



**Case
Study | 4**

Sweden

By Maria Gratschew

Acknowledgements

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I. Introduction

Collecting information on the costs of elections has not been particularly difficult in Sweden, as most information is available to the general public. The difficulty has been to present the costs in a way that can be compared easily with the data from other countries. Some costs are built into the budgets of larger organizations that do not work only on issues related to elections. An example of this is the National Tax Agency. The amount that the central EMB pays to the Agency as compensation for obtaining data for a voter register is small; however, there are hidden costs to the Agency in terms of salaries and benefits to employees, renting premises and technical and legal services. These activities are related not only to elections, but also to the general maintenance and administration of the register. Another example is the board charged with managing and settling electoral disputes: it is appointed and financed by the Parliament (see also Legal Framework).

Case Study 4 - Table 1. Basic facts and statistics of the most recent election¹⁹

Number of eligible voters	6,950,000
Number of electoral districts	6,000
Number of regional EMBs	21
Number of local EMBs	290
Combined elections	Yes: local, regional and national

It is important to note that there are currently two committees, both appointed by the government, which are assessing electoral practices in Sweden—in particular the electoral law and the financing and disclosure requirements of political parties. The conclusions of the committees will be presented in the near future, and their recommendations may lead to major changes in the electoral law and practices. For the most part, however, the information presented in this case study describes existing practices.

Declining voter turnout is often considered a negative, albeit common, phenomenon in modern democracies. The most recent election to the European Parliament in June 2004 showed a decline in turnout in Sweden, as in several other European member

¹⁹ The most recent election was in June 2004, for the European Parliament.

states. The decline in turnout contributed to lower-than-expected election costs for a variety of reasons, including that the option of voting in advance was not used as widely by the voters; the lower turnout meant that the vote-counting process was conducted more quickly; and some material that had already been obtained for the general election of 2002 and the euro referendum of 2003 could be used.

II. Structure of the EMB

The bodies that manage elections in Sweden are organized in a three-level system, with central, regional and local EMBs. This decentralized system corresponds not only to electoral management, but also to the structure of institutions of governance in Sweden in general. The central EMB is an independent authority; created in 2001, it is the newest independent EMB in Europe. Regional and local EMBs are overseen by county administrative boards and municipalities, respectively. The tasks carried out by the local and regional EMBs are not directed by the central EMB, but are stipulated in the same documents and laws that establish them as authorities—the Elections Act of 1997 and its regulations.

The staff of the central EMB can be divided into three main groups: technical staff, subject experts and support staff. There are established procedures for how the EMBs receive their funding, and their core staff members are employed on a permanent basis.

The central EMB works under the supervision of the Electoral Board, a five-member board whose composition should guarantee broad political and civil support. The Board is appointed by the government, and it leads and has decision-making authority over the work of the central EMB. The members of the Board receive a small, mostly symbolic stipend for their work.

The central EMB is a small organization with no more than 13 full-time employees and nine consultants. The consultants work mainly on technical and Web communication issues. There are 21 regional EMBs (one within each of the 21 county administrative boards) and 290 local EMBs (one within each of the 290 local municipalities).²⁰

²⁰ Each kind of EMB—central, regional and local—is responsible for specific tasks and has different responsibilities. Typically, their functions match the area and level for which they are set up. For example, the local EMB is responsible for recruiting and training polling station officials, for setting up and equipping polling stations, and for the first count of votes in the polling stations. The local EMBs are normally hosted under the organization of the municipalities. The regional EMB is responsible for the second and final count of votes from the whole region, which takes place at counting centers, and the appointment of elected members based on the election results. It is typically hosted by the county administrative boards. The central EMB is responsible for the registration of party denominations and names of candidates, the production and design of ballot papers, allocating parliamentary seats to electoral districts, as well as informing voters about the election, and how, when and where to vote. In addition to informing voters, it also develops training and information materials for local and regional EMBs. The central EMB also officially appoints members of Parliament and members of the European Parliament, on the basis of the election results that they continuously disseminate after polls close. The central EMB has developed and maintains the complex technological system that supports election administration. The indigenous people of Sweden (and Scandinavia), the Sami, elect members to their own regional parliament. These elections are managed by the same regional EMBs as for general elections, together with the central EMB and the staff of the Sami authority, as specified in the law governing the Sami Parliament. The Elections Act (Vallag) 1997:157, chapter 1, paragraphs 15, 16 and 17. Also used is the Elections Act (English), which includes changes up to and including SFS 2003:1058.

