



Towards a Framework for Analysing Party Leadership Selection

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TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING PARTY LEADERSHIP SELECTION

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Abstract

It has long been suggested that political parties, despite being formally democratic organisations, are in fact controlled by their leaderships and bureaucracies. Still, there is bound to be variation in the extent to which national political parties have become oligarchies. Recent research has taken steps towards the assessment of such variation. However, we still require a fine-grained analytical framework that takes into account both the ways in which party leaders are selected (*ex ante* mechanisms) and those in which they are subsequently enabled or constrained by the party organisation (*ex post* mechanisms). This paper is a first step towards developing such a framework. It focuses on the selection stage. We hone our indicators through applying them to the rather peculiar case of Sweden.

INTRODUCTION

The famous "iron law of oligarchy" has long suggested that political parties, despite being formally democratic organisations, are in fact controlled by their leaderships and bureaucracies (Michels 1962 [1915]). Many argue that the alienation of parties and members from each other has become worse in recent decades, especially in governing parties (Katz and Mair 1995; Mair 2013; Poguntke and Webb 2005:10).

Still, there is bound to be variation in the extent to which national political parties have become oligarchies. However, while recent research arguably has taken steps towards developing tools to adequately assess variations in this regard, we argue that we still lack a fine-grained analytical framework that takes into account both the ways in which party leaders are selected and those in which they are subsequently enabled, or constrained, by the party organisation. Against this background, this paper is a first step toward developing such a framework. While we acknowledge that events after leaders are selected, so called *ex post* mechanisms, are as important as how the leader is selected, the *ex ante* mechanisms, we confine ourselves in this particular paper to only look at the first stage. Eventually, however, our objective is to develop a framework that include both phases and that is, therefore, appropriate for systematic comparative research on the autonomy of party leaders in democratic polities.

Based on a principle-agent understanding of intra-party power, our project aims to develop a set of well defined indicators that capture different aspects of party leadership. We argue that this theoretical lense offers an illuminating insight into party-leadership selection. Moreover, while the work still is very much in progress, we argue our prospects of eventually arriving at a comprehensive framework are better if our preliminary indicators are honed against empirical data. More specifically, therefore, this paper seek to shine a light on party leadership selection using Sweden as our empirical case.

The reason for the case selection is that the form of leadership selection appears, at first glance, to conflict with expectations, informed by research and perhaps also by national stereotypes, about how Swedish parties *should* conduct this process. As an atypical case it let us capture aspects of party leadership selection that would have been left unnoticed if we had studied more representative cases.

One might expect that Swedish parties remain relatively democratic internally, with leaders who remain the agents of their parties and their members, rather than the other way around. This was more or less the conclusion of a recent survey of Nordic parties (Aylott et al 2013:212), which asserted that "intra-party democracy [in the region] is still far from a meaningless concept". Yet this supposed high level of internal party democracy is not actually easy to capture in systematic, cross-national surveys. Moreover, the same work (2013:216-17) also noted some peculiar features of Swedish internal party life.

Hence, we use our observations of the Swedish case to evaluate a set of indicators that can serve in broader national and international comparisons about party leaders' autonomy. In that sense, our goal, which is shared by many contributors to the literature on party organisation, is descriptive, and arguably important as such in its own right (Gerring 2012:726). The current paper can be seen as a sort of plausibility probe (Eckstein 1975) in the endeavour.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we sketch the theoretical background and the literature that might lead to certain expectations about the case, followed by a review of data that appear to confound such expectations. Second, we outline our analytical framework and identify the indicators that we use in the subsequent, empirical section. Then, in that section, we focus on the case. We briefly describe the generic form of leader selection in Swedish parties, according to their statutes, before going on to examine three recent instances of the process. Finally, we conclude and discuss further the Swedish style of leader selection.

PARTY LEADER SELECTION: WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT IN SWEDEN?

For all their allegedly oligarchic tendencies, parties in parts of Europe (and elsewhere) have increasingly allowed their members, and sometimes even non-members, to participate directly in the selection of party leaders (Sandri and Seddone 2012). Cross and Blais (2012:128) see "clear evidence of an ongoing shift in authority away from the parliamentary party towards grassroots members" in the selection of leaders (see also Kenig 2009a; LeDuc 2001), even if interesting variation across countries and parties is apparent (Pilet and Cross 2014). Increasing transparency, more participation and greater accessibility seems to be one result; but a decline in competition in leadership contests seems to be another (Kenig 2009b).

What about Swedish parties? Perhaps oddly, Swedish parties have not been included in recent comparative surveys. Bynander and 't Hart (2007) and So (2012) both examine Sweden. But those studies focus more on, respectively, episodes of leader succession and why particular leaders are elected at certain moments, rather than directly on the rules that govern the process. The only recent study that covers Swedish rules is by Madestam (2014a). She concludes (2014a:335-41) that, for all the talk in the academic literature of intra-party centralisation and elite rule, and despite the complete lack of interest in involving non-members, intra-party democracy is alive and well in Swedish parties. Members are involved in leader selection "to the highest degree". The two bigger parties in her study have both "democratised" their processes, she argues.¹

Arguably, that fits with a general stereotype about Swedish organisations in general. Surveys of democracy, such as those by Freedom House, the Global Democracy Ranking or the Economist Intelligence Unit, almost always put Sweden (alongside the other Nordic countries) at the top of the table (Aylott 2014:1). Swedish governments usually have a

