinely studied or recognised as an important analytical approach.

I also pose that my connection with the research topic is a strength. My positionality, or what more positivist researchers may refer to as 'bias,' means that I engaged in the research process with a deep expertise of the context in which the actors operated. My transparency about my relationship with the research and reflexivity allowed me to be open to my expertise being questioned, redirected and developed in this interpretative research process.

Empirically, my framework of policy analysis of gender responsiveness could be applied by other researchers and policymakers in policy analysis and development – including audiences and practitioners not as familiar with gender analysis. The ideal policy that is intersectionality-responsive and comprehensively covers all forms of violence remains theoretical but is also a valuable empirical tool. Its related systematic categories of gender and intersectionality sensitivity and diverse forms of violence has allowed an insight into the understandings of gender and violence in a range of relevant policies. Amidst the varying debates about how to operationalise gender and intersectionality, the thesis put forth one, specific analytical tool in the context of this specific research on the phenomenon of violence experienced by UK MPs.

My iterative, multi-method study allowed me to understand the politicisation of the phenomenon across different evidence sources, which allowed me to triangulate findings and offer strong justification for this descriptive and explanatory story.

However, the nature of the multi-method qualitative study can only offer so much in terms of rigorous explanations. In my exploration of how and why the phenomenon had been politicised, I focussed on the gendered aspect of the problem representation. I maintain that part of the explanation is a longer-term 'gendering' of relevant political institutions. However, this is likely only part of the explanation in the complex process of politicisation of the phenomenon of violence towards MPs.

My results suggest that the politicisation of political violence is closely aligned with the politicisation of social media/online harms, and my research focus meant that I did not tease out whether the focus on social media is an alternative or linked explanation to the one I pose. Furthermore, the development of the phenomenon and its resulting politicisation is likely linked to broader, interconnected, complex national and global trends of polarisation, democratic backsliding, and mistrust in elites, aspects my research did not focus given the selectiveness of the research design.

The selectiveness of the approach also meant that I did not trace all the possible influences within my cases, for example how and why the CSPL report recommendations informed the creation of the specific policies in the policy architecture.

Another potential drawback of my approach is that my comprehensive understanding of violence limited an exploration of how different forms of harms impact politicisation in potentially different ways.

Furthermore, I examined the politicisation process including problem representation, rather than, a more in-depth study of policy implementation. The discursive construction of policies limited the exploration of how policies work in practice.

Relatedly, the way I operationalised an understanding of violence, gender and intersectionality in my policy analysis categorical framework was inherently idealistic. This approach comes with a potential drawback in evaluating policy that is 'messier.' A limitation with any normative approach could be that it misses different aspects of analysis and interpretation, and remaining siloed in my gender and politics space, rather than speaking to other literatures. In particular, a limitation of such structured, framework analysis is the risk of lack of nuanced analysis that does not address the inter-play between gender, intersectionality and violence.

In light of these strengths and limitations, there are various implications for further research. Advancing understandings of gender and political violence as a policy problem has important implications for research and practice on addressing gendered violence in politics and democratic participation and policymaking in the UK and around the world.

Studies involving purely quantitative and, especially, mixed-methods research with bigger data points could allow a more evidenced and nuanced story of politicisation. There are likely more factors at play in the politicisation story which, in future, could benefit from further conceptual and empirical work to analyse the various factors.

This thesis analysed on MPs as a clear population of focus. Future research could examine the experiences and representations of different political actors and their

institutional contexts and policy responses. Such populations could include members of devolved bodies, local councillors and the staff of elected representatives. In my research, staff of MPs emerged as a clear group that acted as mediators to the abuse faced by their bosses. Understanding the experiences of staff would allow for conceptual development and policy evaluation, and build on the very nascent work in other contexts (Tenove *et al.*, 2023).

Future research could consider a more systematic evaluation of policy effectiveness with specific metrics of what success means could be conceptually, empirically and practically useful to academics and practitioners. Analysis could be undertaken to address what policy interventions seem to be effective, and why, and how the effective changes could be adapted to different contexts.

Furthermore, it could be useful to further understandings of the impacts of the politicisation of the phenomenon. Other effects of the overall representation can be double edged in terms of awareness raising but also potentially chilling impact. With the politicisation, more MPs feel that they can discuss the problem to raise awareness of the problem. However, there may be a risk of sensationalising the phenomenon and not focusing on how to address it. MPs and other actors are concerned that an impact of the growing politicisation of violence may also have the consequence of people not wanting to enter politics – the very result that the phenomenon itself risks and actors want to avoid.

A useful avenue of future research would be studying other UK political institutions, such as the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and local

government bodies. Such a comparative approach would allow for potential cross-institutional learnings for transformation.

The political workplace is varied, and their experiences of violence take a range of forms as identified in previous literature (e.g. Krook, 2020). What will be important for future research and policy intervention is conceptualising the connections between different forms of violence, for example the integrated impacts and relationships between offline and online threats.

Cross-country comparative work would also allow further understanding of problem representations and policy responses to violence towards politicians. For example, a comparison to the Republic of Ireland could be interesting given the similar contexts of historical political violence, women's representation, and 'open' democratic practice of advice surgeries. Other fruitful avenues of comparative research would be to build on the comparative work between the UK and other parliamentary democracies, such as Australia and Canada (Raney and Collier, 2021) with specific enquiries to problem representation.

In future research, the gendered lens could be deepened to address the structural barriers and possibilities to address a range of forms of violence. This thesis finds evidence to support the conceptualisation of a specific phenomenon of violence against women in politics (VAWP), in which women are specifically impacted in relation to their gender and political participation. Integrating a VAWP approach into forthcoming analysis and policy developments, such as within the Gender Sensitive Parliament framework, would be a fruitful avenue of further research and intervention.

Theoretically and empirically considering intersectionality will be important to any future research. In contrast to my approach with centred gender, explicitly centring the experiences of those most marginalised in politics, as Siow and Christofferson (2024) recently advocated, could be a fruitful further research agenda to understand the problem representation and beyond.

The implications for future research are wide-ranging. Advancing understandings of gender and political violence as a policy problem has important implications for research and practice. Through my original research, I join a long tradition to argue that transforming our political institutions to be more gender responsive will benefit everyone in our democracies.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. The Specific Policy Architecture to Address Violence Experienced by MPs

Policy	Documents	Date Policy Adopted	Date of Policy Document	INCLUDED IN ANALYSIS
1-Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC)	Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC) (2023), <a href="http://www.fixatedthreat.com/ftac-welcome.php">http://www.fixatedthreat.com/ftac-welcome.php</a> (and the various webpages that include historic and current information including FAQs <a href="http://www.fixatedthreat.com/ftac-faq.php">http://www.fixatedthreat.com/ftac-faq.php</a> )	2006	2002	Y
2-Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) Security package	Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) (2023), 'The Scheme', <a href="https://www.theipsa.org.uk/publications/the-scheme">https://www.theipsa.org.uk/publications/the-scheme</a>	2009	2023	Y
	First Edition of the Scheme (2009-10), <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/62omp52KcQxUKPp4nAbN3c/a03a87de7b9de203f685d821161d44b2/Scheme-2009-10_No01.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/62omp52KcQxUKPp4nAbN3c/a03a87de7b9de203f685d821161d44b2/Scheme-2009-10_No01.pdf</a>		Mar 2009	Y
	Second Edition of the Scheme (2010-11), <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/6DkgBMdViTueW0oMwzeTN2/172129203631a6ced8c6930dba24f7a2/Scheme-2010_No02.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/6DkgBMdViTueW0oMwzeTN2/172129203631a6ced8c6930dba24f7a2/Scheme-2010_No02.pdf</a>		Mar 2010	Y
	Third Edition of the Scheme (2011-12), <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/3co2EuUjJyJ5aQgnb7N1C3/6a8c97c2a6dd4f3d673d8d6304bb8932/Scheme-2011_No03.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/3co2EuUjJyJ5aQgnb7N1C3/6a8c97c2a6dd4f3d673d8d6304bb8932/Scheme-2011_No03.pdf</a>		Mar 2011	Y
	Fourth Edition of the Scheme (2012-13), <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/3tnRRq3AwwVc">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/3tnRRq3AwwVc</a>		Mar 2012	Y