III. Legal framework

The central, local and regional EMBs are not mentioned in the Constitution. They are, however, mentioned in the Elections Act.²¹ The Swedish electoral law was changed in 2002, although much of its content dates from 1997. A committee also examined the need for further changes to the Electoral Law in 1994 and presented its recommendations in November of that year.

The Electoral Law specifies that there shall be a central EMB, regional EMBs and local EMBs.²² The Elections Act does not specify that there shall be an independent, central EMB, nor whether it should be affiliated with any other authority or institution—it simply stipulates that the government should decide which body should form the central EMB. The Parliament in 2001 voted to establish an independent EMB;²³ however, it should be noted that the Elections Act does not contain provisions requiring that the EMB be independent. (Prior to 2000, the central EMB was neither independent nor located within the National Tax Agency.) The central, local and regional EMBs face no immediate threats to their existence, especially as the local and regional EMBs are hosted within existing administrations.

The Constitution outlines general principles of equal and universal suffrage, of periodic elections, electoral districts, the Electoral Review Board and the electoral system. The Elections Act specifies the tasks of the local, regional and central EMBs, polling station staff, and the Electoral Board. It also specifies in detail the division of tasks among the EMBs.

Electoral disputes are managed by the Election Review Board, an eight-member board appointed by the Parliament immediately after the installment of new members of Parliament following a general election. New installments may also take place throughout the mandate period when MPs leave their positions for whatever reason. Decisions made by this Board may not be appealed.

IV. Electoral costs

a) Costs during non-election periods

In recent years, notably since 1998, more elections than usual have been held in Sweden. The main reason stems from Sweden's membership in the European Union; as a result, elections to the European Parliament and a referendum on introducing the euro as a currency have taken place.

All of this activity means that the central EMB's regular operations costs during a year without elections are rather difficult to measure, at least by using updated numbers.

²¹ The Elections Act (Vallag) 1997:157, chapter 1, paragraphs 15, 16 and 17. Also used is the Elections Act (English), which includes changes up to and including SFS 2003:1058.

²² The Elections Act (Vallag) 1997:157, paragraphs 15, 16 and 17.

²³ The central EMB was correctly established by a decision of Parliament. Since the inception of the central EMB, there has been a change in function and power relating to the establishment of new authorities. Today the government has the power to establish new authorities.

Case Study 4 - Table 2. Costs of the central EMB during a non-election year

Description of cost or activity	Amount (in kroner)²⁴
Permanent staff	7.1 million (\$910,000)
Office premises	1.2 million (\$154,000)
Financial costs (interest on loans)	40,000 (\$5,000)
Technology and Web communication	14 million (\$1.8 million)
Operating and other costs	1 million (\$128,000)
Depreciation and write-downs	5 million (\$641,000)
Total cost	28.34 million kroner (\$3.63 million)

An attempt to cite costs during a non-election year is shown in Table 2.

The cost of technology and Web communication is fairly high due to the large investments that have been made. The cost of maintaining a high technical standard and expertise within the organization is reflected in this annual budget report. In addition, it is primarily consultants who are working with these issues instead of permanent staff, which is yet another reason for these high costs.

The annual budget of the central EMB is based on a proposal to the government, which nearly always approves the requested amount.

b) Voter registration

The voter register is compiled on the basis of the civil register. The civil register is continuously updated by the National Tax Agency, which has held overall responsibility for the register since 1971.