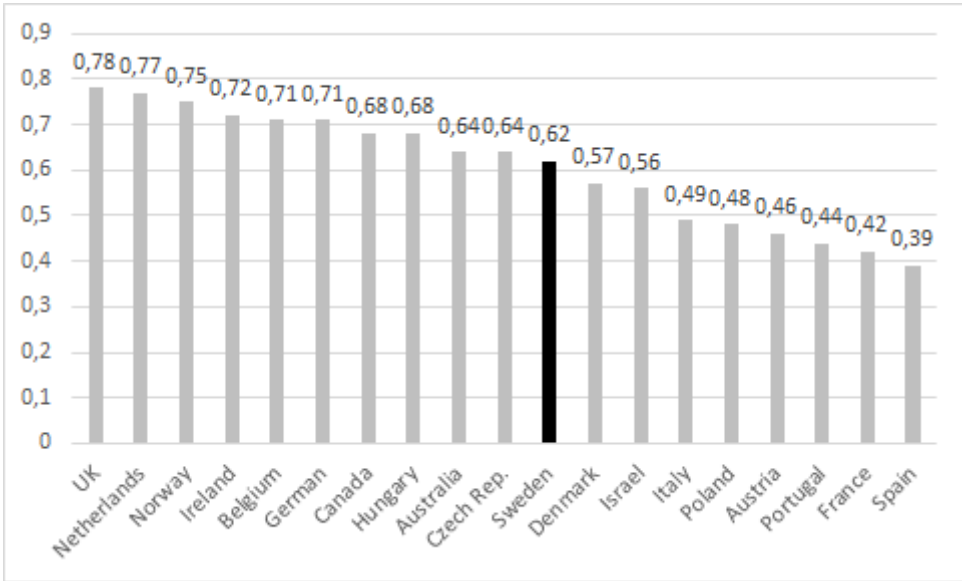
¹ In a newspaper article, Madestam (2014b) has gone further, suggesting that "we can be proud of our Swedish parties", because the selection process "is owned [or perhaps "controlled"] by the members". All translations from Swedish-language sources are the responsibility of the authors.

minister for democracy. By law, Swedish employers have co-decision-making with unions imposed on them, and students must be represented on all university decision-making bodies.

True, there is no consensus on the strengths of Swedish intra-party democracy. Teorell (1998), for example, argued that the country's two biggest parties did not actually live up to the idea. However, a more recent study drew a rather different conclusion. Loxbo (2013) examines the management of two welfare-policy-making episodes in the Swedish Social Democratic Party, one in the 1950s and the other in the 1990s. He compares internal policy deliberations and debates, the preferences of activists expressed at the party congress, and the coverage of the party press. He concludes that, in fact, party leaders in the 1990s, "had considerably less leverage over policy deliberations and activists than their predecessors in the 1950s" (2013:549).

So it is notable, at the very least, that in a recent comparative survey of political parties (to which we make an ongoing contribution), Swedish parties do not actually score very highly in a rank-ordering of intra-party democracy.

Figure 1. Intra-party democracy in comparative perspective



Note: The index is constructed as follows. There are two different modes of assigning IPD values to "items" (questions) in the Party Politics Database. (1) A party is attributed the values 0.00, 0.25, 0.50, 0.75 or 1.00 on some items. The lowest two values reflect organisational features that affect IPD adversely; the highest two values reflect features that affect IPD favourably; and 0.50 reflects no specific effects on IPD. (2) Furthermore, some variables are generated on the basis of "rankings" of individual database items. The decisions regarding the allocation of the values to the items are based on theoretical considerations, which are in turn based on von dem Berge et al (2013:5-15, 43-56). On each variable, a party is allocated a value of 1 if its structure is seen as promoting IPD, -1 if antithetical, and 0 if neutral or irrelevant.

Source: Preliminary data from Poguntke et al (forthcoming).

Using data collected under the auspices of the Political Parties Database Working Group, in which parties in 23 countries from around the world are currently covered, Poguntke et al (forthcoming) construct an index in which levels of intra-party democracy are scored through references to variables grouped into three dimensions: programme, personnel and organisational structure. After averaging each party's scores on the variables in each dimension, and then averaging its scores for the dimensions, each party is assigned an index score (see also von dem Berge et al 2013). Figure 1 presents data on the average level of intra-party democracy. Swedish parties do not even make it into the top half. The Green Party is the highest-placed Swedish party, at equal 17th out of 121. Of the other parties, the Centre Party is 58th, the Left Party 62nd, the Christian Democrats and the Moderates equal 68th, the Liberals 72nd, the Social Democrats 77th and the Sweden Democrats 86th.

This warrants further examination. Moreover, the variables in the Political Parties Database, useful as they are, arguably do not capture the essence of the Swedish style of procedure and its logic.

ANALYSING PARTY LEADER SELECTION IN SWEDEN

At first glance, the generic elements in Swedish party-leader selection make it look pretty inclusive and democratic. Any intra-party unit or member can nominate a potential leader. The formal, final decision is taken by the party congress, the highest decision-making organ. The party's regional or municipal units select delegates to the national congress; few if any places at the congress are reserved for incumbent leaders (Bolin 2015:115).

Nearly always, however, the congress *has only a single candidate for leader to vote for*. True, this in itself is not unusual. Pilet and Cross (2014:233) found that 72 per cent of leader selections in a 13-country survey were uncontested, rising to 81 per cent when the party congress was the selectorate. In most countries, however, that seems to be due more to party custom, and perhaps off-stage power struggles, than to institutional enforcement. The difference in Sweden is that there is a formal mechanism specifically designed to engineer a single-candidate decision by the party congress. This mechanism, which would appear bizarrely undemocratic in some European countries, is what we call the "selection committee" – in Swedish, *valberedning*, literally, "selection [or election] preparation". As far as we know, the system finds an equivalent only in Norwegian parties (Allern and Karlsen 2014:51-53).

