

ESCE

Electoral System Change in Europe since 1945



Electoral System Change in Europe since 1945: Sweden

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Section 1: Overview of Swedish Electoral System Changes since 1945

Sweden has been a democracy since the beginning of the twentieth century, and, unlike most other European countries, has not witnessed any spell of dictatorship or occupation since then. Since the aim of the project is to describe and map post-war electoral reforms, this summary begins in 1945 where the electoral system was semi-open PR with an average district magnitude of just over 8 with no formal threshold. This system has remained largely unchanged since – the biggest change took place in 1969 – when Sweden adopted a unicameral structure – substantially increasing the number of seats at stake, and introducing an upper tier of allocation and a party threshold of 4%. In 1997 this system was further amended in order to give greater weight to preference votes in determining the allocation of seats to candidates.

Section 2: Relevant Electoral System changes in Sweden since 1945

Table 1. Summary of Swedish Electoral Laws and Amendments since 1945

Law	Amendment	Date of enactment	Location	Relevant for the research
[name of the law]	[Name of the amendment]	Day Month Year	location	Yes or No
[name of the law]	[Name of the amendment]	Day Month Year	location	Yes or No

Section 3: Details of previous electoral systems and electoral system changes.

3.1 The 1945 Electoral System

Sweden had (and retains) a system of list proportional representation.

Assembly size. 230 seats. This could grow to a slightly higher number (for example, 233 seats in 1964) due to technicalities in seat allocation over districts.

Districts and district magnitude. Through Hare quota, seats are distributed to 28 electoral districts, which have an average magnitude of just over 8.

Nature of votes that can be cast. Voters seem to have complete freedom concerning the ballot they can file. However, voters are limited to a ballot that at least contains a party name and some candidate names which are registered by this party as candidates running for this party



in this district. In practice, parties would often hand out pre-printed ballots at the entrance of the polling station.

Party threshold. No legal party threshold, outside of the 'natural' thresholds due to district magnitude.

Allocation of seats to parties at the lower tier. In every district, seats are allocated to parties according to the D'Hondt system of highest averages.

Allocation of seats to parties at the upper tier. Not applicable (until 1969, Sweden had only one tier)

Allocation of seats to candidates. Seats are allocated through a complex system, which seems to hold the middle ground between Borda Count and intra-party D'hondt. For each party, the ballots are examined. The candidate who appears on the top of the ballot on a plurality of the ballots is elected first. Any additional seats the party has received are distributed through the following procedure. Any ballots from which the top candidate has just been elected are redistributed to the next candidate on the ballot who has not already been chosen. However, after redistribution, the ballot is only worth $(1/(1+n))$ votes, where n is the number of times the ballot has been redistributed). In practice, it seems that pre-printed party ballots all but determined the hierarchy of candidates within a party.

Table 2: Allocation of seats at district level in 1948

Electoral district	1948
Stockholms Stad	24
Stockholms län	12
Uppsala län	5
Södermanlands län	7
Ostergötlands län	11
Jönköpings län	9
Kronobergs län	5
Kalmar län	8
Gotlands län	3
Blekinge län	5
Kristianstadts län	9
Malmö städers valkrets	10
Malmöhus län	9
Hallands län	5
Göteborgs län	11
Göteborgs län Bohusområde	7
Alvsborg läns norra valkrets	6
Alvsborg läns södra valkrets	5
Skaraborgs län	8
Värmland län	9
Orebrö län	8



Västmanlands län	6
Kopparbergs län	9
Gävleborgs län	9
Västernorrlands län	9
Jämtlands län	5
Västerbottens län	8
Norrbottens län	8



3.2 The 1952 Electoral Reform

This reform witnessed the introduction of the modified Saint-Laguë instead of D'Hondt.

Allocation of seats to parties at the lower tier. [Short description].

The system of distributing seats within districts is changed to modified Saint-Lague.

No other change.