<a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/d60b299efde8154f0c837728648d2806/Scheme-2012_No04.pdf">Wdvrb93FFJ/d60b299efde8154f0c837728648d2806/Scheme-2012_No04.pdf</a>			
Fifth Edition of the Scheme (2013-14), <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/01H2g1MH67txjDZm99IA5u/517c48f6f508e74dd395923ed9ef0421/Scheme-2013_No05.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/01H2g1MH67txjDZm99IA5u/517c48f6f508e74dd395923ed9ef0421/Scheme-2013_No05.pdf</a>		Mar 2013	Y
Sixth Edition of the Scheme (2014-15), <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/tQp6RmcEws4syO97NQqOI/de43637f434cf23586189f1e0438f72c/Scheme-2014_No06.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/tQp6RmcEws4syO97NQqOI/de43637f434cf23586189f1e0438f72c/Scheme-2014_No06.pdf</a>		Mar 2014	Y
Seventh Edition of the Scheme (2015-16), <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/6MFimguaEZKrdpxlHNZiGL/77bc564fc69edc24540556bfe138d520/Scheme-2015-16_No07.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/6MFimguaEZKrdpxlHNZiGL/77bc564fc69edc24540556bfe138d520/Scheme-2015-16_No07.pdf</a>		Mar 2015	Y
Eighth Edition of the Scheme (2016-17), <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/6PCmNGvfJc0GgnZPzqyoZo/d2d8714344ea2d189a32531249f7a628/Scheme-2016-17_No08.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/6PCmNGvfJc0GgnZPzqyoZo/d2d8714344ea2d189a32531249f7a628/Scheme-2016-17_No08.pdf</a>		Mar 2016	Y
Ninth Edition of the Scheme (2017-18). March		Mar 2017	Y
Ninth Edition of the Scheme (2017-18). Following General election. <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/3HyJyNGNOWvrErbNbnPAAv/16b926678ec57bbbf84d0541f1f1aff4/scheme-2017-18-version-41-post-8-june-election.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/3HyJyNGNOWvrErbNbnPAAv/16b926678ec57bbbf84d0541f1f1aff4/scheme-2017-18-version-41-post-8-june-election.pdf</a>		Jun 2017	Y
Tenth Edition of the Scheme (2018-19) <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/7cpNAcxHbBxpl9gxcwxgi2/4066482cd73a83c75d16f69480d6126d/scheme-of-mps-business-costs-and-expenses-2018-19_web_accessible.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/7cpNAcxHbBxpl9gxcwxgi2/4066482cd73a83c75d16f69480d6126d/scheme-of-mps-business-costs-and-expenses-2018-19_web_accessible.pdf</a>		Mar 2018	Y

	<p>Eleventh Edition of the Scheme (2019-20)  <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/rw1E2bxerCIX1bMf5Tsh1/44e6ebea1f303df87bafdf74361fbc59/Scheme-2019-20_No11.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/rw1E2bxerCIX1bMf5Tsh1/44e6ebea1f303df87bafdf74361fbc59/Scheme-2019-20_No11.pdf</a></p>		Mar 2019	Y
	<p>Twelfth Edition of the Scheme (2020-21)  <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/YNXhXGHBh6TxweD0JV2vu/6d3dbe993900961bb6eb8ee32cf6f5e4/scheme-2020-21.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/YNXhXGHBh6TxweD0JV2vu/6d3dbe993900961bb6eb8ee32cf6f5e4/scheme-2020-21.pdf</a></p>		Mar 2020	Y
	<p>Addendum to the Twelfth Edition of the Scheme (2020-21)  <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/2M2smNGm3F01nxJ7hvqk7w/b49822f935739c49f8abac7e4e341458/Scheme-2020-21_No12_addendum.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/2M2smNGm3F01nxJ7hvqk7w/b49822f935739c49f8abac7e4e341458/Scheme-2020-21_No12_addendum.pdf</a></p>		Jun 2020	Y
	<p>Thirteenth Edition of the Scheme (2021-22),  <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/6FjW4RDyApa0L6l1M3ZRnT/Oa3e2e21057677af588c084bfbcef0cb/The_Scheme_of_MPs_Staffing_and_Business_Costs_2021-22.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/6FjW4RDyApa0L6l1M3ZRnT/Oa3e2e21057677af588c084bfbcef0cb/The_Scheme_of_MPs_Staffing_and_Business_Costs_2021-22.pdf</a></p>		Mar 2021	Y
	<p>Fourteenth Edition of the Scheme (2022-23),  <a href="https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/2etNPrnZy3ErzpDX30DwK0/b830befad57e561df9250e5727dd86dc/Fourteenth_Edition_of_the_Scheme_2022-23.pdf">https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/2etNPrnZy3ErzpDX30DwK0/b830befad57e561df9250e5727dd86dc/Fourteenth_Edition_of_the_Scheme_2022-23.pdf</a></p>		Mar 2022	Y
	<p>Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) (2022) A guide to MPs' claims information page,  <a href="https://www.theipsa.org.uk/news/a-guide-to-mps-claims">https://www.theipsa.org.uk/news/a-guide-to-mps-claims</a></p>		10 Aug 2022	N (background)
	<p>Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) (2017) Freedom of Information Request 80609,  <a href="https://www.theipsa.org.uk/freedom-of-information/2017-18/cas-80609">https://www.theipsa.org.uk/freedom-of-information/2017-18/cas-80609</a></p>		2017	N (background)

3-Operation Bridger	National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) (2016), 'Chief Constables' Council, MP Security – Cover Note, 13 July 2016/Agenda Item: 4.1.4. (Neil Basu QPM, Deputy Assistant, Commissioner Specialist, Operations)' <a href="https://www.npcc.police.uk/FOI_2016/CO/0414_MP_Security_DAC_Basu.pdf">https://www.npcc.police.uk/FOI_2016/CO/0414_MP_Security_DAC_Basu.pdf</a>	Dec 2015	13 July 2016	Y
Includes Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team (PLAIT)		Jun 2016	13 July 2016	Y
Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection (PADP)	<i>Information gathered from parliament website and CSPL and other reports e.g. UK Parliament, Security Department Webpage, accessed 2022,</i> <a href="https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/bicameral/parliamentary-security-department/">https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/bicameral/parliamentary-security-department/</a>	1974/ 2015 (merger)	2023	N (not enough detail in doc)
Parliamentary Security Department (PSD)	<a href="https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/bicameral/parliamentary-security-department/">https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/bicameral/parliamentary-security-department/</a>	Historic	2023	N (not enough detail in doc)
4- Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS)	Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) (2019) 'UK Parliament Behaviour Code', <a href="https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/privileges/UKParliamentBehaviourCode.pdf">https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/privileges/UKParliamentBehaviourCode.pdf</a>	2018	2019	Y
	Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) (2022), 'Bullying and Harassment Policy', <a href="https://www.parliament.uk/link/8d72de96842a4588bab2913e04e21316.aspx">https://www.parliament.uk/link/8d72de96842a4588bab2913e04e21316.aspx</a>		2022	Y
	Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) (2022), 'Sexual Misconduct Policy',		2022	Y