Before every election, the central EMB acquires from the agency a complete voter register, which is extracted from the database containing the civil register. The central EMB pays the agency a fee for this information; the amount for the euro referendum in 2003 totaled 500,000 kroner (\$64,000). The amount is calculated on the basis of the number of persons in the register, with the per-name being 2-5 öre (1 kroner = 100 öre). The central EMB receives the voter register in an electronic format and produces printed registers for each polling station. This is done with the use of statistics and maps provided by the Land Survey. The cost of dividing and printing the register by polling station is equivalent to 300,000 kroner. Additional costs (almost 13.5 million kroner) involve the printing and dissemination of voting cards to all eligible voters.

c) Boundary delimitation

Similar to how the central EMB purchases services from the National Tax Agency, it also purchases services relating to boundary delimitation—but in this case from

²⁴ As reported in the annual report of the central EMB. (Available in Swedish only, titled: "Årsredovisning för VALMYNDIGHETEN avseende budgetåret 2003.")

another government agency, the Land Survey. The regional EMBs produce maps of electoral districts, and these are used by the Land Survey to produce registers of all real estate located in the approximately 6,000 electoral districts in Sweden. The Land Survey provides details of all real estate in the register and maps and codes for the real estate. In this process they use Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, which has proved to be useful in quickly finding all necessary data. For this service, the central EMB pays 200,000 kroner (\$26,000). In addition, the central EMB subscribes to a regular update of map services and real estate services, but at very low cost, and again, calculated on the basis of a few öre (1 kroner = 100 öre) per unit of real estate. The services of boundary delimitation from the Land Survey are bought in advance of every election.

d) Polling operations

Polling operations are managed by local EMBs, which are hosted within municipal organizations. The municipalities fund their activities, including election administration, from annual disbursements from the national government as well as tax revenues from their inhabitants. In addition to their annual, general budget, the local EMBs receive extra funding for specific electoral tasks, in particular voting operations at special institutions such as hospitals or prisons. Upon application, this funding is provided by the central EMB, and a financial accounting must be submitted to the central EMB

Case Study 4 - Table 3. Electoral budget of municipalities

Training of polling station officials
Salaries paid to polling station officials
Production of material
Transportation of material, postal votes and staff
The renting of additional premises
Information services at the entrance of larger polling stations
Amount per election :
9 million kroner (\$1.15 million) in Stockholm (460 polling stations)
2.2 million kroner (\$282,000) in Uppsala (104 polling stations)

once the election is over. Table 3 shows the cost of polling operations in two municipalities, Stockholm and Uppsala, for the European Parliament election of 2004.

As can be seen, costs differ greatly between municipalities. The municipality of Stockholm has almost 610,000 eligible voters, which makes the cost of polling operations approximately 15 kroner per voter. However, there are several other costs within the electoral process and polling operations that are not taken into account, but possibly covered by other bodies, such as voting at post offices.

The cost of polling operations varies greatly between regions and municipalities. This depends on decisions made by the municipalities, for example whether to retain or merge small, remote polling stations, and how much to pay polling station officials, if anything. This is normally the single largest cost in the budget. The amount paid to polling stations officials varies widely in Sweden, and some municipalities do not pay polling stations officials at all. In the case of Stockholm, officials are paid comparatively high salaries, as follows:

- Chairperson of polling station: 2,500 kroner (\$320)
- Vice chairperson of polling station: 2,000 kroner (\$260)
- Other officials of polling station: 1,200 kroner (\$154)

This amount includes a small amount paid to chairpersons and vice chairpersons for participating in training before the election; all other officials are trained but without additional pay. Each polling station has six officials, and the municipality of Stockholm, for example, has almost 460 polling stations operating in an election, while Uppsala manages 104 polling stations.