Table 3: Allocation of seats at district [and provincial] level from 1952 to 1968

Name of the district	1952	1956	1958	1960	1964	1968
Stockholms Stad	24	25	25	25	24	22
Stockholms län	12	13	13	14	16	19
Uppsala län	5	5	5	5	5	6
Södermanlands län	7	7	7	7	7	7
Ostergötlands län	11	11	11	11	11	11
Jönköpings län	9	9	9	9	9	9
Kronobergs län	5	5	5	5	5	5
Kalmar län	8	7	7	7	7	7
Gotlands län	3	3	3	3	3	3
Blekinge län	5	5	5	5	5	5
Kristianstadts län	8	8	8	8	8	8
Malmö städens valkrets	11	11	11	11	12	12
Malmöhus län	8	8	8	8	8	8
Hallands län	5	5	5	5	5	5
Göteborgs län	12	12	12	12	12	13
Göteborgs län	7	7	7	7	7	7



Bohusområde						
Alvsborg läns norra valkrets	6	6	6	6	6	6
Alvsborg läns södra valkrets	5	5	5	5	5	5
Skaraborgs län	8	8	8	8	8	7
Värmsland län	9	9	9	9	9	8
Orebrö län	8	8	8	8	8	8
Västmanlands län	7	7	7	7	7	7
Kopparbergs län	9	9	9	9	9	8
Gävleborgs län	9	9	9	9	9	9
Västernorrlands län	9	9	9	9	8	8
Jämtlands län	5	5	5	5	5	5
Västerbottens län	7	7	7	7	7	7
Norbottens län	8	8	8	8	8	8



3.3 The 1969 Electoral Reform.

Sweden moved at this time from a bicameral to a unicameral legislative structure. At the same time, the size of what was the lower chamber and became the single chamber was substantially increased, to 350 seats, an upper tier of seat allocation was added, and a national vote threshold for seat allocation was established.

Assembly size. The assembly is expanded to 350 seats (310 district seats plus 40 national adjustment seats).

Party threshold. A national party threshold of four percent is introduced. Parties that cross this threshold compete for seats in all districts, and for the national adjustment seats. Additionally, parties that did not cross this bar do compete in districts where they have won at least twelve percent of the seats, but these parties never compete for the adjustment seats.

Allocation of seats to parties at the upper tier. First, all the district votes cast for parties that have passed the four percent threshold are counted on the national level. Then, through modified Saint-Lague, all the 350 seats are allocated to these parties. Seats which are won by parties that didn't make the 4 percent threshold, or which are distributed to parties which would be entitled to less seats than they have already won at the lower tier, are disregarded. The difference between the number of 'entitled seats' and seats already won at the district level, is subsequently granted to parties from the forty adjustment seats. Through intra-party modified Saint-Lague, these seats are then allocated to the different districts, where they are further treated as if the concerned parties would have won the seats at the lower tier.

Table 4. District list and magnitude

Name of the district	1970	1973
Stockholms Stad	31	29
Stockholms län	24	27
Uppsala län	8	8
Södermanlands län	9	9
Ostergötlands län	15	15
Jönköpings län	12	11
Kronobergs län	6	6
Kalmar län	10	9



Gotlands län	2	2
Blekinge län	6	6
Kristianstadts län	10	10
Malmö städernas valkrets	18	18
Malmöhus län	10	10
Hallands län	7	8
Göteborgs län	17	17
Göteborgs län Bohusområde	10	10
Alvsborg läns norra valkrets	9	9
Alvsborg läns södra valkrets	7	7
Skaraborgs län	10	10
Värmland län	11	11
Orebrö län	11	11
Västmanlands län	9	9
Kopparbergs län	11	11
Gävleborgs län	12	12
Västernorrlands län	11	11
Jämtlands län	5	5
Västerbottens län	9	9
Norrbottnens län	10	10

No other change.



3.4 The 1974 Electoral Reform

This reform reduced assembly size by one seat, so that the total number of seats would be odd and a tie between left and right would not therefore be possible.

Assembly size. The assembly is reduced to 349 seats (310 district seats plus 39 national adjustment seats).

No other change.

Table 5: Allocation of seats at district level from 1976 to 1991

Name of the district	1976	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991
Stockholms Stad	27	26	26	25	25	25
Stockholms län	28	29	30	31	32	32
Uppsala län	9	9	9	9	9	9
Södermanlands län	9	9	9	9	9	9
Ostergötlands län	15	15	15	15	15	15
Jönköpings län	11	11	11	11	11	11
Kronobergs län	6	6	7	6	6	6
Kalmar län	9	9	9	9	9	9
Gotlands län	2	2	2	2	2	2
Blekinge län	6	6	6	6	6	6
Kristianstadts län	10	11	11	11	11	11
Malmö städens valkrets	18	17	17	17	17	17
Malmöhus län	10	11	11	11	11	11
Hallands län	8	9	9	9	9	9
Göteborgs län	17	17	16	16	16	16
Göteborgs län	10	10	10	11	11	11



Bohusområde						
Alvsborg läns norra valkrets	9	9	9	9	9	9
Alvsborg läns södra valkrets	7	7	7	7	6	7
Skaraborgs län	10	10	10	10	10	10
Värmland län	11	11	11	11	11	10
Orebrö län	11	11	10	10	10	10
Västmanlands län	9	9	9	9	9	9
Kopparbergs län	11	11	11	11	11	11
Gävleborgs län	12	11	11	11	11	11
Västernorrlands län	11	10	10	10	10	10
Jämtlands län	5	5	5	5	5	5
Västerbottens län	9	9	9	9	9	9
Norrbottens län	10	10	10	10	10	10

3.5 The 1994 Electoral Reform

The number of lower-tier districts was increased here from 28 to 29.