	<a href="https://www.parliament.uk/link/23ccb4b758a24c348a0b59fec023ee68.aspx">https://www.parliament.uk/link/23ccb4b758a24c348a0b59fec023ee68.aspx</a>			
	Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) (2019) 'UK Parliament Behaviour Code', <a href="https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/privileges/UKParliamentBehaviourCode.pdf">https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/privileges/UKParliamentBehaviourCode.pdf</a>		2019	Y
	Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) (2021), 'Bullying and Harassment Procedure', <a href="https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/conduct-in-parliament/bullying-and-harassment-procedure.pdf">https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/conduct-in-parliament/bullying-and-harassment-procedure.pdf</a>		2021	N (only included policy rather than procedure doc)
	Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) (2021), 'Sexual Misconduct Procedure', <a href="https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/conduct-in-parliament/sexual-misconduct-procedure.pdf">https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/conduct-in-parliament/sexual-misconduct-procedure.pdf</a>		2021	N (only included policy rather than procedure doc)
5-Labour Party Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct for its members	Labour Party (2018/accessed 2023) 'Sexual Harassment Complainant Guidance', <a href="https://labour.org.uk/complaints/sexual-harassment/">https://labour.org.uk/complaints/sexual-harassment/</a>	2018	2018	N (only included policy rather than procedure doc)
	Labour Party (2018/accessed 2023) 'Sexual Harassment Complainant Procedure', <a href="https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/SH22-Sexual-Harassment-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf">https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/SH22-Sexual-Harassment-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf</a>	2018	2022	N (only included policy rather than

				procedure doc)
	Labour Party (accessed 2022) 'Code of Conduct: Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination', <a href="https://labour.org.uk/members/my-welfare/my-rights-and-responsibilities/coc-sexual-harassment/">https://labour.org.uk/members/my-welfare/my-rights-and-responsibilities/coc-sexual-harassment/</a>	2019	2022	Y
	Labour Party (2022) 'Code of Conduct: Bullying and harassment: Policy statement and procedural guidelines for all Labour Party Members, Volunteers and Staff', in the Labour Party Rule Book, <a href="https://labour.org.uk/rulebook">https://labour.org.uk/rulebook</a>	2018	2022	Y
	Labour Party (2022) 'Code of Conduct: Antisemitism and other forms of racism', in the Labour Party Rule Book, <a href="https://labour.org.uk/rulebook">https://labour.org.uk/rulebook</a>	2019	2022	Y
	Labour Party (2022) 'Code of Conduct: Social Media Policy', in the Labour Party Rule Book, <a href="https://labour.org.uk/rulebook">https://labour.org.uk/rulebook</a>	unclear	2022	Y
6- Conservative Party Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct for its members	Conservative Party (2022) 'Code of Conduct', <a href="https://www.conservatives.com/code-of-conduct">https://www.conservatives.com/code-of-conduct</a>	2017	2022	Y
	Conservative Party (2022) 'Social Media Complaints Rules', <a href="https://www.conservatives.com/code-of-conduct/social-media-complaints-rules.html">https://www.conservatives.com/code-of-conduct/social-media-complaints-rules.html</a>	unclear	2022	Y
	Conservative Party (2022) 'Equal Opportunities Policy', <a href="https://www.conservatives.com/equal-opportunities-policy">https://www.conservatives.com/equal-opportunities-policy</a>	unclear	2022	Y
	Conservative Party (2021), Constitution, <a href="https://public.conservatives.com/organisation-department/202101/Conservative%20Party%20Constitution%20as%20amended%20January%202021.pdf">https://public.conservatives.com/organisation-department/202101/Conservative%20Party%20Constitution%20as%20amended%20January%202021.pdf</a>	unclear	2021	N (background, not specific)

7-Liberal Democrats Party Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct for its members	Liberal Democrats (2017) 'Members Code of Conduct', <a href="https://www.libdems.org.uk/code-of-conduct">https://www.libdems.org.uk/code-of-conduct</a>	2017	2017	Y
	Liberal Democrats (2017) 'Online Code of Conduct', <a href="https://www.libdems.org.uk/online-code-conduct">https://www.libdems.org.uk/online-code-conduct</a>	2017	2017	Y
	Liberal Democrats (2017) 'Candidates Code of Conduct', <a href="https://www.libdems.org.uk/candidates_code_of_conduct">https://www.libdems.org.uk/candidates_code_of_conduct</a>	2017	2017	Y
8-SNP Rules in relation to behavioural codes of conduct for its members	Scottish National Party (SNP) (2022), 'Code of Conduct', <a href="https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/thesnp/pages/9765/attachments/original/1503997100/Code_of_Conduct.pdf?1503997100">https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/thesnp/pages/9765/attachments/original/1503997100/Code_of_Conduct.pdf?1503997100</a>	2017	2022	Y
9-Intimidation in Public Life: joint statement on conduct of political party members	Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) (2020), 'Intimidation in Public Life: joint statement on conduct of political party members', <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-joint-statement-on-conduct-of-political-party-members">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-joint-statement-on-conduct-of-political-party-members</a>	2020	2020	Y
10-Responding to Intimidating	Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) (2019), 'Responding to Intimidating Behaviour: Information for Parliamentarians', <a href="https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/pu">https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/pu</a>	Mar 2019	Mar 2019	Y

Behaviour: Information for Parliamentarians	<a href="#">blications/Responding-to-intimidating-behaviour-04-2019.pdf</a>			
11-Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections	The Electoral Commission, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), and College of Policing (2019), 'Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections' <a href="https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/Joint-Guidance-for-Candidates-in-Elections.pdf">https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/Joint-Guidance-for-Candidates-in-Elections.pdf</a>	Nov 2019	Nov 2019	Y (but v similar to 2021)
	The Electoral Commission, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), and College of Policing (2021), 'Joint Guidance on Intimidation for Candidates in Elections', <a href="https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-03/Joint-Guidance-for-Candidates-in-Elections-2021_0.pdf">https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-03/Joint-Guidance-for-Candidates-in-Elections-2021_0.pdf</a>	Mar 2021	Mar 2021	Y

## Appendix 2. Interview Support Materials

### 2.1. Email Recruitment Template – MPs

Dear NAME,

#### **Request for Interview: violence against MPs**

I hope you are well. I am a Social Policy PhD student at the University of Oxford researching gendered violence in politics. I am contacting you to request your voluntary participation in an interview to support my doctoral research which explores the phenomenon and policy architecture of gendered violence against politicians in the UK.

I am specifically contacting you because [of your engagement in this issue in several parliamentary debates / you were recommended as an expert in this issue by xxx / your role in developing policy on this area]. Your expertise would be extremely beneficial for my research.

The interview has the objectives: Understand your professional opinion and expertise on how and why the issue of violence against politicians has been addressed in policy; and, only if you feel comfortable discussing this issue, understand your own experiences of violence in your role as a MP, including what you perceive to be the causes and impacts of the violence.

The interview should take no longer than an hour. Ideally the interview will take place in person, at a time and location at your convenience, in a location that I would be able to record the interview (with your permission) without background noise. Alternatively, we can speak on the phone or video call.

Please read the statements below. If you are happy with all of the statements, please indicate this in your answer e-mail to me. This will be considered to constitute giving your consent to participate in the study. If you have any questions about the research or the statements below, please do not hesitate to contact me.

- Your participation will be confidential.
- You can withdraw from the study at any time, including following the interview. Please email me if you would like to withdraw retrospectively.
- Only with your permission, I will record the interview for the research purposes. Only I will have access to the recording. I will record using my phone and have it set so it

will only save locally. I will then save it to my secure university OneDrive and delete the recording from my phone. Both the phone and OneDrive are password protected. If we do not record, I will take notes in this notebook which when not on my person is in my private property. I will transcribe the interview for my research purpose, again saved on the secure OneDrive.

- Given that some of the topics that we will discuss may be sensitive, I also want to share some support resources. The parliamentary estate has a list of hotlines that you can access on the parliamentary intranet. I understand that the [current hotlines list is here](#). Other locations of confidential support include the Samaritans. The 24-hour number is 116 123 and you can find other ways of contacting the organization here: <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

Please let me know if you would be willing to take part in an interview and, if yes, please provide options for times and locations.