Three tasks in polling operations not covered by the local EMBs/municipalities are the vote counting process, the production of ballot papers and envelopes, and advance voting at post offices. First, the initial count of votes is conducted at the polling station, and from there officials phone the results to the regional EMB. The regional EMB is also responsible for completing a second and final count of all votes. For this task, the central EMB compensated the regional EMBs a total of 23 million kroner for the 2004 European Parliament election. This equals a little more than 3 kroner per voter on average. Second, the production of material, specifically ballot papers (6 million kroner for purchasing paper and 9.2 million kroner for printing in the 2004 election), voting envelopes (3 million kroner), and the packing of voting cards for voters and material for the local and regional EMBs (3.2 million kroner) are all managed by the central EMB. The central EMB also pays compensation to the post offices for the work involved in advance voting at the polling stations. (See also paragraph e.)

e) External voting

There are three main types of external voting in Sweden:

- All voters may choose to cast ballots at post offices up to 18 days prior to Election Day. Most recently, about 30 percent of voters chose to vote in advance in this manner. The central EMB compensates the post offices for this additional task, which cost 110 million kroner (\$14.1 million) in the 2002 general election, or around 55 kroner per voter choosing this option. (The cost of advance voting at post offices was lower for the European Parliament election in 2004, totaling 63 million kroner.) To these costs must be added the cost of producing voting envelopes, voting cards, etc. (See also paragraph d.)
- Second, there is the possibility to vote from abroad, mainly at diplomatic missions. This practice is managed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and its regular out-posted staff. Staff members are given a short briefing and information about the election by the central EMB when they are in Sweden. There is

almost no additional cost involved for this practice because the diplomatic missions use existing premises and staff, and votes are sent to Stockholm by regular couriers or as part of diplomatic mail. Voters may also vote by mail from abroad; special mailing vote material is produced by the central EMB and sent to all Swedes living abroad who have notified the Swedish Tax Board of their address and desire to be included in the civil register. The material is also sent to diplomatic missions and may be ordered free of charge from the central, regional and local EMBs as well.

- Third, voters have the option to vote by messenger and from special institutions, such as prisons, hospitals and other care institutions. The costs of voting from special institutions are covered by the central EMB, but the actual process is carried out by local EMBs. The costs for this type of vote, which totaled 6 million kroner in the most recent election, are simply reimbursed to the local EMBs after the election. The costs consist primarily of salaries paid to polling officials and transportation of staff and voting materials.

f) Campaign finance

Sweden has no legal framework regulating the financing of political campaigns. The electoral system is a list proportional system, and political parties, therefore, are the main campaign machines. However, since 1997 the party lists have been transparent, and this has opened up elections for individual campaigns by nominated candidates. Generally, the individual campaigns are small; approximately 80 percent of them are less than 25,000 kroner (\$3,200). Finances for individual campaigns are covered by a voluntary agreement between the political parties in Sweden; if asked to do so, parties are expected to publicly disclose their income.

Election campaigns can be conducted by any political party, individual, corporation or organization. Available funds within political parties may be used for this purpose (see paragraph g).

The 2003 referendum on the introduction of the euro revealed interesting features of campaign funding in Sweden. Public funds were distributed to both sides in the campaign, but organizations separate from political parties were also involved in the campaign. Businesses were heavily involved, with the vast majority supporting a 'yes' vote—thus making the 'yes' campaign much better funded overall. During the campaigning, it was debated whether this discrepancy marked the undermining of democracy—a consideration that was much less noteworthy after the 'no to euro' side had won with 56 percent of the vote.

g) Political party finance

Since direct public funding was introduced in the mid-1960s, political parties have relied heavily on this source of income. Presently, during a non-election year, an average of 70–80 percent of party income is provided by the public purse. The figure is slightly lower in election years. Public funds are distributed according to performance in the previous election and current representation in the legislature. Funds are divided into office support and general party support.