In the following section, we present "thick descriptions" of the process in the same Swedish parties that Madestam (2014a) examined, which allow us to make use of the rich qualitative data that she presents. However, our observations do not quite match hers. They cover the selection processes that occurred in the Social Democratic Party in 2010-11; in the Green Party in 2011; and in the Moderate Party in 2014-15. It offers a fair range of party ideologies, organisational histories, ages, contemporary sizes – and of scores in the index described above. Two of the three observations are of the respective parties' most recent selection. The third, the Social Democrats, is of the party's last-but-one selection. We decided to focus on

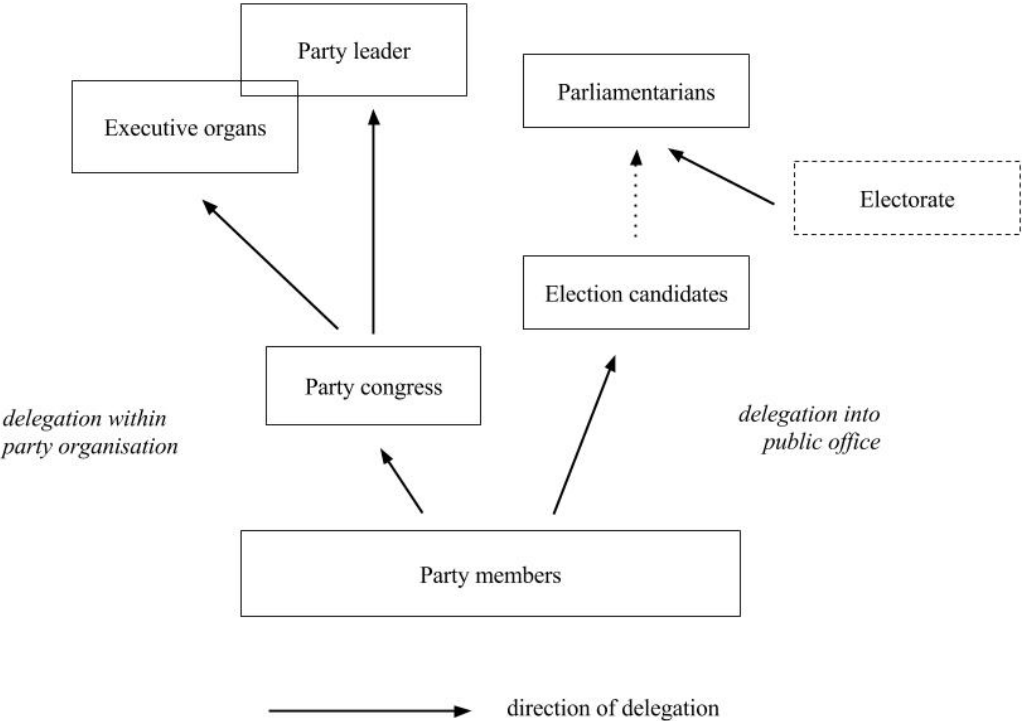
that one partly because it was unusually dramatic, but more because the most recent one, in 2012-13, was highly unusual in character.

We examine leader selection through the lens of a particular theoretical framework, which we now outline.

Principals, agents and party leaders

This framework starts with the conception of politics as a series of delegation relationships. Principals, who want something done but who (for whatever reason) cannot do it themselves, delegate the task to selected agents. They seek to maintain the effectiveness of the delegation through various accountability mechanisms, such as mandates and checks. We apply a "bottom-up" perspective on party delegation (Aylott et al 2013:26-31; Müller 2000; Ström and Müller 1999; cf. Katz 2014). We envisage the members as the ultimate intra-party principals, who delegate via separate channels to party leaders and to aspiring politicians (that is, election candidates). The main reason for taking this approach is that it reflects how most parties present themselves in their statutes.

Figure 2. Simplified intra-party delegation



In the classic mass-party, in which the leader acquires her mandate through a congress decision, she is ultimately the agent of the party membership (Müller 2000:319). It is the party congress that subsequently renews her mandate to lead, perhaps as often as every year. The party programme, which can be seen as the contract that prescribes the leader's policy direction, is controlled by the congress. The executive organs, also elected by the congress, will monitor her performance. Of course, the leader will often (though by no means always) also be a parliamentarian, and as such is subject to cross-pressure (Blomgren 2003). But the party in public office, its parliamentarians, cannot remove her – at least not formally. In fact, the leader can be seen as the party's foremost means of monitoring the performance of those who the party previously nominated to run in public elections.

This model of bottom-up delegation offers a consistent framework for comparative analysis. It is related to but distinct from measures of internal party democracy (von dem Berge et al 2013; Cross 2013; Poguntke et al forthcoming). Our objective is not to judge whether a certain procedure is more or less "democratic" – a concept that is, of course, open to a very wide range of interpretations. Nor do we assess the degree of "inclusiveness" in leader selection, which refers to the numbers of individual party actors who are involved in the process (Cross 2013:102). At this stage, moreover, we only preliminarily assess the degree of "agency loss" in a delegation relationship – that is, the extent to which the preferences of the principal are aligned with the actions of the agent. A more robust, comparative assessment is one of our ultimate objectives, but it is for future work. For now, as we develop our measures, our objective is largely descriptive and only indirectly analytical.

Nevertheless, intra-party delegation must be an essential part of intra-party democracy. It is hard to imagine democracy in any form, direct or representative, working well without effective delegation. On the other hand, delegation could work effectively, in the sense of agents being mandated and monitored in their execution of their principal's preferences, without necessarily conforming to common notions of democracy – if, say, the chain of delegation did not extend down to the ordinary party members, who are often seen as the equivalent of the electorate in a national democracy. In our approach, for example, delegation could work equally well (or badly) in a party irrespective of whether the leader was selected by the parliamentary group, the party congress or in a membership ballot.