Districts and district magnitude. The number of districts is raised from 28 to 29. This lowers the average district magnitude from 12.5 to just over 12.

No other change.

Table 6: Allocation of seats at district level in 1994

Electoral district	1994
	Stockholms Stad
Stockholms län	33
Uppsala län	10
Södermanlands län	9
Ostergötlands län	15



Jönköpings län	11
Kronobergs län	6
Kalmar län	9
Gotlands län	2
Blekinge län	6
Kristianstadts län	11
Malmö städers valkrets	8
Malmöhus län nord	9
Malmöhus län sodra	11
Hallands län	9
Göteborgs län	15
Göteborgs län Bohusomrade	11
Alvsborg läns norra valkrets	9
Alvsborg läns södra valkrets	6
Skaraborgs län	10
Värmland län	10
Orebrö län	10
Västmanlands län	9
Kopparbergs län	11
Gävleborgs län	11
Västernorrlands län	10
Jämtlands län	5
Västerbottens län	9
Norrbotbens län	10

3.6 The 1997 Electoral Reform

This reform increased the weight of voters' preferences in determining the order in which candidates filled their parties' seats, though it also reduced voters' capacity to express complex preferences among candidates.

Nature of votes that can be cast. From 1997 on, there were three types of ballots. A ballot with just a party name (to cast a party vote), a ballot with a party name and the list of candidates running for that party in the concerned constituency, and a blank ballot, on which voters can indicate a party name and (optionally) the name of one candidate they want to cast a preferential vote for.

Allocation of seats to candidates at the lower tier. In most of the cases, the system worked as a semi-open list system with a preferential threshold. First, the candidates would be elected in order of the number of preference votes they have received, provided that these candidates have obtained at least eight percent of the number of votes for their party in the constituency. Any seats which cannot be filled through this procedure, are filled according to the list order provided by the party. A sole exception would be the case in which a party would not have protected the candidates on their list; in this case, the list order can theoretically be further amended by a sufficient number of write-in votes.

Arter (2006: 36), Bergman (2004: 221), and Möller (1999: 270–4) all argue that this reform was introduced in response to voters' disengagement from politics. Previously, though voters had



been able to strike out or add names from lists, this had never had any practical effect (Särilvik 2002: 261). Bergman (2004: 205) reports that the reform did have an effect in the first two elections in which it was used: in 1998, it led to the election of twelve MPs who would otherwise have been too far down their party's list; in 2002 this number was ten. Nevertheless, Bergman (2003: 599) also points out that the reform reduced voters' capacity to express their preferences: "while giving voters a greater role in choosing candidates from parties' lists, the new rules also give party organizations more control over ballot access in the first place".

No other changes.

Table 7: Allocation of seats at district level in 1994

Electoral district				
	1998	2002	2006	2010
Stockholms Stad	26	27	27	28
Stockholms län	34	35	36	37
Uppsala län	10	10	11	11
Södermanlands län	9	9	9	9
Ostergötlands län	15	15	14	14
Jönköpings län	12	11	11	11
Kronobergs län	6	6	6	6
Kalmar län	9	8	8	8
Gotlands län	2	2	2	2
Blekinge län	6	5	5	5
Malmö kommuns	9	9	9	9
Skåne läns västra	11	11	11	12
Skåne läns norra	10	10	10	10
Skåne läns norra och östra	10	10	10	10
Hallands län	10	10	10	10
Göteborgs kommun	16	17	17	17
Västra Götalands län västra	11	11	11	12
Västra Götalands län norra	9	9	9	9
Västra Götalands län södra	6	6	6	6
Västra Götalands län östra	9	9	9	9
Värmland län	10	10	10	9
Orebro län	10	10	10	9
Västmanlands län	9	9	8	8
Dalarnas län	10	10	10	10
Gävleborgs län	10	10	10	10
Västernorrlands län	9	9	9	8
Jämtlands län	5	5	5	4
Västerbottens län	9	9	9	9
Norbottens län	9	9	9	9



Appendix

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