18

SWEDEN

Carina Bischoff and Marlene Wind

Figure 18.1 Map of Sweden
Sweden

Table 18.1 Sweden profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EU entry year</th>
<th>1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schengen entry year</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEPs elected in 2009</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEPs under Lisbon Treaty</td>
<td>20 since 1 December 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two additional seats allocated to Amelia Andersdotter (Greens/EFA) and to Jens Nilsson (S&amp;D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total area*</td>
<td>438,574 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>9,644,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density**</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of population</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political system</td>
<td>Constitutional Monarchy, Parliamentary Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of state</td>
<td>King Carl XVI Gustaf (September 1973–)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of government</td>
<td>Fredrik Reinfeldt, Moderate Party (M) (October 2006–), Moderate Party (M), Centre Party (C), Liberal People’s Party (FP) and the Christian Democrats (KD) Government Coalition (October 2006–)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political majority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency</td>
<td>Swedish Krona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohead GDP in PPS</td>
<td>44,300 €</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes:
* Total area including inland waters.
** Population density: the ratio of the annual average population of a region to the land area of the region.

1 Geographical position

Sweden is located in northern Europe, bordering Norway to the west and Finland to the northeast. It has a long coastline to the east and south, and in the south the Öresund bridge connects the country to Denmark. About 85 per cent of the Swedish population lives in urban areas and, in particular, in the capital Stockholm, which has 1.3 million inhabitants.

Even though in geographical terms Sweden is the third largest country in Europe, it has a population below ten million, and in the context of the European Union the country is regarded as belonging to the group of small states.

2 Historical background

The history of Sweden as an independent state, which goes back to the Middle Ages, was characterized by territorial wars with its neighbours. Vast territories presently belonging to Finland and Norway were once under Swedish rule. However, cooperation with neighbouring countries was achieved for longer periods of time, and from 1397 to 1523, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway formed the Union of Kalmar.

From around the eighteenth century, and during the following centuries, the Swedish population grew rapidly and at the same time the country’s agricultural production increased.
Moreover, progress was made in extracting the country’s natural resources, such as wood, iron, and copper, laying the ground for the industrialization of the country. Changes in the social and economic structures that followed industrialization and urbanization during the nineteenth century resulted in a growing proletariat and the formation of the social democratic movement in the 1880s–1890s.

Sweden did not participate actively in WWII and did not suffer from the same post-war economic hardship as most of the other European countries. Instead, the country’s economy flourished and after the war the Social Democratic government, led by Prime Minister Tage Erlander, introduced several welfare measures that made Sweden an excellent model of social reform. Until the 1970s, Sweden’s generous welfare policies were financed by a booming economy, and the tax system was designed in order to achieve a better redistribution of the wealth. However, in the mid-1970s, the Swedish economy went into recession, the unemployment rate went up, and the public debt increased dramatically.

Despite this, Sweden did not, like Denmark, seek EC membership, as this would have compromised the country’s neutral position. However, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Sweden’s relations with the European Union changed. In light of the new geopolitical situation, and following another decline in the Swedish economy, the government increased its efforts to enter the European Union at the beginning of the 1990s.

Sweden’s application for membership in the European Union was endorsed in a popular referendum held on 13 November 1994, in which 52.3 per cent of the electorate voted in favour of membership. Sweden entered the Union on 1 January 1995, and has since then been active in areas such as environmental and social policies. Sweden’s entry to the EU did not automatically include accession to the EMU. The question of whether Sweden should join the euro-zone was instead decided through a referendum held on 14 September in 2003, and the result was a rejection by 55.9 per cent of the voters. According to opinion polls, this majority against joining the euro-zone has increased even further since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008.

3 Geopolitical profile

Since the Napoleonic wars in the nineteenth century, Sweden has pursued a non-aligned foreign policy in peacetime and neutrality in wartime and, unlike Denmark and Norway, it has never been a member of NATO. More recently, however, there have been indications that its position of non-alignment is changing.