The second most important source of income is party-owned lotteries, which account for up to 15–20 percent of total income. Membership in political parties has declined sharply in the last 30 years, and membership fees now account for only 4–5 percent of party income. Once the most important source of income, member fees have become marginalized mainly by the introduction of public funding. Private donations, general fundraising and income from conferences and publications are additional sources of income; but since the conservative Moderate party decided to refuse donations from corporations, no national party accepts such donations.

In general, political party finance in Sweden has been based primarily on voluntary agreements like the one regarding corporate donations. There is virtually no legal framework concerning party finance. The Law on Public Funding of Political Parties (1972:625) regulates public funding but not other sources of income. Since the 1980s, the political parties have followed a voluntary agreement to disclose their income and expenditures, if asked to do so. There are no legal requirements for reporting or disclosing income or expenditures.

In 2004, a public investigation called Public Disclosure of the Incomes of Parties and Candidates' (SOU 2004:22) was conducted. The authors of the subsequent report, Lars-ke Ström and Gullan Gidlund, suggested a legal framework to require political parties to publicly account for all income, including all private donations of 20,000 kroner or more. These issues are currently being debated in Sweden.

h) Civic education

The electoral law²⁵ specifies the responsibility of the central EMB to inform voters about the electoral process. Explicitly, its task is to inform the general public about when, where and how to vote, and of other practices relevant to the election. The main focus of voter information efforts is on producing a pamphlet in 14 different languages (in addition to Swedish), providing information on the Web site, producing brochures with information, and advertising on television and radio. A variety of ethnic groups and immigrants reside in the country or are citizens of Sweden, and the languages of the 14 main groups were used for the European Parliament elections in 2004. These languages included including Arabic, Bosnian, Croatian, Farsi Finnish, Kurdish (both North and South), Russian, Serbian, Somali, Spanish, Turkish, and a few other European languages. Additional language versions are sometimes placed on the Web site; a decision is made before each election as to which languages to use. Brochures and films in sign language and printed information in Braille are also produced. The cost for voter information totaled about 17 million kroner for the 2002 general election, a 60 percent from 2002.

Before the elections to the European Parliament in June 2004, the central EMB participated in the government's democracy campaign by organizing information seminars for representatives from municipalities, organizations, government agencies and schools. The authority working with the development of schools included election information brochures in its general information dissemination plan.

²⁵ The Elections Act (Vallag) 1997:157, chapter 1, paragraph 15.

The central EMB is prepared to develop its information activities further before the general elections in 2006. Producing special information packages for schools and for immigrants is under discussion, but this has yet to be decided and depends on the annual budget granted to the central EMB.

i) Cash transactions at the EMB

The central EMB does not handle any cash transactions, except for small purchases of certain office supplies. The organization handles many of its transactions electronically. Typical electronic transactions are payments to the local or regional EMBs for their additional electoral costs, or payments to businesses that provide services or goods to the central EMB. The administrations that host the local and regional EMBs receive additional funding from the central EMB in order to carry out certain tasks, such as voting from institutions or the second and final count of votes. Payments made to local or regional EMBs are based first on application and secondly, on the submission of budget reports or simple invoices.

j) Inventory of unused supplies

In the most recent election, the central EMB was fortunately able to use material that had been procured for earlier elections. By doing so, some savings were realized. An inventory of unused supplies takes place after each election; unused material without text, such as voting envelopes, can be used in future elections. The central EMB always keeps in stock a certain amount of voting envelopes and paper used for printing ballots. This stock is regarded as a reserve. The local EMBs store materials used in polling stations, such as ballot boxes and polling booths. These are normally made of strong, long-lasting material and do not need to be replaced often, which is why they constitute a very low and rare cost in the budget of the EMB.

The central EMB produces millions of ballot papers for a general election, a number much greater than the number of eligible voters in Sweden. The reasons for this are (1) there should be enough ballot papers available to voters for all political parties and also versions of blank ballot papers, and (2) political parties that received at least 1 percent of the votes in an earlier election qualify to receive a certain amount of ballot papers for free (some are used at the polling station, and some are distributed by political parties). However, printing ballot papers involves a relatively low cost, once they are designed and ordered.