Yours sincerely,

Hannah Phillips

## 2.2. Email Recruitment Template – Committee on Standards in Public Life

Dear NAME,

### **Request for Interview: violence against MPs in policy / Committee on Standards in Public Life**

I hope you are well. I am a Social Policy PhD student at the University of Oxford researching gendered violence in politics. I am contacting you to request your voluntary participation in an interview to support my doctoral research which explores the phenomenon and policy architecture of gendered violence against politicians in the UK.

I am specifically contacting you because of your involvement with the development of [Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life](#). Your expertise would be extremely beneficial for my research.

The interview has the objectives: Understand the reasons for the development of the 2017 review and its impact. And, understand your professional opinion and expertise on how and why the issue of violence against politicians has been addressed in policy.

The interview should take no longer than an hour. Ideally the interview will take place in person, at a time and location at your convenience, in a location that I would be able to record the interview (with your permission) without background noise. Alternatively, we can speak on the phone or video call.

Please read the statements below. If you are happy with all of the statements, please indicate this in your answer e-mail to me. This will be considered to constitute giving your consent to participate in the study. If you have any questions about the research or the statements below, please do not hesitate to contact me.

- Your participation will be confidential.
- You can withdraw from the study at any time, including following the interview. Please email me if you would like to withdraw retrospectively.
- Only with your permission, I will record the interview for the research purposes. Only I will have access to the recording. I will record using my phone and have it set so it will only save locally. I will then save it to my secure university OneDrive and delete the recording from my phone. Both the phone and OneDrive are password protected. If we do not record, I will take notes in this notebook which when not on my person is in my private property. I will transcribe the interview for my research purpose, again saved on the secure OneDrive.
- Given that some of the topics that we will discuss may be sensitive, I also want to share some support resources. The parliamentary estate has a list of hotlines that you can access on the parliamentary intranet. Locations of confidential support include the Samaritans. The 24-hour number is 116 123 and you can find other ways of contacting the organization here: <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

Please let me know if you would be willing to take part in an interview and, if yes, please provide options for times and locations.

Yours sincerely,

Hannah Phillips

### 2.3. Interview Guide – MPs

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me today.

With your permission, I would like to record the interview. Only I will have access to the recording. I will record using my phone and have it set so it will only save locally. I will then save it to my secure university OneDrive and delete the recording from my phone. Both the phone and OneDrive are password protected. If we do not record, I will take notes in this notebook which when not on my person is in my private property. I will transcribe the interview for my research purpose, again saved on the secure OneDrive. Are you happy for me to record this interview?

*If YES:* Thanks. [start recording]

*If NO:* No problem.

Now, I will give an overview of my project and my objectives for the interview and give you the opportunity to ask me any questions. Then, we will start the interview.

This interview is part of my doctoral research on gendered violence against MPs in the UK

The interview has the objectives: Understand your professional opinion and expertise on how and why the issue of violence against politicians has been addressed in policy. And, only if you feel comfortable discussing this issue, understand your own experiences of violence in your role as a MP, including what you perceive to be the causes and impacts of the violence.

I have a series of planned questions but this is a semi-structured interview so I may ask different or additional questions as our conversation evolves. If you do not want to answer a question, just let me know and I will move on. Your participation will be confidential.

You can withdraw from the study at any time, including following the interview. Please email me if you would like to withdraw retrospectively.

Given that some of the topics that we will discuss may be sensitive, I also want to share some support resources. The parliamentary estate has a list of hotlines that you can access on the parliamentary intranet and there are other locations of support including the Samaritans. I can share these links with you after the interview.

Do you have any questions for me about my project or the interview?

I understand you have already consented to the interview via email but to just to make sure, could you please confirm that you consent to this interview as part of my PhD research?

Thank you.

Thank you. Let's get started with the interview.

Do you think that violence (including abuse/intimidation/harassment) against MPs is a problem?

What is the policy architecture for addressing violence (including abuse/intimidation/harassment) against MPs specifically?

Why did the (specific) policy architecture develop in this way?

Was there a specific event or events that led to any specific policies?

Have (or did) you experienced violence/abuse/intimidation/harassment in your role as a MP?

What forms does the violence/abuse take

Prompts: online, offline – meetings ect, harassment, online abuse?

How has violence impacted you, especially your political participation?

Prompts: online, in-person harassment, online, in-person participation, different policy advocacy?

Is there anyone else you think would be willing to take part in this research?

## 2.4. Interview Guide – Committee on Standards in Public Life

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me today.

With your permission, I would like to record the interview. Only I will have access to the recording. I will record using my phone and have it set so it will only save locally. I will then save it to my secure university OneDrive and delete the recording from my phone. Both the phone and OneDrive are password protected. If we do not record, I will take notes in this notebook which when not on my person is in my private property. I will transcribe the interview for my research purpose, again saved on the secure OneDrive. Are you happy for me to record this interview?

*If YES:* Thanks. [start recording]

*If NO.* No problem.

Now, I will give an overview of my project and my objectives for the interview and give you the opportunity to ask me any questions. Then, we will start the interview.

This interview is part of my doctoral research on gendered violence against MPs in the UK

The interview has the objectives: Understand the reasons for the development of the 2017 review and its impact. And understand your professional opinion and expertise on how and why the issue of violence against politicians has been addressed in policy.

I have a series of planned questions but this is a semi-structured interview so I may ask different or additional questions as our conversation evolves. If you do not want to answer a question, just let me know and I will move on. Your participation will be confidential.

You can withdraw from the study at any time, including following the interview. Please email me if you would like to withdraw retrospectively.

Given that some of the topics that we will discuss may be sensitive, I also want to share some support resources. The parliamentary estate has a list of hotlines that you can access on the parliamentary intranet and there are other locations of support including the Samaritans. I can share these links with you after the interview.

Do you have any questions for me about my project or the interview?

I understand you have already consented to the interview via email but to just to make sure, could you please confirm that you consent to this interview as part of my PhD research?

Thank you.

Thank you. Let's get started with the interview.

Can you walk me through the process of the development of the report?

What were the reasons for the development of the 2017 Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life?

Prompts e.g.

- In your view, how important was Jo Cox's murder as a reason?
- In your view, how important was Brexit election as a reason?
- In your view, how important was the 2017 election as a reason?

- Which key actors pushed for the review? Then Prime Minister Theresa May? What do you think were their reasons?

The report frames intimidation in public life as a threat to democracy. Where did this frame come from? Who were the main people pushing for this framing? Did anyone disagree?

The report frames the problem as particularly impacting women. Where did this frame come from? Who were the main people pushing for this framing? Did anyone disagree?

The report highlights the online aspects of this problem. Where did this frame come from? Who were the main people pushing for this framing? Did anyone disagree?

Were there any (other) disagreements in the development of the report?

Prompts e.g.

- The report does not advocate for new legislation. Was this contested in the report's development?
- The Committee make-up is purposively diverse. Did ideological differences lead to any disagreement during the report's development?
- Is there anything that is included that you would rather was not included? Why was it included? Who pushed for it? What considerations won out?
- Is there anything that is not included that you wish was? Did you make your views known? Why wasn't included? Who pushed back? What considerations won out?

In your view, what has been the impact of the report?

Prompts e.g.

- Do you think it influenced the policy discussion in Westminster? How? Why/Why Not? Who pushed for / did not push for the policy discussion?
- Do you think it raised awareness of the issue?

## 2.5. Email Thank You Template

Dear Name,

### **Thank you for taking part in the interview**

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me [today/yesterday]. Your expertise will be extremely beneficial for my research which seeks to advance the understandings of gendered violence in politics.

As I mentioned in the interview, given that some of the topics that we will discuss may be sensitive and upsetting, I am sharing some support resources with all interviewees.

Locations of confidential support include the Samaritans. The 24-hour number is 116 123 and you can find other ways of contacting the organization here: <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

[Only for MPs: The parliamentary estate has a list of hotlines that you can access on the parliamentary intranet. I understand that the current hotlines list is here.]