Process indicators

Given our prior knowledge about Swedish party leader selection and our analytical framework, what exactly are we looking for in our descriptions? What features of the processes do we expect to be especially significant or revealing? Some cross-national indicators that are already available – such as the identification of the selectorate, the competitiveness of leadership contests, and terms of office, all of which are covered in recent, pioneering work (Cross 2014) – are obviously interesting and relevant to us. But, for our purposes, we need further, more fine-grained observations. For now, at this early stage of our work, we keep them relatively few and fairly Sweden-focused. Our data are taken from party statutes, which reflect the "official story" of how a party chooses its leader, but also from

contemporary news reports about our cases, which sometimes also capture the "real story" (Katz and Mair 1992:6-8).

We start from the beginning. (1) Which actor sets the process in motion, by, for example, proposing the appointment and composition of a selection committee? (2) Which organ amends or approves the proposal? Crucially, (3) who chairs the selection committee and (4) who serves in it – members of the party's national board, its executive committee, its parliamentary group, regional units and/or ancillary organisations? In other words, what power centres within the party are represented within this crucial filtering unit?

(5) Who can nominate candidates for party leader? (6) Is there any formal or informal constraint on the individuals who can be nominated, perhaps relating to the time they have spent in the party or their membership of the parliamentary group? (7) What sort of statutory parameters does the selection committee work within? Does some other party organ – the executive committee, for example – play any sort of part, formally or informally, in its work? (8) Does the selection committee designate a shortlist of nominees, which serves as a provisional endorsement of those nominees' campaigns? (9) To what extent do candidates have the scope to outline their own platforms and plans for the party?

We know that the selection committee, in a final phase, invariably recommends that a single candidate be presented to the party congress, which we also already know is formally the "selectorate" for each Swedish party. But (10) *must* the selection committee recommend a single candidate? And (11) what are the constraints, formal or informal, on the party, especially on congress delegates and on other aspiring leaders, to accept the recommendation and thus merely to confirm the selection committee's preferred leader candidate when the congress votes?

SELECTING LEADERS IN THREE SWEDISH PARTIES

A first point to note about Swedish party leaders is that, with one exception (the Greens), the formal title of each of the main parties' leaders is party chair, which signals that their authority is based on the membership organisation, not the party in public office.

Social Democrats 2010-11

Historically, the Social Democratic Party conforms to the mass-party model. It was founded in 1889 in close collaboration with the Swedish trade-union movement, and practiced a system of overlapping membership with the unions until the 1990s. Partly due to the support of organised labour, the Social Democrats are Sweden's biggest and oldest party. They have won in excess of 45 per cent of the vote in national parliamentary elections on no fewer than ten other occasions. They dominated government for decades. From the mid-1990s, however, the Social Democrats' share of the vote began to fall. By autumn 2010 the party was in poor shape, after a second consecutive election defeat. Unlike in some countries, it is not

customary for Swedish party leaders to take immediate responsibility for election failures and resign. The Social Democratic incumbent, Mona Sahlin, at first indicated that she, too, would continue. However, within a few weeks of the 2010 election, her position began to unravel, and she eventually stepped down.

This created an organisational problem for the party. As Madestam recounts (2014a:48-59), there had been unhappiness at how the selection process in 1996 had been steered, in rather ad hoc fashion, by a single person, the chair of the party's parliamentary group. Moreover, the preferences of the organisations' constituency branches (*partidistrikt*), particularly the individuals in those units who might be described as their chief executives (*ombudsmän*), had been influential. The following year, the party congress had conferred on the party council (*förtroenderåd*), elected by its constituency branches, the right to appoint the selection committee. It would convene a few months before a party congress and then submit to it proposals for who should fill leading party positions. But this meant that, when Sahlin resigned, there was no selection committee *in situ*.

The party's secretary-general is appointed by the congress. After Sahlin's resignation, it fell to him to propose a selection committee. A newspaper reported that "party headquarters", which can reasonably be equated with the secretary-general, had urged the constituency branches, which are often grouped into six regional clusters, to collaborate in proposing composite nominations to the selection committee (*SvD* 16 Nov. 2010). The chair of two northern branches immediately declared that they and five others from northern "forest counties" would do exactly that, and that they would then approach Scania, in the south-west, and Stockholm city to tie up the slate (*DN* 16 Nov. 2010*).

Within a fortnight, the secretary-general could propose a selection committee to the national board (*partistyrelsen*). However, the proposal was unusually controversial. Sahlin, in a late (and futile) concession to her critics, had agreed that all members of the party's board and executive committee, including herself, should submit themselves for re-election at an extra congress (*SvD* 15 Nov. 2010). After she had quit, the secretary-general declared that it would be up to the selection committee to determine whether individual members of those organs – including himself – still had the confidence of the branches that had nominated them (*DN* 1 Dec. 2010*). At that important moment, some Social Democratic MPs reportedly suspected that the secretary-general's plan to shift administrative resources from the parliamentary group to the constituency branches had been made with his own position in mind (*Exp.* 1 Dec. 2010). He first presented his proposal to a telephone conference of the party's constituency branch chairs (*Exp.* 1 Dec. 2010), then to the board, and only then formally to the party council (*SvD* 2 Dec. 2010), the body that was to approve it (which, of course, comprised constituency branch representatives).