Since joining the European Union, neutrality has been watered down, and Sweden is now strongly involved in the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy, and participates in NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme. In spite of these commitments, Swedish foreign policy is still heavily influenced by its tradition of conflict resolution, peacekeeping and democracy building, and its development policy is one of the most generous in the world. In addition, Sweden joined the Council of Europe in 1949, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1961, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United Nations in 1946, and the International Monetary Fund in 1951.

4 Overview of the political landscape

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. An important reform of the Swedish political system came with the adoption of a new Constitution in 1975, the
so-called ‘Instrument of Government’, which replaced the 1809 Constitution. As a result, the Riksdag changed from a bicameral to a unicameral system with 349 seats.

Throughout the twentieth century, Swedish politics was dominated by the Swedish Social Democratic Workers’ Party (Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetarepartiet), usually called the Social Democratic Party or Social Democrats, that governed uninterrupted from 1932 until 1976. Subsequently, for six years, the government was in the hands of the three centre-right parties: Moderaterna (the Moderates) – the former Conservative party – Folkpartiet (the Liberal People’s Party), and Centerpartiet (the Centre Party). Differences between the parties made stable collaboration difficult and the four successive non-Socialist governments in the period represented a single-party minority government, as well as coalitions of two or three parties. In the 1982 elections the Social Democrats were able to regain office and except for a short period in opposition from 1991 to 1994, the Social Democratic Party remained in power until 2006.

Despite their dominance, the Social Democrats never succeeded in winning an absolute majority in Parliament and were therefore required to cooperate with other parties. Sweden has negative parliamentarism, which means that a government does not need a majority to support it but can rule as long as there is no majority in Parliament against it. Therefore, the Social Democrats usually ruled as a minority government, although the party shared office with centre-right parties in the 1950s. In the past, a key factor behind the Social Democrats’ virtual monopoly was undoubtedly the divided nature of the opposition, with one or two parties on the left and three or four parties on the right, which struggled to form a viable alternative. In addition, the Social Democrats were for a long time regarded as the embodiment of the special Swedish concept of Folkhemmet (The People’s Home), representing a universal welfare model with a focus on equality.

The 2006 Riksdag election led to a majority coalition government, consisting of four centre-right parties, the Moderate Party, the Centre Party, the Liberal People’s Party, and the Christian Democratic Party. This was hardly business as usual and it seemed to open a new era in Swedish politics, one characterized by greater balance between the left and the right and a true government alternative. This change in the political landscape was more than just a short interlude, as confirmed in the 2010 parliamentary elections when the centre-right parties had to build parliamentary majorities with parties outside the ruling coalition.

5 Brief account of the political parties

The two main political parties in the Swedish political system are: the Social Democratic Party and the Moderates, which were called the Conservative Party until 1969. All other parties are small and tend to coalesce with either the Social Democrats or the Moderates.

Founded in 1889, the Swedish Social Democratic Workers’ Party (Social Democrats) has dominated and shaped Swedish politics since 1932. Its main aim is to create a more egalitarian society; the expansion of the Swedish welfare state is one of its major achievements over the past 80 years. However, since the 1970s the electoral success of the party has declined, something that could be partially explained by the changes adopted in the welfare state, due to the growing pressures of globalization. Since 2006, the party has been in opposition and has suffered from a severe leadership crisis. Amongst the left-wing parties that often support or coalesce with the Social Democrats are the Green Party and the Left Party.

The Green Party (Miljöpartiet) was founded in 1980 and emerged out of the strong post-materialist subculture in Sweden. It advocates environmentally friendly policies combined with strong support for social engagement in society, and it gives priority to issues such as the fight
against climate change, the preservation of the generous welfare state providing social security to the Swedish people, and job creation.

The Left Party (Vänsterpartiet) was originally named the Communist Party and was founded in 1917 as a faction that left the Social Democratic party. After being expelled from Comintern in 1929, it became the Left Party Communists and finally, in 1990, it adjusted to the new post-Soviet reality under the name of the Left Party.

On the centre-right of the political spectrum there are four parties: the Moderates, the Liberal People’s Party, the Centre Party, and the Christian Democratic Party.