Many thanks again and all the best,

Hannah Phillips

## Appendix 3. Supplementary Information for the Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) (2017)

Table A. Document Data List related to Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) (2017)

Evidence	Date	No. Pages
<b>Context Documents and Correspondence</b>		
<u>Intimidation in Public Life: CSPL Call for Evidence 24 July 2017</u> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/intimidation-of-parliamentary-candidates-cspl-call-for-evidence">https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/intimidation-of-parliamentary-candidates-cspl-call-for-evidence</a>	24/07/2017	1
<u>Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life 13 December 2017</u> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-a-review-by-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-a-review-by-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life</a>	13/12/2017	88
<u>The Prime Minister's letter to CSPL on the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82e68ced915d74e3404220/20170717_Letter_from_Prime_Minister_to_Lord_Bew_requesting_review_of_intimidation_of_Parliamentary_candidates_1.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82e68ced915d74e3404220/20170717_Letter_from_Prime_Minister_to_Lord_Bew_requesting_review_of_intimidation_of_Parliamentary_candidates_1.pdf</a>	17/07/2017	2
<u>CSPL's reply to Prime Minister's letter on intimidation of Parliamentary candidates</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82441240f0b6230269bb86/20170719_Letter_to_the_Prime_Minister_accepting_intimidation_review_1.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82441240f0b6230269bb86/20170719_Letter_to_the_Prime_Minister_accepting_intimidation_review_1.pdf</a>	19/07/2017	1
<u>Intimidation in Public Life: PM letter in response to Committee's report 6 February 2018</u> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-pm-letter-in-response-to-committees-report">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-pm-letter-in-response-to-committees-report</a>	06/02/2018	3
<b>General Evidence Submissions</b>		

<u>Intimidation in Public Life: summary of quantitative submissions 18 December 2017</u> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-summary-of-quantitative-submissions">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-summary-of-quantitative-submissions</a>	18/12/ 2017	5
<u>Written evidence: submissions 1 - 39</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b0cd48e90e07043f2b9871/1. Intimidation Submissions 1-39.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b0cd48e90e07043f2b9871/1. Intimidation Submissions 1-39.pdf</a>	<i>various</i>	70
<u>Written evidence: submissions 40 - 59</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b0cd6be90e070449d49f00/2. Intimidation Submissions 40-59.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b0cd6be90e070449d49f00/2. Intimidation Submissions 40-59.pdf</a>	<i>various</i>	62
<u>Written evidence: submissions 60 - 79</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b0cd8be90e07043c35f526/3. Intimidation Submissions 60-79.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b0cd8be90e07043c35f526/3. Intimidation Submissions 60-79.pdf</a>	<i>various</i>	81
<u>Written evidence: submissions 80 - 97</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b0cdb3e90e07044b1ef590/4. Intimidation Submissions 80-97.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b0cdb3e90e07044b1ef590/4. Intimidation Submissions 80-97.pdf</a>	<i>various</i>	129
<b>Evidence from Social Media Companies</b>		
<u>Note of meeting with Facebook</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a823313ed915d74e623652a/20170920_Note_of_meeting_with_Facebook.docx">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a823313ed915d74e623652a/20170920_Note_of_meeting_with_Facebook.docx</a>	20/09/ 2017	20
<u>Note of meeting with Google</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a74e183ed915d502d6cbbd8/Note_of_meeting_with_Google_25_October.docx">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a74e183ed915d502d6cbbd8/Note_of_meeting_with_Google_25_October.docx</a>	25/10/ 2017	8
<u>Note of meeting with Jigsaw / Google</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82a5e5ed915d74e6236ec4/20171102_Meeting_transcript_Google_-_2_November.docx">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82a5e5ed915d74e6236ec4/20171102_Meeting_transcript_Google_-_2_November.docx</a>	02/11/ 2017	14
<u>Follow-up written evidence from Google</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a81f0e040f0b62302699fcf/20171101_Google_Follow-up_evidence_email.docx">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a81f0e040f0b62302699fcf/20171101_Google_Follow-up_evidence_email.docx</a>	01/11/ 2017	3

<u>Note of meeting with Twitter</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a81f106ed915d74e3400e29/20171025_Note_of_formal_meeting_with_Twitter.docx">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a81f106ed915d74e3400e29/20171025_Note_of_formal_meeting_with_Twitter.docx</a>	25/10/ 2017	9
<b>Evidence from Political Parties</b>		
<u>Transcript of CSPL public hearing with political parties: 14 September 2017</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82b717ed915d74e6237437/20170928_CSPL_Political_Parties_Hearing_Transcript_3.docx">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82b717ed915d74e6237437/20170928_CSPL_Political_Parties_Hearing_Transcript_3.docx</a>	14/09/ 2017	11
<u>Written evidence: Conservative Party</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82b5d740f0b6230269c4ba/67-Conservative_Party_1.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82b5d740f0b6230269c4ba/67-Conservative_Party_1.pdf</a>	09/09/ 2017	7
<u>Supplementary written evidence: Conservative Party</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a820629ed915d74e3401520/95_-_Conservative_Party.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a820629ed915d74e3401520/95_-_Conservative_Party.pdf</a>	04/10/ 2017	1
<u>Written evidence: Labour Party</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82ceb740f0b62305b94735/74-Labour_Party.docx">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82ceb740f0b62305b94735/74-Labour_Party.docx</a>	08/09/ 2017	9
<u>Supplementary written evidence: Liberal Democrat Party</u> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82df62e5274a2e87dc3673/96_-_Liberal_Democrat_Party.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82df62e5274a2e87dc3673/96_-_Liberal_Democrat_Party.pdf</a>	09/11/ 2017	6
<u>Intimidation in Public Life: Evidence from the Scottish National Party 26 October 2017</u> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-of-parliamentary-candidates-evidence-from-the-scottish-national-party">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-of-parliamentary-candidates-evidence-from-the-scottish-national-party</a>	19/10/ 2017	3
<u>Intimidation in Public Life: roundtable transcript 17 October 2017</u> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-of-parliamentary-candidates-roundtable-transcript">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-of-parliamentary-candidates-roundtable-transcript</a>	12/09/ 2017	27
<u>Intimidation in Public Life: Evidence from the Green Party 5 October 2017</u> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-of-parliamentary-candidates-evidence-from-the-green-party">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-of-parliamentary-candidates-evidence-from-the-green-party</a>	21/09/ 2017	3
<b>Government Response</b>		

<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-pm-letter-in-response-to-committees-report">Intimidation in Public Life: PM letter in response to Committee's report 6 February 2018</a> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-pm-letter-in-response-to-committees-report">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-pm-letter-in-response-to-committees-report</a>	06/02/ 2018	3
<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life-review-of-intimidation-in-public-life">Government response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life Review of Intimidation in Public Life</a> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life-review-of-intimidation-in-public-life">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life-review-of-intimidation-in-public-life</a>	08/03/ 2018	21
		<b>589</b>

Source: *UK Government, Collection: Intimidation in Public Life*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/intimidation-in-public-life>

Table B. Summary of Recommendations: Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (2017)

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Government should bring forward legislation to shift the liability of illegal content online towards social media companies.	Government
The government should consult on the introduction of a new offence in electoral law of intimidating Parliamentary candidates and party campaigners.	Government
The government should bring forward legislation to remove the requirement for candidates standing as local councillors to have their home addresses published on the ballot paper. Returning Officers should not disclose the home addresses of those attending an election court.	Government
Political parties should set clear expectations about the behaviour expected of their members, both offline and online through a code of conduct for members which specifically prohibits any	Political parties

intimidatory behaviour. Parties should ensure that members are familiar with the code. The consequences of any breach of the code should be clear and unambiguous.	
Political parties must ensure that party members who breach the party's code of conduct by engaging intimidation are consistently and appropriately disciplined in a timely manner.	Political parties
Political parties must collect data on the number of complaints against members for engaging in intimidatory behaviour, and the outcome of any disciplinary processes which result from these complaints.	Political parties
The political parties must work together to develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour during election campaigns by December 2018. The code should be jointly enforced by the political parties.	Political parties
<p>Political parties must take steps to provide support for all candidates, including through networks, training, and support and resources. In particular, the parties should develop these support mechanisms for female, BAME, and LGBT candidates who are more likely to be targeted as subjects of intimidation.</p> <p>Political parties must offer more support and training to candidates on their use of social media. This training should include: managing social media profiles, block and mute features, reporting content, and recognising when behaviour should be reported directly to the police.</p>	Political parties
The National Police Chiefs Council should ensure that local police forces have sufficient training to enable them to effectively investigate offences committed through social media. Local police forces should be able to access advice and guidance on the context in which MPs and Parliamentary candidates work.	National Police Chiefs Council
The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice for elections should be updated to include offences relating to intimidation, including offences committed through social media.	College of Policing