The selection committee's 11 ordinary members reflected a balance between the regions and the sexes (*SR* 1 Dec. 2010). Its most well-known figure was a former chair of Gothenburg city council. He was one of only two without parliamentary experience. Five were current MPs, and four more, including the chair, had either declined to run or lost their seats in the

recent 2010 election. Of the five reserve members, who could attend meetings but only vote in the absence of an ordinary member, one was another current MP.²

There were calls within the party for a more open and competitive process than previously.³ One member of the party council even urged that the new leader be chosen through a membership ballot. However, such suggestions made no headway. Indeed, the chair of the selection committee, a former minister for social security, famously rejected a ballot with a dismissive reference to a television talent show (*GP* 5 Dec. 2010*). That meant that the committee worked "traditionally". It met representatives of the various constituency and municipal party branches and collateral organisations. It invited suggestions about the characteristics that the next leader ought to have. It received nominations. Then it discretely talked to some nominees. The objective was, as usual, to recommend a single candidate for the congress to approve.

The process turned out to be difficult. For one thing, there was no obvious successor to Sahlin. Several of the likeliest individuals ruled themselves out early on. An additional complication, moreover, was that observers were unsure how seriously to take these denials of interest. A feature of party culture, which had been especially visible in the 1996 selection process but which Madestam (2014a:44) suggests might go back to the 1960s, is that self-promotion among leader candidates is taboo.⁴ Meanwhile, complex struggles between the party's ideological tendencies and regional clusters had, according to some accounts, been made still more arcane by the uncertainty surrounding other top positions in the party, which opened the possibility of horse trading (Madestam 2014a:85; Nilsson 2011). A further problem was apparently the committee chair's aversion to recommending any candidate who could not command the committee's unanimous support (Madestam 2014a:111-12).

The deadlock induced mounting alarm among Social Democrats. About ten days before the congress, however, the selection committee could finally agree on an almost completely unexpected candidate: Håkan Juholt, a vaguely left-wing parliamentarian from the south-east of the country. He was reportedly then influential in securing the demotion of at least two members of the executive committee in the package proposal that the selection committee eventually presented to the congress (*Exp.* 20 Mar. 2011), which duly approved it.

² Information about the status of individual members of the parties' selection committees was collected through internet searches, which often led to Wikipedia entries.

³ See, for example, Einerstam et al 2010; Hassel 2010. There had been similar calls before the process that produced Sahlin.

⁴ The closest any individual came to mounting a campaign was when one said that he was prepared to "step up" if the party called (*Exp.* 2 Mar. 2011).

Green Party 2011

The Greens are one of Sweden's younger parties. They were formed in 1981, primarily because of how the issue of nuclear energy had been (mis-) handled by the established parties, but also as a reaction against the internal processes of those parties. Per Gahrton, arguably the most important of the Greens' founders, claimed that the aim of their organisation was to serve the grassroots rather than to make sure that all members shared the same views on every matter (Bolin 2012:105-6). Indeed, the party was initially very sceptical about leaders *per se*, and did not have one at all during its first couple of years. However, due to problems in attracting media attention, and thus in penetrating the "visibility filter" (Sikk 2006), the party had to accept that some sort of leadership was needed. It chose something of a middle way by having two spokespeople, a man and a woman. They were not to lead in the usual sense, but were merely to communicate the party's message (Bolin 2012:116).

While it is commonly argued that, in practice, the Greens' spokespeople have become increasingly similar to customary party leaders (Madestam 2014a:171), there are still important differences. One such is term limits. According to party statutes, a spokesperson can only be (re-) elected at the annual congress nine times, although three years out of office is enough for that count to be restarted (Miljöpartiet 2011a). While spokespeople were frequently changed during the party's first two decades, Peter Eriksson and Maria Wetterstrand broke with that pattern. Elected in 2002, each served a full nine-year term. Thus, their resignations were not caused by an election defeat or a dip in popularity. On the contrary, they oversaw gains in three consecutive parliamentary elections. With a record 7.3 per cent in 2010, the Greens became the third-largest party in Sweden.

The nine-year rule meant that it was known long in advance that the Greens would select new spokespeople at the 2011 congress. This gave the party's selection committee plenty of time to prepare, although the national election in September 2010 was a distraction (cf. Madestam 2014a:173).

The selection committee is formally elected by each congress. According to party statutes, the selection committee prepares elections to be made at the following congress, including those for spokespeople (Miljöpartiet 2011a). In practice, the selection committee is selected by various sub-groups within the party. Each constituency branch (there are 29 in total) nominates one member, selected at an annual meeting. In addition, the Greens' youth wing selects two, a man and a woman. These two are always full members, with voting rights. Fourteen members are reserves – that is, without voting rights. Party statutes state explicitly that the positions of ordinary members should rotate between the constituency branches.⁵ The congress also elects the convenor of the selection committee. Joakim Larsson, the convenor elected at the 2010 congress and in place when the new spokespeople were elected in 2011, had first joined the committee in 2007 and had become convenor in 2009.⁶

⁵ In reality, however, votes have only very rarely taken place. Almost all decisions are unanimous (interview Joakim Larsson, 26 June 2015)

⁶ By autumn 2015, he was still convenor.

Historically, a position in the selection committee has not been considered very prestigious. On the contrary, previous experience of important positions within the organisation seemed not to have been necessary for members (Madestam 2014:192-3). Instead, most people in the committee have been rather inexperienced local and regional politicians.

In accordance with the self-image of being an internally democratic party, the selection committee stated early that the process of finding successors to Wetterstrand and Eriksson would be an "open" one. Initially, there were also discussions about whether a member ballot should be held. However, partly because some argued that this would disadvantage the less well-known candidates, the selection committee decided against it (Madestam 2014a:176). Instead, a two-stage process was initiated. First, all members had the chance to propose candidates. In parallel, the selection committee held about 40 member meetings and conducted more than 100 interviews with members at various party levels in order to get an idea of what qualities the members were looking for in the incoming spokespeople (Miljöpartiet 2011b).

Eleven candidates, seven men and four women, declared their interest. However, the selection committee decided on a shortlist of six. During the second stage of the nomination process, these candidates were invited to campaign openly against each other. The selection committee also interviewed each of them about their opinions on the party programme, before they made a decision about who should finally be nominated (Madestam 2014a:195-6).