See also Table 2 above, which includes depreciation and write-downs as a cost of the central EMB.

k) New technologies

The central EMB has made investments in new technology and Web-based communication, particularly in recent years. The central EMB has applied for, and received, a relatively high annual budget, with support from the government. The cost of IT support and technology almost doubled in 2002, when it was a little more than 20 million kroner (\$2.6 million). The technology that has been obtained and devel-

oped is mainly used in the production of the voter register and boundary delimitation and in managing election results. Although the existing technology requires high maintenance, it has been acknowledged that the using a long-term, cost-efficient system has increased the central EMB's efficiency.

Election results are published electronically immediately after the close of polls on Election Day. The Swedish central EMB was first in the world to produce preliminary and later final election results in real time on the Internet in 1994. The results for the parliamentary elections of that year were reported through a reporting receiver to the central EMB directly from the polling stations. The final results of the parliamentary elections of 1998 also were reported in this way. The central EMB was established as an independent authority in 2001, and one reason for the structural change was to facilitate the installation of new technology.

1) International financial assistance to the EMB

The central EMB does not receive any international financial assistance. The organization has actively participated, however, in the development of international standards on electronic voting with the Council of Europe and the development of a European regional network of EMBs.

V. Overall assessment

A number of costs applicable to the electoral process in Sweden have not been covered in this report. The central EMB pays a small amount to the University of Gothenburg to obtain statistics about the electoral process in general, and voting behavior in particular. This cooperation has been in place for many years. Statistics Sweden, the central statistical office, is also a partner of the central EMB; it produces statistics on elections and publishes them in detail on its Web site and in its annual reports. Statistical services are also purchased by the central EMB for its internal work on planning, for example.

A committee to examine the financing political parties has recently been appointed by the government. Its initial press release suggested that rules of disclosure be created in Sweden, as no such laws require such reporting at present.

Another currently active committee is considering changes to the existing electoral law, and it presented its preliminary recommendations in November 2004. The committee's most significant recommendation is that municipalities take over advance voting, which has been conducted by the post offices, as a regular election task. This change would be quite costly, however, and it and other committee recommendations will be discussed in greater detail once the final report is released.

An attempt to summarize the cost of elections in Sweden is presented in Table 4. A number of different costs are specified; however, the total amount does not include all costs relating to elections in Sweden²⁶ as discussed above. Table 4 does give an indication of the average cost of certain activities or materials that can be used in comparison with other countries and practices.

Case Study 4 - Table 4. Budget of the central EMB and share per registered voter

Description of cost or activity	Amount in kroner
Cost of central EMB during non-election year	28.34 million
Voter registration	0.8 million
Boundary delimitation	0.2 million
Printing and distributing voting cards	13.5 million
Polling operations (in Stockholm, amount per registered voter)	15
Vote counting (in the form of compensation to regional EMBs)	23 million
Production of ballot papers	15.2 million
Packing and distribution of ballot papers and other material	3.2 million
Advance, external and voting at special institution	116 million
Civil education	18 million
Total (rounded)	218 million (USD \$28 million)
Number of registered voters	6,722,152
Total cost per registered voter	47.50 (USD \$6.07)

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²⁶ The amounts are average costs at general elections, unless other references are made.

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About the author

Maria Gratschew is a graduate of the University of Uppsala, Sweden. She joined International IDEA in 1999 as a project manager responsible for International IDEA's Voter Turnout Project (<http://www.idea.int/turnout>). She works mainly on voter turnout, election administration, external voting and compulsory voting issues in the Elections Team of International IDEA. Together with Rafael López Pintor, Ms. Gratschew served as lead writer and editor for *Voter Turnout since 1945: A Global Report* (2002) and *Voter Turnout in Western Europe—A Regional Report* (2004).