Founded in 1904, the Moderates are an old party, but until 1976 the party had major difficulties overcoming the dominance of the Social Democrats in Swedish politics. Tax cuts and privatization of the public sector are key issues on the political agenda of the Moderates. They underline the importance of a strong surplus economy, whilst emphasizing the need to sustain the Swedish welfare state.

The Liberal People’s Party, established in 1934, advocates the traditional values of an open society, the defence of civil rights, and liberal economic principles.

Set up in 1913 as an agrarian party, the Centre Party has over the years become more of a liberal party advocating issues related to free enterprise, job creation, gender equality, and the environment.

The Christian Democratic Party (Kristdemokraterna), founded in 1964, focuses its political programme on Christian and traditional family values.

Finally, on the far right, it is possible to find the Swedish Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna), who appeared for the first time on the political stage in 1988, but had to wait until 2010 in order to gain parliamentary representation. Like most extreme right-wing parties, the Swedish Democrats have a very nationalistic and anti-immigration agenda.

5.1 Party attitudes towards the European Union

The Greens and the Left Party have been the most Eurosceptic of the political parties represented in Parliament since Sweden entered the European Union in 1995. Both have advocated Sweden’s withdrawal from the EU, but in 2008 the Greens reverted this stand, whereby the Left Party became the only party against EU membership.

The Centre Party has all along been in favour of European integration, but it rejected Swedish membership of the EMU and recommended a ‘No’ vote in the 2003 referendum on joining the euro-zone.
In terms of public support for the EU-sceptic parties, both the Greens and the Left Party were very successful in the first two EP elections held in Sweden in 1995 and 1999. However, in the 2004 EP election the aggregated share of the vote for the two parties dropped from 30.1 per cent in 1995 and 25.3 per cent in 1999 to 18.8 per cent in 2004, and then dropped even further to 16.7 per cent in the 2009 EP election.

The fact that for many years both parties had no prospect of entering government is congruent with a party strategy or thesis claiming that Euroscepticism is a vehicle for domestic dissent and follows the politics of opposition (Taggart, 1998; Sitter, 2001). The recent turn of the Greens on EU membership lends support to this interpretation. However, as Nicholas Aylett points out, there are also ideological roots at the base of the party positions (Aylott, 2008). The Left Party supports a model of political economy with a large public sector and sees the EU as threatening this. Conversely, the Greens’ original anti-European stance might be perceived as being at odds with its ecological concerns, which favour supranational regulation, as do many other green parties in Europe. Furthermore, The Greens are strongly committed to decentralized decision-making, local democracy, and neutrality in international relations. Two of its bedrock concerns are in fundamental opposition to Europe, and even to the Greens in the European Parliament. It is, therefore, not possible to ascribe the party’s history of Euroscepticism to a strategy of capitalizing on electoral dissatisfaction, or at least not to this motive alone.

Until 2004, the parties running in EP races were the same as those that competed for the Riksdag elections. Then Junilistan (the June List) was founded as an EU-sceptic popular movement. As in the case of the June Movement, a party which already existed in Denmark, the June List did not seek representation in the national Parliament, but only in the EP. The June List rejects further integration, but is not against EU membership as such.

Figure 18.2 Support for hard Eurosceptic parties at EP and national elections in Sweden

None of the parties have split as a result of disagreement on questions relating to the EU. However, although popular and elite Euroscepticism has not manifested itself clearly at the system level, this is not to say that parties have not felt its impact. Many Swedish parties can count Eurosceptics amongst their members and three of them, the Social Democrats, the Centre Party, and the Christian Democrats, even comprise organized Eurosceptic factions.

In the Social Democratic Party a Eurosceptic faction was created in 2002 in opposition to EU membership, although none of the Social Democratic MPs expressed a real wish for Sweden to leave the EU (Aylott, 2008). Instead, milder, more moderate forms of Eurosceptic attitudes, including opposition to the EMU, prevailed.

Factionalism of a harder and more persistent nature has been found in the Centre Party and amongst the Christian Democrats. In a country where party cohesion and discipline are generally high, these Eurosceptic factions have surprisingly continued to exist and a balance between candidates with pro- and anti-European profiles has been found on the party ticket. This tolerance within parties, coupled with the low salience of European issues in national elections, undoubtedly goes a long way towards explaining why EU membership has not had a significant impact on the Swedish party system.