While the selection committee's nomination of Gustav Fridolin as the Green's male spokesperson was widely expected, that of Åsa Romson as the female one was not. The favourite had been the party's economic policy spokesperson, Mikaela Valtersson (*SvD* 25 Oct. 2010). However, the profile of Romson, particularly her competence in environmental issues, better matched the members' preferences. Moreover, the fact that Romson had been a member of the selection committee during the previous three years, including two as vice-convenor, may have also favoured her candidacy. Still, Romson won the committee's nomination by only one vote, nine to eight (*Aft.* 29 Mar. 2011).

Unlike in other Swedish parties, the selection committee's proposal is not automatically confirmed by the congress (Madestam 2014a:169). For example, Peter Eriksson was selected by the 2002 congress despite not being nominated by the selection committee, in a process that has been described as "democratically doubtful" (Madestam 2014a:165). In 2011, however, Fridolin and Romson were comfortably selected by the congress, even though most other nominees had maintained their candidacy.⁷

⁷ Romson received 200 votes to Valtersson's 59. Fridolin received 277 votes; his nearest rival got only 14 (Miljöpartiet 2011b).

Moderates 2014-15

Since 1979 the Moderates have been Sweden's second-biggest party. This conservative party had, like the other mainstream ones in Sweden, adopted many of the features of the mass party over previous decades, with, for example, a sovereign party congress.

The Moderates were marginalised during the Social Democrats' long dominance of Swedish politics, but they became stronger in the 1980s and led a four-party coalition government in 1991-94. A disastrous election in 2002, however, in which their vote fell to 15 per cent, induced profound change in the party. A new leader, Fredrik Reinfeldt, pulled the Moderates decisively towards the political midfield. That, in turn, facilitated the creation of a highly successful pre-electoral coalition, known as the Alliance, with the three smaller right-of-centre parties (Aylott and Bolin 2007). In 2010 the Moderates' vote was only just short of the Social Democrats' score. When Reinfeldt announced his resignation as party leader, as he conceded defeat in the 2014 election, he had been prime minister for eight years.

Party statutes (Moderaterna 2011:12-14) prescribe a permanently standing selection committee. Its 13 ordinary members and 11 reserve members should come from different constituency branches (the party has 26) and, in addition, include a representative and a reserve from each of the Moderates' women's and youth sections. These members serve four-year terms. They are elected at the "working congress" that takes place a year before a scheduled quadrennial parliamentary election. (An "ordinary congress" takes place the year after the election.)

The selection committee that was confirmed at the 2013 congress was proposed by a conference of the chairs of the constituency branches, who had met a few months previously (Moderaterna 2013:381; also Madestam 2014a:240-41). The proposal involved a high turnover on the committee; only three ordinary members, including the proposed chair, remained from the previous term (*DO* 10 Sep. 2013). In the proposal, the nominees' constituency branches were grouped into three geographical clusters, in order to ensure regional balance. Only one nominee for ordinary membership of the committee, a sitting MP, had any parliamentary experience. Five nominees were current chairs of their respective constituency branches, including the proposed committee chair and vice-chair. Madestam (2014a:250) argues that members of a Moderate selection committee have a fair degree of freedom to reach consensus among them, rather than being bound by the preferences of their branches.⁸

Perhaps reflecting this status and authority within the party, the chair of the committee was a well-known figure, albeit not from national politics. As chair of a municipal council in Scania, he had in 2009 been under the national media spotlight when he resisted the placement of refugees in that area. Later, just before his confirmation by the 2013 party congress that he

⁸ Evidently, this independence need not always lead to unanimity. In 2011 five members of the selection committee declared their disagreement with its own proposal for a slate of candidates for election to the party board (SR 22 Oct. 2011; *SvD* 22 Oct. 2011).

would continue as chair of the selection committee, he had openly criticised the party's central office (*DI* 7 Oct. 2013), after which followed further turbulence there (*DO* 20 Nov. 2013). The day after the 2014 election and Reinfeldt's announcement that he would step down, the committee chair explained that its process would involve consideration of desirable characteristics in a new leader and of various possible candidates, after which the committee would recommend one candidate to the extra congress that would meet in the following spring. In other words, it would be a "traditional" procedure. A more "open" process might induce "battles between different factions", he argued (*SR* 14 Oct. 2014).

In some ways, the Moderates' selection process in 2014 resembled that within the party in 1999 (cf. Madestam 2014a:262-64). As then, there was no obvious successor to the outgoing leader. Moreover, despite the party's successful pursuit of both votes and office during Reinfeldt's time in charge, some activists had become frustrated by a reluctance to tackle sensitive policy issues, such as immigration (*DN* 22 Nov. 2014). The party's dismal score in the election to the European Parliament in May 2014, followed by a significant loss of votes in the parliamentary election in September, many of them apparently to the far-right Sweden Democrats (Ekengren and Oscarsson 2015), might reasonably have enhanced activists' appetite for change. As in 1999, this could have involved a swing away from the incumbent Stockholm-dominated leadership. The selection committee chair stated that such a sentiment had been prominent in the submissions to it (*DN* 21 Nov. 2014). Yet, in the event, the selection committee's task became a straightforward one.