The National Police Chiefs Council, working with the Crown Prosecution Service and the College of Policing, should produce accessible guidance for Parliamentary candidates giving clear advice on behaviour they may experience during a campaign which is likely to constitute a criminal offence.	National Police Chiefs Council, working with the Crown Prosecution Service and the College of Policing
Social media companies must develop and implement automated techniques to identify intimidatory content posted on their platforms. They should use this technology to ensure intimidatory content is taken down as soon as possible.	Social media companies
Social media companies must do more to prevent users being inundated with hostile messages on their platforms, and to support users who become victims of this behaviour.	Social media companies
Social media companies must implement tools to enhance the ability of users to tackle online intimidation through user options.	Social media companies
All social media companies must ensure they are able to make decisions quickly and consistently on the takedown of intimidatory content online.	Social media companies
Twitter, Facebook and Google must publish UK-level performance data on the number of reports they receive, the percentage of reported content that is taken down, and the time it takes to take down that content, on at least a quarterly basis.	Social media companies
Social media companies must urgently revise their tools for users to escalate any reports of potential illegal online activity to the police.	Social media companies
The social media companies should work with the government to establish a 'pop up' social media reporting team for election campaigns.	Social media companies
Social media companies should actively provide advice, guidance and support to Parliamentary candidates on steps they can take to remain safe and secure while using their sites.	Social media companies

Press regulation bodies should extend their codes of conduct to prohibit unacceptable language that incites intimidation.	Press regulation bodies (IPSO and Impress)
News organisations should only consider stories from freelance journalists that meet the standards of IPSO’s Editors Code, or the Editorial Guidelines of Impress, as appropriate, and ensure that freelance journalists are aware of this policy.	News organisations

*Reproduced and adapted from: Committee on Standards in Public Life (2017, 2020)*

Table C. Codebook Summary for the CSPL Review Analysis

Code Name	Code Description
Key Events	Indicates key event as a factor in creating/approaching report: /2017 election / Jo Cox Murder / Stephen Timms stabbing /Brexit (2016 European Union referendum) /ScotRef (2014 Scottish independence referendum)
Report Framing	Key aspects of the report framing: /democracy /diversity and equality in politics /gender /public service integrity /safety and security /problem will get worse /social media design /social media use
Critical Actors	Actors who were especially important in the review and/or broader politicisation: /Speaker Hoyle /Theresa May /Women MPs general /Diane Abbott /Diane Abbott Staff /MPs general /Stephen Hart /Third Sector /2017 Amnesty International General Election Twitter abuse research. /Jo Cox Foundation /Social Media Companies /Media

## Appendix 4. Summaries for Policy Document Analysis

Table D. Codebook Summary

Code	Description
Policy	Name of the policy
Document	The policy document that is available e.g., full policy document, statement about the creation of the policy
Date Policy Adopted	Date the policy was adopted
Date of Policy Document	Date of policy document (some policies are updated every year)
Additional Description	Additional description of the policy as described by the institution responsible and/or summarised by me
Sector(s)	Policy sector i.e., Security, Behavioural Conduct
Type of Policy	Type of policy i.e., Institutional body, Legal Guidance
Actor(s) Responsible	Policy actor responsible for policy implementation
Policy Aim	Explicit or implicit aim of the policy/document
Victim(s)	Victim(s)/affected group(s) defined explicitly or assumed implicitly by the policy (in the document and/or using supplementary information)
Perpetrator(s)	Perpetrator(s)/affected group(s) defined explicitly or assumed implicitly by the policy (in the document and/or using supplementary information)
Gender and Intersectionality	Overview of if and how gender and Intersectionality is understood explicitly or implicitly, if the policy/document can be categorised as Gender and Intersectionality - Neutral, Aware, Sensitive, Responsive
Violence	Overview of type of violence covered or assumed in the policy, including if it explicitly or implicitly includes: Physical, Psychological, Sexual, Economic, Semiotic, Online
Change over time	Information on change over time of policies, where relevant and available
Cause	Explanations for why the policy was adopted, as outlined by the policy and/or literature

Table . (Reproduced from Chapter 3) Summary for Identifying Gender and Intersectionality

<b>Representations of Gender and Intersectionality</b>				
	Neutral	Aware	Sensitive	Responsive
<b>Gender</b>	Defines the problem in generic terms. No recognition of gender in relation to the problem of violence. Documents with entire 'silences' on gender are included in this category.	Gender is recognised as a factor in relation to the problem of violence, but not necessarily as a risk factor that makes violence more likely or in relation to gender inequality/gender relations	Certain gender individuals or groups have a particular risk factor in terms of violence because of inequality are coded as 'gender-sensitive'.	Policy has a stated aim of responding to gender inequality
<b>Intersectionality</b>	No recognition of the intersection of gender and other inequalities (though it may demonstrate awareness of inequalities on their own e.g., race)	Intersecting characteristics are recognised in relation to the problem of violence	Recognises intersectional inequality in relation to the problem of violence i.e., intersecting characteristics can impact incidence of violence because of power inequality	Specific, stated aim of responding to intersectional gender inequality

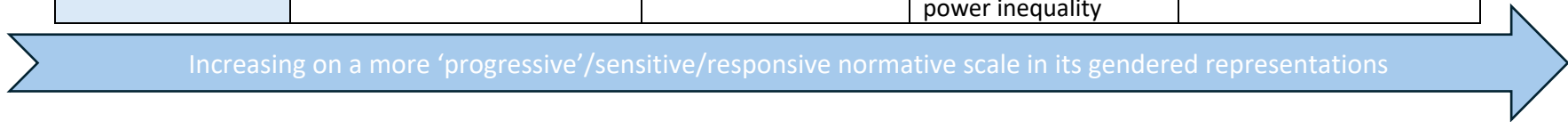


Table. (Reproduced from Chapter 3) Summary for Identifying Forms of Violence

Physical	Includes physical violence i.e., bodily harm e.g., references 'force', 'security', 'assault'
Psychological	Includes psychological violence i.e., harm to mental or emotional state e.g., covers bullying, harassment
Sexual	Includes sexual violence i.e., unwanted sexual behaviour e.g. (sexual) harassment
Economic	Includes economic violence e.g., property damage
Semiotic	Includes semiotic i.e., symbolic or image-based violence towards members of marginalised groups.
Online	Includes violence that happens in online spaces such as email and social media platforms e.g., reference to 'communications', social media abuse