6 Public opinion and the European Union

In the first years following accession, there was a significant drop in the number of citizens who thought that membership of the EU was ‘a good thing’. In fact, by 1996, 20 per cent more Swedish respondents expressed a negative perception of EU membership. However, since then there has been a consistent downward trend in the percentage of Eurosceptics, and by 2009 the picture was completely reversed, with 35 per cent more Swedes looking positively at the European Union.

![Figure 18.3 Swedish attitude to the European Union](https://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm)

*Figure 18.3* Swedish attitude to the European Union

Sweden

And yet, it should not be forgotten that one out of five Swedes remains very critical, and, as Aylott puts it:

If the term is used in a relative sense, Sweden is a Eurosceptical country. By autumn 2002, across the European Union (EU), just one in ten citizens was estimated to believe that his or her country’s membership of the EU was a ‘bad thing’. In Sweden, it was one in four.

(ibid., 181)

As Figure 18.3 reveals, the rather EU-sceptical Swedes have become gradually more positive towards the EU, albeit not Euro-enthusiastic. A tension persists in the representation of popular views on Europe in Sweden, highlighting a discrepancy between party positions and public opinion.

7 National and EP electoral systems

The Swedish electoral system builds on proportional representation (PR), which guarantees a fair distribution of seats on the basis of party voting shares. The electoral period for the Riksdag is four years, whilst for the EP elections it is five. The 4 per cent threshold applies to both electoral contests, which precludes the smallest parties from gaining representation. One of the few differences between EP and Riksdag elections refers to the number of the constituencies, whilst these are 29 for Riksdag elections, there is only one single constituency for the EP elections. With the Lisbon Treaty, Sweden got two additional seats in the European Parliament, thus, since 1 December 2009, there have been 20 Swedish MEPs. The parties running in the EP race can list as many candidates as they wish, and Swedish voters can express their preference for individual candidates from non-ordered party lists. There are no rules limiting the use of opinion and exit polls.

8 A glance at the EP and national elections

In the 2010 parliamentary election, eight parties obtained representation. On the left of the political spectrum the parties were: the Left Party, the Green Party, and the Social Democratic Party. At the centre-right the parties were: the Centre Party, the Moderates, the Liberal People’s Party, and the Christian Democratic Party. Finally, on the extreme right, Sverigedemokraterna (the Swedish Democrats) entered Parliament for the first time with 5.7 per cent of the vote.

One of the key differences between Riksdag and EP elections is turnout. Since 1998, turnout at national elections has ranged between 80.1 and 84.6 per cent, whilst that of Euro-elections has oscillated between 37.9 and 45.5 per cent. Another difference is the constellation of small parties with very specific issues on their agenda that run in the EP elections. Thus in the 2009 EP election, it was not only the Eurosceptic movement, the June List, that ran, but also the Feminist Initiative and the Pirate Party, which both have a very narrow political programme.

After joining the European Union, Sweden held its first EP election in 1995. The second EP contest took place in 1999 following the normal election cycle. In the first two elections only the established parties participated, as the single-issue parties had not formed yet. Instead, Euroscepticism in Sweden was expressed by the Left Party, the Greens and, to some extent, the Social Democrats, who were split on the EU question. In the latter case, some candidates ran a somewhat more anti-European campaign than that recommended by the party leadership.

The media coverage of the 1999 EP election campaign was confusing and dealt mostly with the MEPs’ allowances and salaries. The front figures in the Social Democratic Party and in the Moderate Party kept a low profile and rarely appeared in the media. Amongst some of the main
European issues discussed in the election campaigns conducted by the political parties were: a European defence identity, consumer protection, including the question of hormones in beef, and issues related to the labour market and employment. The latter was not least brought up by the Social Democrats and the Moderates, whereby the parties reinvigorated the left–right approach to European affairs.