The 2014 election had created an unstable parliamentary situation. A minority coalition of Social Democrats and Greens had taken office, but it was uncertain whether it could get its budget through. The parliamentary arena was thus at the centre of public attention. Meanwhile, although he was to remain formally party leader until the extra congress in March, Reinfeldt had opted to withdraw immediately from frontline politics (a decision that had caused some surprise and consternation in his party). These two circumstances created a favourable situation for the chair of the parliamentary group, Anna Kinberg Batra, who had assumed the leader's role in parliamentary debate and inter-party negotiations. A month after the election, the only other figure taken seriously in media discussion declared that she was not interested. A month after that, there was a joint meeting of the boards and delegates to the coming party congress of the two Stockholm constituency branches. When that meeting agreed to follow several other constituency branches in nominating Kinberg Batra, who represented Stockholm county in parliament, the party's choice of leader was, in effect, decided (*Exp.* 11 Nov. 2014).

In early December 2014, just two months after it had taken office, the new government did indeed see its budget voted down, and the Social Democratic prime minister called a snap election for March 2015. This immediately prompted the Moderates to bring forward their extra congress by two months, to early January 2015. But it made little difference to the party's decision (and, anyway, the new election was later rescinded). In mid-December, the selection committee announced that it would nominate Kinberg Batra as the party's new leader. A week later, it also proposed new first and second vice-chairs. At the same time, and

even before her confirmation as leader, Kinberg Batra announced her appointments to the roles of political spokespeople and, subject to confirmation by the party board after the congress, a new secretary-general. These were all duly approved.

DISCUSSION: COMPARING AND ANALYSING THE PROCESSES

What can we discern from these accounts of leader selection in three Swedish parties? The results of our search for process indicators can be seen in Table 1.

There are certainly interesting and important differences between the three observations. It seems surprising that, while the two other parties had standing selection committees, the Social Democrats, such an old and institutionalised party, should have found themselves without a leader and without a selection committee at the end of 2010. The latter had to be cobbled together at short notice by the secretary-general on the basis of nominations from the constituency branch chairs and subject to their approval. That, plus the fact that its single, immediate task was to find a new party leader, severely constrained the autonomy of the selection committee in the face of intensely interested constituency branches, and rendered it essentially a forum for those branches to haggle with each other along regional, ideological and perhaps also personal lines.

Of course, part of the explanation for this situation is that, historically, the Social Democrats had never expected to be discarding leaders away from scheduled party congresses; and the fact that they did so in 2010-11 reflected the party's modern difficulties. As it happened, the selection of Juholt went badly wrong, and he was forced to resign by the party's executive committee after just ten months. His successor was found in an even more ad hoc manner. He was confirmed as acting leader by the party board after being proposed by the executive committee "in agreement with all the constituency branches", according to the secretary-general (Jämtin 2012). Perhaps understandably, the Social Democrats changed their procedures soon afterwards.⁹

Table 1. Summary of indicators and findings

Process indicators	Social Democrats 2011	Greens 2011	Moderates 2015
1	Secretary-general	Constituency branches	Constituency branches
2	Constituency branch chairs,	Congress	Congress

⁹ In fact, the 2009 Social Democratic congress had decided that an organisational review should be undertaken, and the review's members were belatedly appointed by a new party secretary-general in May 2011. They eventually proposed, among other reforms, that the party council be abolished (*AiP* 25 Feb. 2013). The 2013 congress agreed and arrogated to itself the right to appoint the party's selection committee, which would then serve a four-year term.

	party council		
3	Former MP, minister	Regional politician	Regional politician
4	Geographical spread, mainly MPs or ex-MPs	Geographical spread, mainly local/regional elected politicians or party activists	Geographical spread, mainly elected politicians
5	Primarily constituency branches	Primarily constituency branches	Primarily constituency branches
6	Longstanding party membership, very probably an MP	Longstanding party membership, probably an MP	Longstanding party membership, very probably an MP
7	Very strong role of constituency branches	Consultation with constituency branches	Consultation with constituency branches
8	No	Yes, three for each spokesperson position	No
9	None	Lots	Very little
10	No, but does	No, but does (for each spokesperson position)	No, but does
11	Very strong cultural constraints	Some constraints	Fairly strong cultural constraints

Summary of indicators

- (1) Which actor sets the process in motion, by, for example, proposing the appointment and composition of a selection committee?
- (2) Which organ amends or approves the proposal?
- (3) Who chairs the selection committee?
- (4) Who serves in it – members of the party's national board, its executive committee, its parliamentary group, regional units and/or ancillary organisations? In other words, in what power centres within the party are represented within this crucial filtering organisation?
- (5) Who can nominate candidates for party leader?
- (6) Is there any formal or informal constraint on the individuals who can be nominated as leader, perhaps relating to the time they have spent in the party or their membership of the parliamentary group?
- (7) What sort of statutory parameters does the selection committee work within? Does some other party organ – the executive committee, for example – play any sort of part, formally or informally, in its work?
- (8) Does the selection committee designate a shortlist of nominees, which serves as a provisional endorsement of those nominees' campaigns?
- (9) To what extent do candidates have the scope to outline their own platforms and plans for the party?
- (10) *Must* the selection committee recommend a single candidate?
- (11) What are the constraints, formal or informal, on the party, especially on congress delegates and on other nominee leaders, to accept the recommendation and thus merely to confirm the selection committee's preferred leader candidate when the congress votes?

The Greens' procedure shows that there is a degree of divergence between Swedish parties. The selection committee's nomination of a short-list of potential spokespeople, who were then

invited to campaign openly against each other, contrasted sharply with the Social Democrats and the Moderates. Either side of the Greens' selection in 2011, the Left Party and then the Centre Party also held relatively open contests. The cultural constraints on challenging the selection committee's favoured candidates in a vote at the party congress is also clearly much weaker in the Greens than in the Moderates and Social Democrats.¹⁰

Still, in an international comparative perspective, the striking impression is of how much Sweden's parties, with their varying historical trajectories, have in common in their procedures. Above all, there is the role of the selection committee. In all the Swedish parties, even those, like the Greens, that produced public shortlists of candidates, the committees still ultimately endorsed just one (or, in the Greens, a duo) to the party congress.