## Appendix 5. Codebook for MPs' Interview Analysis

CODE	EXAMPLE OF CODED TEXT (multiple examples for some codes to indicate some range of text e.g. different party leaders)
<b>POLICY – DESCRIPTIVE</b>	
<b>Policy [The policy the MP refers to (both what they say and the policy they mean e.g. they may say parliament security when it would have been the parliamentary liaison and investigation team)]</b>	
FTAC (Fixated Threat Assessment Centre)	"The Fixated Threat Assessment Centre ... was, you know, the beginning of a recognition that there may be individuals that that are behaving in [this] way" (P10)
ICGS (Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme)	"There is nothing to stop MPs using the scheme. I think they're less likely to, but I think there's nothing to stop them." (P2)
IPSA (Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority)	"IPSA [was] never the blocker. The problem they had was how much time they took to make a decision" (P9)
OpB (Operation Bridger)	"Operation Bridger I suppose, is the national policy for it [violence and abuse towards MPs]" (P5)
OSA (Online Safety Bill/Act)	"I'm glad that the online harms bill has been passed because I was pushing for regulation" (p14)
(Political) Party Codes & Complaints	"I genuinely don't think that there is much between the parties" (P11) [Labour] "I think it's adequate at the moment and it seems working. Like all politics, there will need to be time to review to see, but it appears to be working properly. I think issues are now dealt with as they are and there is no interference from outside people doing it in one way or another." (P4)
PLAIT (Parliamentary Liaison and	"[PLAIT] both take action on the individual issues and investigate them further and also they therefore act as a bit of an intelligence gathering because sometimes what you get is somebody who is abusing multiple MPs, so you get a kind of pattern spotting thing" (P2)

Investigation Team)	
Police Guidance	"The police were actually quite helpful to me at that time. I don't think they dealt with this as a general policy. I think it was seen to me as an individual and I was given advice on what I should do ... ironically, a lot of the things they told me were things that appeared years later as policy" (P4)
PSD (Parliamentary Security Department)	"I think that the UK is struggling at the moment to know how far to protect its MPs. What is reasonable? Most MP's want to walk down the streets and say hello to everybody ... do all that sort of stuff which you should normally be able to do, and I hope they will be able to continue to do it, but it carries a risk now, and it didn't 20 years ago." (P11)
Social Media Org Policy	"I think it's possible for companies to have in place strategies and say, if there's a particular type of incident or something occurs, and we think there's a good chance that this is what the response will be and therefore how can we be ready to counter that." (P8)
<b>Policy Actor [both what they say and the policy they mean e.g. they may say parliament security when it would have been police]</b>	
Courts	"I find it much harder once we got towards the court process ... I wasn't kept informed that I had to go and ask, is there any news? And it wasn't always clear who I should ask so. So, I think that could be improved" (P2)
EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission)	"the policy thing I'd say, it only changed because they [the Labour Party] were made to, because they reached such depths, it was forced on them by the EHRC" (P4)
Men MPs [/Male political culture]	"this is part of the problem with Parliament doing this. Parliament is still dominated by men. And even when the number of women MP's is increasing, the thing that I think is not appreciated as well about Parliament is the power structures internally and within the parties and within the government it's even more male. The higher you go the more male it is, partly in terms of like literally, who's in the room, but also in terms of culture." (P2) "I would have male colleagues saying 'oh, I've just seen this terrible message', and I'm like, yeah, I get like hundreds of a day, what are you talking about?" (P15)
MPs staff	"I said to my staff, all this talk about murder threats, I mean, I haven't had any. And they said, uh, we just don't tell you." (P11)
Parliament (general institution)	"I think there's something about the House of Commons itself. I think it's only really relevant because I'm imagine in the next year or two, everyone is going to be moved out of it. And I think that that might have, I mean I might be dreaming, but it might have a positive reset if it's done well ... on the culture of MPs, on the

	culture of how people see MPs. There's something about seeing MP's in this old building. It's important, but there's something about it that may that could be an opportunity to have a bit of a reset." (P11)
Parliamentary Security	"in my time [the safety and security team at Parliament has] been run by two different women, headed up by two different women, and I think, I don't feel at all that they don't recognise or try and react differently to women and the threats that women feel, not even just are realised, the threats that women feel." (P5)
(Political) Party	"I haven't felt a lack of support. And so now I wouldn't be pressing for more." (P6) "I think even the political parties themselves don't, even, I don't think [my party] takes it seriously" (P15)
(Political) Party Leadership	"leadership really matters in this area. And so, I would hope that, I mean, Rishi is careful about his language, Keir is careful about his language." (P11) "One of my beefs with Boris [Johnson] was that he would always escalate things ... I called him out several times in the Chamber about his language. He just didn't care. Escalate, escalate ... And it has consequences making people angry." (P11) [Labour, Corbyn] "I do think it was a failure of leadership to really call people out and to recognise the scale of the problem" (P7) [Liberal Democrats] "Under the leadership of Jo Swinson, it was a very different moment ... It [abuse] didn't surface at all during that period" (P15)
(Political) Party Whips	"when there is a good woman in the Whip's office ... it makes a world of f*cking difference" (P5)
Police	"some police forces are better than others "(P9)
Social Media Orgs	"we need actually social media companies to take more responsibility around that because it's maybe not the police's job" (P12) "[social media abuse has] definitely got worse since Elon Musk took over Twitter. It felt like Twitter were trying to get a handle on before then" (P5)
(Parliament House of Commons) Speaker (Lindsay Hoyle)	"Parliament slowly – it's when Lindsey Hoyle was Speaker it happened mainly – they started to put alarms in people's, in MPs', homes, which was a big move on." (P4)
<b>POLICY – INTERPRETATIVE</b>	
<b>CAUSES OF POLICY [MPs express their view of factors which explain why the problem was politicised/became a policy problem]</b>	
CSPL Report (Committee on Standards in Public	"I think that was the one that was done by I think it was Lord Bew in the House Lords who did it and it was about basically revealed how damaging abuse of women was having a public life ... it quantified it for the first time" (P11)

Life 2017 Review into Intimidation in Public Life)	
David Amess murder	"in a very short space of time we've lost two colleagues who were just doing their constituency surgeries, so I do think people are more aware of it" (P3)
GE (General Election) 2017	"There was definitely, after the 2017 election, which was particularly febrile and not just for women, but you know, politics generally and obviously we were in a post Jo Cox world then, there was there was sort of moves to look at politically aggravated abuse" (P5)
Jo Cox murder	"It probably took that murder of Jo Cox for people to actually accept that it [serious violence] could really happen" (P4)
MeToo (Movement)	"I think MeToo did create a power shift" (P2)
MPs sharing experiences	"There is more attention. I think because it has got worse is one reason. I think, related to that, there is perhaps a greater confidence to talk about it" (P2)
Third sector	"it wasn't well accepted that women got it worse than men ... until that research [by Amnesty International in 2017], the problem wasn't quantified in a way that meant that you had a credibility talking about it" (P2)
<b>POLICY CHANGE OVER TIME [How the MP perceives how their experience with policy changed over time]</b>	
Parliament	"It was all familiar to me because of all the advice been given to me personally. But, in recent years, those security measures were given to MPs in general by the Parliamentary authorities. I think that was a change." (P4)
Constituency	"Having security at home, that was totally new. Having security like constituency office as well which frankly when I think about in my first two terms how insecure my office was..." (P2)
Police	"The reaction of the police has massively improved with regard to social media. They do take it seriously. Where they can find people, they do try." (P5)
Social Media	"the platforms perhaps improving their reporting mechanisms and, perhaps doing a bit more" (P15)
Attitudes	"all this stuff that everyone's putting up with. When I think about the generation above me in politics and literally what they had to put up with" (P2)
<b>POLICY EFFECTIVENESS</b>	
Attention to Gender	"I wouldn't say it's specific, <b>Operation Bridger</b> isn't in any way specific to the issue of women. It has quite a lot of focus on it but, no, that's not like written in." (P5)