Table 18.3 National election results in Sweden: 1994–2010 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vänsterpartiet</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialdemokraterna</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miljöpartiet</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centerpartiet</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folkpartiet</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristdemokrate</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderaterna</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sverigedemokraterna</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turnout</strong></td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 2004 European election turned out to be a more exciting event than the previous one, as the newly formed June List entered the stage. The campaign focussed on three themes: (1) the European labour market system, which was launched by the Social Democrats who argued that the Services Directive potentially undermined the Swedish model; (2) the bureaucracy in Brussels, which was emphasized by several of the candidates who, speaking to the Eurosceptic Swedish public, talked about taking power back to the Member States; and (3) the European Union Foreign and Defence Policy was put on the agenda by the Centre Party which, to the surprise of everyone since the party had voted against joining the euro-zone, argued that qualified majority voting should be introduced over international issues. Moreover, the Moderates and the Liberals were concerned with expanding the EU’s powers to fight crime (Aylott and Sundström, 2009, 5), and the Christian Democrats were concerned that Sweden’s strict alcohol policy could be undermined by the EU.

9 The 2009 European election

9.1 Party lists and manifestos

The parties that ran in the 2009 EP election can be divided into two categories:

- generally pro-EU: the Social Democrats, the Moderates, the Christian Democrats, the Liberals, and the Centre Party;
- generally Eurosceptics: the June List, the Sweden Democrats, the Greens, the Left Party, and the Feminist Initiative.

All candidates running in the EP election had to be announced by the parties before 13 March 2009, and by this date approximately 500 candidates from a total of 24 parties had been listed. The leading candidates in the EP election were generally a mix of well-known personalities, although not necessarily from the world of politics, and unknown candidates, including MEPs and national politicians.

The head of the list for the Social Democrats, Party Secretary Marita Ulvskog, was a somewhat controversial candidate representing the EU-sceptical section of the party. Her scepticism was reflected in the general Social Democratic campaign, which focussed on problems in the Swedish labour market caused by the European Court of Justice’s Laval verdict, which allows EU companies, in this case a Latvian company, to settle and work in Sweden without offering their employees the same working conditions as those required by Swedish collective agreements.

The Feminist Initiative, founded in 2004, had unsuccessfully run for the Riksdag elections in 2006. In the 2009 EP election, it presented as its leading candidate the former leader of the Left Party, Gudrun Schyman, who personified the focus on promoting gender equality.

The Centre Party, the Moderates, the Greens (Carl) and the Left Party, all nominated as the heads of their party lists former MEPs who already had experience with the European Parliament and EU politics, although they were not necessarily familiar to the broader public.

Marit Paulsen, a Liberal MEP between 1999 and 2004, returned to politics after a back injury, and she entered the campaign as one of the strongest candidates, with animal welfare as one of her key campaign issues. Her ability to speak about the EU in a manner easily understood by the general public gave talk of a ‘Marit effect’ with reference to the Liberals’ improvements in the polls.

After all the leading candidates from the June List had backed out, former Left Party member and academic Sören Wibe entered the campaign as the main candidate for the Eurosceptic June List.
The Christian Democrats nominated the young Ella Bohlin as their leading candidate, but she soon found herself in fierce competition with the more experienced Alf Svensson, co-founder of the party and former party leader as well as minister.

One party that only ran in the 2009 EP election is the Pirate Party (Piratpartiet), which tends to be somewhat critical about the EU, but its position is difficult to ascertain, since it is based on single a issue: the reform of copyright laws and internet privacy. However, the party’s opposition to the Lisbon Treaty indicated a certain degree of scepticism. The head of the list of the Pirate Party, Christian Angstrom, one of the founders, probably received (somewhat surprisingly) the most media attention over the course of the campaign.

The Pirate Party was able to put forward topics such as the reform of copyright legislation and internet privacy as some of the 2009 EP election’s most significant issues, which ultimately also received considerable attention in the press. The government had been struggling with these issues in 2008 when it was accused of infringing upon the right to privacy when attempting to allocate further internet surveillance rights to the National Defence Radio Establishment. Along with the conviction of the Swedish founders of Pirate Bay, an online forum for sharing digital files, these events boosted the Pirate Party’s electoral platform in April 2009.