Preliminary delegation analysis

If we regard the party members as the ultimate principals, there is good reason to ask how well the process of delegation from them to the party leadership actually works. Successful delegation, in which the agent has incentives to act in line with the preferences of the principal, can be promoted by certain institutional arrangements.

After the act of delegation, *ex post*, the agent must be monitored, and all three of our Swedish parties manage that in an apparently effective way. The chain of intra-party delegation leads from members to party congress delegates (via municipal and regional branches). The congress must re-elect the party leader (or spokespeople) every time it meets – annually for the Greens, biennially in the Moderates and, at least in 2011, quadrennially for the Social Democrats (biennially from 2013). The congress also elects the party's board and executive committee, both of which count the leader as members. Ostensibly at least, therefore, party leaders should be constantly kept in line by the "institutional checks" that these powerful executive organs, mandated by the congress, constitute.

Institutions are also important *ex ante*, before the act of delegation has occurred. First, the right agent has to be appointed, and "adverse selection" avoided. In some ways, Swedish parties seem to manage this well, too. The strong tradition of requiring longstanding engagement in the party before an individual can be considered for leading positions should reduce the risk of subsequent errant behaviour.

However, political preferences within parties naturally vary among members, sometimes widely. It is hard to see how members, through their agents at the party congress, can express those preferences, and thus indicate the direction in which a plurality or a majority think the party should take, if they have just one potential agent whom they are expected to confirm. It is especially problematic when the agent-designate has said little or nothing about what her own preferences are, which is what Social Democratic party culture, in particular, has come to require, and which was also a feature of the Moderates' selection in 2014-15. True, the

¹⁰ Later the same year, the incumbent Christian Democratic leader faced, and saw off, a challenge at the party congress, a very rare event in Swedish politics.

selection committee must try to discern the membership's preferences before it makes its recommendation; and that must be easier when alternative preference-packages are associated with individual candidates, who have advertised those packages competitively. Still, this method of discerning the principals' preferences is surely inferior to simply revealing them in an open vote, either among members directly or among their representatives.

Successful delegation also requires a clear communication of what the principals want the agent to do – in other words, a mandate. Again, that mandate is difficult to convey when there is no open vote that reveals the principals' preferences. (There is, of course, the party programme. But its contents in Swedish parties are largely vague and aspirational.) Indeed, in the absence of such a vote between competing candidates, it may well be difficult for the principals themselves to decide what their *own* preferences are.

Certainly, our stylised description of intra-party delegation is not the same thing as describing internal party democracy. But, as discussed above, the two concepts have quite a lot in common. We cannot yet be sure that the scope for agency loss described in the preceding paragraphs, which we suspect but cannot yet be sure is comparatively large in Sweden, explains those parties' mediocre performances in the Party Politics Database index. But those separate findings are in line with each other. Why, then, do Swedish parties select their leaders in this way?

Madestam (2014a:306-7) is clear about why the selection process is so restrictive in the Moderates and the Social Democrats. Since 1936 Swedes have experienced just six years in which their prime minister did not come from one of these two parties. The argument is that if the selection of these parties' leader is preceded by open intra-party conflict, and she is thus not chosen by an ostensibly united party, her authority as prime minister will be undermined. In 2015 the chair of the Moderates' selection committee agreed directly with Madestam's argument (SR 14 Nov. 2014).

Yet this logic has evidently escaped the most frequently governing British, Danish and Finnish parties, among others. Nor is it clear why a party that selects a would-be prime minister as leader should feel the imperative to suppress internal division more than any other party does. Anyway, the fact that the leader was previously selected by a unanimous congress does little to disguise serious internal division, as the Social Democrats's experience in 2011-12 confirmed. Clearly, more analysis, probably both institutional and historical, is required.

Next steps

As we explained at the start, this paper is an early contribution to an inquiry into the nature of party leadership. One aim was to describe a case whose characteristics are surprising and unusual. Subsequently, we hope to use case studies like this one to develop the set of process indicators that we presented in Table 1. Even if the Swedish-style selection committee is rarely found elsewhere, some parties appear to have some organ that plays a comparable, if

not equivalent, role. In Austria, for example, the executive committee seems to fulfill this gatekeeping function (Jedenastik and Müller 2014:68).

These indicators will seek to capture differences in power relations as they are conceived in the delegation approach. The scope for the ultimate party principals, the members, to discriminate between aspiring agents, to formulate a mandate, and then to monitor the performance of the agent once delegation has occurred, plus the scope for exogenous actors (such as parliamentarians or collateral organisations) to exercise cross-pressure on the agent, should be captured by this set of indicators.

Returning, finally, to the Swedish context, however, the parties' selection committees are surely a neglected area of party research. In each of our three observations, the selection committee was fairly clearly the agent of the parties' constituency branches. Yet it is at least noteworthy that while the Greens and the Moderates' selection committees were dominated by local and regional politicians, the Social Democrats' was heavily populated by current or former parliamentarians. Interestingly, this echoes earlier findings about the members of the party board (Aylott et al 2013:181-84). The membership of selection committees in Swedish parties over time is a potentially intriguing avenue of inquiry.

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ABBREVIATIONS OF MEDIA SOURCES

Aft. - *Aftonbladet*.

AiP - *Aktuellt i Politiken*.

DI - *Dagens Industri*.

DN - *Dagens Nyheter*.

DO - *Dagens Opinion*.

Exp. - *Expressen*.

GP - *Göteborgs Posten*.

SR - *Sveriges Radio*.

SvD - *Svenska Dagbladet*.

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INTERVIEW

Joakim Larsson, convenor of Green Party selection committee, 2007 to present, interviewed by telephone 26 June 2015.