	"It's good that that [PLAIT] is there, yes, but there's a reliance on a kind of process and there's an under-appreciation of the cultural, undercurrent and foundation of this problem. So, this problem is not that people are abusing MP's, it's that people are abusing women MP's in particular." (P2)
Attention to Race	"I also feel like there is more of a focus more on abuse towards female politicians, and there isn't always a recognition about race." (P1)
Problem taken seriously	"I'm not saying that my experience with PLAIT was bad, because actually it was, it was fine. The people were very nice, and you know, ultimately they did investigations" (P2)
Not kept informed (police & courts)	"I have zero visibility of why this has happened, what the concerns are ... I have no idea what was going on ... it's quite frustrating" (P6)
Prevention	"When you think of the fact that two MPs have been murdered, I don't think anything close to enough has been done to mitigate against that happening again." (P15)
MPs do not use policy	"There is nothing to stop MPs using the [ICGS] scheme. I think they're less likely to, but I think there's nothing to stop them." (P2) "I drive my staff mad. I won't wear my panic alarm and all the rest of it because it drives me crackers that I have to live like that." (p13)
<b>OTHER SOLUTIONS [MPs express their policy ideas to address the problem of violence towards them. (There is an explicit or implicit perception that current policy is ineffective at dealing with the problem)]</b>	
Aggravation in sentencing	"there potentially could be aggravations in sentencing that are about a threat to democracy" (P5)
Community support	"There is a kind of camaraderie ... across parties, particularly among the women. There's a shared kind of understanding. But, that's not really a substitute for really being helped to deal with it [abuse]." (P2)
Diverse political representation	"What's the greatest thing we can do? As long as women are unusual and are in the minority, that's why people will write about them. Once we get to 50:50, that will make more of a difference." (P15)
Education	"is also important about them is that they go beyond, they are multifaceted, they go beyond a security lens. So they go into the education, they go into the to the sort of broader policy area. They are not only about protective security." (P10)
Equality Act	"I do think we are we are missing a trick because there's already supposed to be policies and frameworks put in place to deal with discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics. We have a whole Equality Act dedicated to it. But I don't see those mechanisms being employed to protect the MPs, which worries me..." (P3)
Misogyny a hate crime	"misogyny should be a criminal offense ..." (p14)

Social Media regulation	"the big thing is that the online space needs to be much better regulated ..." (P3)
<b>EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE</b>	
<b>Forms (of violence)</b>	
Domestic	"I think that there needs to be a proper systematic support for victims of domestic violence who are members of Parliament or working in Parliament. That just doesn't exist. ... There's this thing called 'The Employers' Initiative for Domestic Abuse' which is having policies for it when your staff members or people in your organization. I think should be standard across political parties and Parliament. Parliament funnily enough is recognised as one of the players, so they have it for staff. Parliament helped set it up." (P5)
International	"I [have] people who abuse me from all over the place. There's definitely a problem when some of that threat and abuse comes internationally" (P5)
Not criminal	"The low-level abuse stuff is very, very common and it's significant in its volume. And so, we need actually social media companies to take more responsibility around that because it's maybe not the police's job ... It's still abuse. It's not necessarily criminal. It's not scrutiny, debate and discussion, so we're talking about abuse" (P12)
Online	"receiving abusive emails sometimes on also on social media" (P1)
Physical	"I can remember one other incident when a guy spat on me. I can't remember why, it wasn't at all clear at the time what exactly prompted it. But it was rather unpleasant. And, it was, you know, at a time when I was completely on my own, I didn't have anyone with me. I was just at a surgery on my own" (P6)
Psychological	"They changed tactics. They couldn't do that open harassing of me again because it was all public back then. So they did it very differently ... people didn't look at me, they'd turn their heads away ... this guy had organised a campaign to dehumanise me, and they were told they must never ever call me by my name, and they must call me – well, at best, not call me anything at all because I had to be dehumanised, and if I they had to refer to me, I was 'The MP' because that was a very non personal thing." (P4)
Sexual	"you've got to see it within society generally being made more aware of the position of women and particularly sexual harassment and that being more of an issue since the whole Me Too thing" (P7)
<b>Identity (Specific identities that experience violence e.g. in terms of more violence and/or certain forms)</b>	
Ethnic and/or Religious Minority	"the abuse is racist ... it's to do with me as my identity ... rather than what I'm saying and what I'm advocating" (P12)
Intersect [abuse experience of the	"Diane Abbott gets more abusive tweets in one day that others do. ... it all goes after both her gender and her race" (P2)

intersections of different identities]	“we know that structural discrimination exists, and I think that it's always been very clear to me that power structures and the intersection of different oppressions are very much a feature in how it [violence] plays out in society, but also how it plays out in politics at every level” (P12)
LGBTQI+	“if you multiple intersecting, if you're a gay woman or if you're if you're a black woman or a Muslim woman, then, you're just experiencing this on multiple levels” (P2)
Woman	“...women get it worse, ethnic minority MPs get it worse, LGBT MPs get it worse, anyone with a disability gets it worse, anyone with any kind of protective characteristic does get it a million times worse than, let's say, a straight white man...” (P3) “I think there's, in terms of framing your policies, the wider framing has got to be what's happening in terms of gender equity” (P7)
<b>MPs positionality [abuse related specifically to do with being an MP]</b>	
Abused because MPs	it's not about your profile or your ethnicity ... in lots of cases it's just about being an MP” (P13)
Not Employees	“as an MP, you're very vulnerable, because really unless that's you have some policy that restricts or screens in some way, I don't know how you do it [constituency surgeries]” (P4)
Democracy	“if we live in a representative democracy, how can it be representative if a representative lives in fear of their life?” (P13)
<b>Impact</b>	
Abuse in politics expected	“I do feel that abuse towards politicians has become the norm, where it's expected that, it's 'part of the game'” (P1)
Abuse increased o	“the problem has definitely escalated” (P11)
Chilling on political participation	“I do feel like those that are not on social media as MPs, that decision not to be on it is more to do with online abuse” (12) “That's a whole other thing, it's [abuse] actually chasing people out of politics.” (P11)
Mental Health	“after Jo's murder, what we got was practical steps to keep safe, but there wasn't anything to help with the emotion of it or the anxiety” (P7)
On Family	“I had an issue where like someone was like outside my kids' nursery ... And I had to vacate the home in which I lived in London when that happens ... Thinking about the impacts on wider family, that was pretty serious...” (P15)
On Staff	“I think the impact on staff is huge. I think they probably get the brunt of it, right. They answer the phone, they read the emails ... there is a mental toll, there is an emotional toll” (P2)
Time	“we're so busy, it's difficult to always report them [incidents of abuse] really quickly in terms of the boost that you get and sometimes you don't really bother because if you spend time doing that, it takes away from

	delivering on your cases [for] constituents” (P1) “I switched off my comments recently. I feel like I won’t say life has got better, but I just feel like it’s less of a headache and things to add to my teams’ tasks – the difference is the workload, practically speaking” (P12)
<b>Causes of the Problem [MPs express their view of factors which explain the occurrence of violence towards MPs]</b>	
Backlash to diversity	“that is probably partly as a backlash with the increasing representation of women” (P2)
Brexit Referendum	“Brexit was a real catalyst for MPs being targeted and being seen as legitimate targets” (P14)
Lack of understanding of MPs role	“there’s definitely a misconception of the role of an MP and the things surrounding us, but that lends itself to abuse” (P3)
Mainstream media	“The most dehumanised I’ve ever felt in the abuses that I’ve suffered is when it’s been poorly handled by the media” (P5)
Not (necessarily) a new problem	“I don’t think that historically it’s unusual that we [MPs] suffer violence and abuse, but there’s very specific nature of women, the violence, essentially being following the same patterns ... [of] classic violence against women and girls.” (P5)
Polarisation	“we have entered an increasingly polarised world where people enjoy getting, enjoy, people just do get very worked up and angry, and politicians are often the but of that” (P11)
Poor mental health	“it’s a wider point about society more generally, isn’t it, that we’ve got we do have a bit of an epidemic of mental health problems at the moment and there aren’t really the resources to support people adequately.” (P6)
Scottish Referendum	“the first time people started talking about abusive behaviour online in the context of politics was during the Scottish independence referendum. People talked about the ‘Cyber Nats’ and there had been some studies done looking at Russian involvement in disinformation around the referendum” (P8)
Social Media	“it’s kind of very boring and old-fashioned to say blame social media, and it isn’t all the fault social media, but there is there is something about the algorithmic amplification of social media that definitely makes it easier for this type of abuse to flourish” (P2)

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