Almost every party included environmental issues in their manifestos. The Greens went the furthest by suggesting that the EU, by 2020, had reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent (Aylott and Sundström, 2009, 7). This clearly contrasted with the current goal of 20 per cent, which many already viewed to be ambitious. All of the parties were against the EU’s common agricultural policy (Aylott and Sundström, 2009).

The traditional left-parties have always given priority to issues concerning employment and the labour market, but now the ‘New Moderates’ emphasized how they also sought to protect the Swedish labour-market model (ibid.). The traditional left–right division between the parties was shown in their position on the issue of health care. The centre-right parties thus argued that Swedish citizens should be able to seek health treatment in other EU countries, with the Swedish government paying the medical bills. The Liberals went a step further, advocating for the right to seek medical care in the EU without consulting Swedish authorities. This was in line with the European debate on the upcoming patient directive. The left–centre faction argued that the medical system ought to remain in purely national hands (ibid., 7).

The manifestos and campaign issues reveal how, even though the picture was fragmented and national topics discussed, the campaign still had a European flavour (Aylott and Sundström, 2009).

**9.2 Electoral campaign**

The Swedish EP Information Office ran an institutional campaign that included television spots, radio adverts, press kits, media seminars, billboards, installations, and social media. In this pan-European campaign, Member States chose amongst a variety of messages that were nationally relevant to highlight the importance of the EP elections. For its messages, Sweden chose energy, consumer protection, and border security. The EPIO in Stockholm targeted three main groups: the media, teachers, and youth (Suni, 2010).

A ‘choice box’, a room equipped with computers and cameras, was placed in Stockholm to encourage citizens to express themselves and leave a message for MEPs. Television spots were distributed for free: commercial TV4 aired a spot 36 times, Canal 7 aired one 152 times, and Open Channel aired a spot twice. Additionally, the EPIO in Sweden created a celebrity event that gained a lot of media attention, where a number of Swedish celebrities – together with Commissioner Margot Wallström – voted on the first day of early voting. To target younger voters, the EPIO in Stockholm used social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace (ibid.).
Other campaign tools were used as well: billboards were put up in Stockholm, Malmö, and Gothenburg and installations on security and energy were placed in several Swedish cities. Additionally, the EPIO organized one-day training courses for about 200 young people so that they could organize election-related activities in their respective youth organizations. Swedish MEPs Göran Färm and Christofer Fjellner participated in the last training session (European Parliament, 2009).

9.3 Electoral results

An interesting feature of the 2009 Euro-election was to see how the changes that had occurred within the national government after the 2006 Riksdag election were reflected at the EP level. It was also the first electoral contest since the Green Party had given up its demand for Swedish withdrawal from the EU and had adopted a more soft Eurosceptic profile.

The turnout in the 2009 EP election, at 45 per cent, was higher than ever before and placed Sweden at the top compared to countries without compulsory voting. Analyses of the election have shown that the Pirate Party’s ability to mobilize young voters and potential abstainers probably contributed significantly to this result (Aylott and Sundström, 2009). However, the actual turnout represents just over half of the turnout in the latest national elections, and European politics remain unable to compete with domestic politics for voters’ attention.

In the 2009 EP election three parties ran on different, very narrow political programmes: the June List, the Feminist Initiative, and the Pirate Party. The most Eurosceptic parties, the Left Party and the June List, fared very poorly. The Left Party had its share of the vote halved and lost one seat, whilst the June List lost around three-quarters of its voters, and thereby lost all three seats it had won in the previous EP election. The Feminist Initiative, which also ran on a Eurosceptic platform, and was a newcomer to the European elections, had no greater success at the polls, and it failed to garner enough votes to earn a single seat.

It is difficult to interpret the results as something other than a natural consequence of the shift in popular opinion towards a more EU-positive position. The fact that the Green Party, which abandoned its hard Eurosceptic position in 2008, was not punished by the voters, but on the contrary almost doubled its support and number of EP seats, seems to support this view. However, it must be kept in mind that the Greens still have a soft Eurosceptic profile, and in that regard it was the only Eurosceptic party that actually had a good election result. The Centre Party, which traditionally has been more hesitant towards Europe, and supported a ‘No’ in the Euro-referendum, did not do well compared to the last election for the Riksdag.

Whilst the overall shift in popular views on Europe presents a background for the lack of success of the Eurosceptic parties, it is also likely that competitive pressures from both the Social Democrats and the Moderates played a certain role. As described earlier, both parties officially advocate pro-European policies, but in 2009 presented rather sceptical views on Europe to the voters. The Social Democrats even chose their leading candidate from the party’s Eurosceptical faction, but their strategy did not produce better results in 2009.

As already mentioned, the winners of the 2009 EP Election were the Greens, the Liberals and the Pirate Party. Whilst the Liberals were mildly pro–European, the Pirate Party took a soft-sceptical approach by opposing the Lisbon Treaty on the grounds of democratic concerns.

9.4 Campaign finance

Financial support to political parties is a crucial issue in Sweden. Swedish regulations are rather loose and there is no limit to the amount a party can receive from a private sponsor. However,
## Table 18.5 List of Swedish MEPs: seventh legislature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>National party</th>
<th>Political group</th>
<th>Professional background</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Committee/Chair</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna Maria Corazza Bildt</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>UN officer</td>
<td>10/03/1963</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Internal Market and Consumer Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena Ek</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>County councillor</td>
<td>16/01/1958</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Industry, Research and Energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian Engström</td>
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<td>Greens/EFA</td>
<td>Computer programmer</td>
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<td>Internal Market and Consumer Protection/Legal Affairs</td>
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<td>1 Budgets</td>
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<td>Christofer Fehnner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gunnar Hökmark</td>
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<td>Economic and Monetary Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna Ibrisagic</td>
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<td>EPP</td>
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<td>23/05/1967</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isabella Löven</td>
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<td>Greens/EFA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olle Ludvigsson</td>
<td>S</td>
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<td>28/10/1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marit Paulsen</td>
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<td>Vice-President of the Liberal People of Sweden</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carl Schlyter</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Alf Svensson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eva-Britt Svensson</td>
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<td>Women’s Rights and Gender Equality</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Åsa Westlund</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Amelia Andersdotter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jens Nilsson</td>
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<td>Politician</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Regional Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

public support is by far the most important source of campaign finance for Swedish parties, and election campaigns are primarily financed by the state. The amount a party receives is calculated on the basis of the number of seats they hold in the Riksdag.

10 Theoretical interpretation of Euro-elections

10.1 Second-Order Election theory

If voters treat the EP election as second-order contests, we would expect higher returns for the opposition rather than ruling parties. In fact, they could take the opportunity to voice their dissatisfaction against the government and to show support for smaller parties compared to national elections.

Conversely, citizens may also use the EP contest to genuinely express their sentiments on Europe. If this is the case, Hix and Marsh (2007) suggest that this will lead to higher support for parties with a strong EU profile, either negative or positive, and for green parties, given that the environment has been viewed as a European issue since the late 1980s, and greater volatility in EP elections than national elections.

Lower turnout can be taken as supporting both hypotheses or none, since a failure to vote can indicate Euroscepticism or reflect factors such as a lower level of media attention.

In the case of Sweden, the smaller parties have gained more in EP elections than large parties compared to national elections. Opposition parties have gained more than those in government, and the parties with a Eurosceptic and/or Green profile have generally appeared to have a comparative advantage in Swedish EP elections.

With respect to the volatility of electoral behaviour, Swedish voters display a lack of party loyalty in Euro-elections compared to national elections. Volatility at the EP contest in the 1999–2009 period was about twice as high as the average for national elections in the same period, though in the 2004 EP, election it was only slightly higher than the norm for national elections.

The results of Swedish EP competitions support both the Second-Order Election and the Europe Salience models concerning voting behaviour. Some of the effects are difficult to distinguish from each other at this level of aggregation because without survey data, it is difficult to determine whether small parties gain votes because of ‘sincere voting’, because they have more green or Eurosceptic profiles, or because they belong to the opposition. The evidence of both theories in voting behaviour is congruent with a recent analysis carried out by Hobolt et al. (2009).

Finally, the timing of the Swedish EP elections in relation to the national cycle may play a role. The 1995 and 1999 Euro-elections in Sweden were held no more than a year after the national elections to the Riksdag in 1994 and 1998, respectively. Thus, according to the SOE theory, turnout could be expected to be lower and the party or parties in government have the advantage of being the winner of the previous national election (Hix and Marsh, 2007, 496). A glance at the results of the Swedish Social Democratic Party in the two national and EP contests that shortly followed shows that support for the governing party in the 1995 Euro-election was 17.2 per cent lower than in the 1994 national election, and in 1999 it was 10.4 per cent lower than in the national election to the Riksdag in 1998.

The 2004 EP Election was held in mid-term, when the unpopularity of the government was supposed to be at its highest and voters could use the EP election to express their dissatisfaction (Hix and Marsh, 2007). The results of the Social Democratic government in the 2004 EP election compared to the party’s outcome in the 2002 national election shows a drop of 14.7 per cent in voter support, a bigger loss than in 1999, but still not as big as in 1995.
At the 2009 EP elections, the Social Democrats were out of government and the centre-right coalition led by the Moderates had won the national election in 2006 and taken office. The EP contest was held a little more than a year before the upcoming national election and, according to the SOE model, this would be reflected in the increased time and money the parties would spend on campaigning and the people’s motivation to vote (ibid.).

The turnout in the 2009 EP election was rather high compared to the previous EP elections, lending support to this theory. However, as mentioned earlier, the high turnout could also be explained by the Pirate Party’s ability to attract and motivate young voters. The governing coalition, which had won the 2006 national election with 48.2 per cent of the vote, received 42.6 per cent of the preferences at the Euro-elections. Thus, as predicted, ruling parties lost consensus, albeit only by 5.6 per cent, much less than what the Social Democrats lost at the European elections compared to national ones when they were in power. Finally, the hypothesis relating the timing of the EP contests within the national election cycle fits only partly with the Swedish pattern.

10.2 Europe Salience theory

The hypothesis that a party’s position on Europe matters, and the more anti-European the policy position the more the party will increase its share of the vote compared to the previous national election fits well with Swedish election results. Thus, all anti-European or Eurosceptic parties experienced an increase in their voting share between national and EP elections. This was the case for the Greens and the Left Party; however, with regards to the latter, the 2009 outcome was very close to that achieved for the Riksdag in 2006.

The hypothesis that the more extreme a party is in terms of its distance from the political centre the more votes it will gain between the previous national election and the subsequent EP election, can be confirmed only partially in the case of Sweden. As mentioned above, until 2009 the Left Party had gained votes between the national and EP elections. As for the Sweden Democrats, they were not represented in the Riksdag until 2010 and although they increased their voting share at the EP elections, they have not yet managed to reach the threshold necessary to secure a seat in Strasbourg.

Since 1994, the Green Party has obtained between 4.5 and 7.3 per cent of the vote in the national elections, whilst in the EP elections it has received between 6.0 and 17.2 per cent. Whereas support for the party in EP elections has varied, the party has always gained a larger share of vote at EP elections compared to national elections, in line with the Europe Salience model.

Finally, the hypothesis that anti-European parties, whether they run in national elections or not, receive a greater increase in their vote share in EP elections compared to other parties seems to fit with the case of Sweden. However, it is difficult to evaluate the impact of different potential causal factors due to the few European electoral contests held so far.

As discussed above, the analysis of the aggregate electoral data gives support to both Second-Order Election and Europe Salience theories. Without further research using survey data, it is difficult to know whether the public votes on European or national issues. However, as already discussed, there are several indications that ‘Europe’ played a large role in the 2009 election campaign. This is undoubtedly a good sign in the sense that Swedes are now actually debating the future of the European Union, not merely holding ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ positions on specific European questions or simply debating national policies in the EP campaign.
Sweden

References

Primary sources


Secondary sources


