

# **The Democratic Audit of Sweden**

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# 1 Summary

The aim of the Democratic Audit is to actively contribute to a constructive, objective debate on the basic preconditions for democracy by means of a wider discussion of the concepts, analyses and empirical research. The Democratic Audit of Sweden consists of independent social scientists who have been invited by SNS to assess the state of Swedish democracy.

There are two main criteria for the success of a Democratic Audit. Firstly, the findings must be credible, i.e. based on solid research, clear theoretical standards and systematic empirical research. Secondly, the results must reach out, i.e. the reports have to be accessible for a wider audience, for media and decision-makers. Then the audit might be part of democratic society as a learning process.

The democratic ideal as formulated by the Democratic Audit is one of **popular**, **constitutional** and **effective** government. The people must be free to govern themselves. Public power has to satisfy the fundamental requirements of the rule of law, to be respected by the authorities and enjoy public legitimacy. Finally the political system must have the capacity to carry out its decisions.

Results are published in annual reports. The research teams normally consists of four or five scholars, mostly political scientists. Some authors have participated in several reports, but usually members are replaced each year. The SNS Democratic Audit is primarily financed by grants from research foundations. Published reports regularly get broad media attention and members of the research team participate in seminars around the country.

During the first years the reports have covered themes such as political leadership, multilevel governance, local self-government, citizen involvement, constitutional control, political parties, and globalization.

The SNS Democratic Audit has provided an overview of the state of democracy in Sweden. Democracy received a passing grade in certain areas, such as civil society, politicians as a fairly descriptive representation of the electorate, liberal freedoms, the rule of law and decision-making capacity. The weak points are limited access to the political agenda, quality problems in the public sphere, intolerance, lack of clarity in the separation of powers, deficient accountability and weaknesses when it comes to economic resource control.

## 2 Theory and method

The common experience from the countries that have undergone the democratization process show that a number of relationships compose necessary conditions for democratic government. We can speak of a minimal definition of democracy. It is important that the legislative branch be chosen in free and general elections. Elections must be conducted on a regular and fair basis. This means that elections cannot be tampered with through manipulation and force. Another key principle is that no adult can be deprived of the right to vote and candidate for office. Moreover, everyone must be allowed to express their opinions and criticize holders of power in society. The liberal freedoms of speech, press, and association form an important cornerstone of the minimal definition of democracy. Citizens must, therefore, also have the opportunity to obtain information from different sources. The right of association - particularly the right to create political parties - needs to be guaranteed in a democratic state.

These criteria are the basis for democracy. They must be fulfilled in order for a country to be considered a democracy. All established democracies, including Sweden, fulfill these criteria well. An audit of mature democracies requires a more sophisticated definition of democracy than the one given by these minimal requirements.

A more appropriate definition of democracy targets the quality of democracy. How well are the basic values fulfilled? This is the implication of the work of the Democratic Audit, which focuses its attention on the quality of Swedish democracy. The quality of a country's democracy can be measured with the help of a number of criteria for good democratic governance. These criteria have been formulated from the international debate on the meaning of democracy. The criteria form a kind of ideal type that is both an theoretical abstraction and a norm for comparison. The ideal can, therefore, be used as a scale and a measuring stick to judge the democratic quality of political systems as they appear on paper and in action.

This basic ideal can be formulated as popular, constitutional, and effective government. This ideal signifies, first, that citizens must be able to govern themselves in a free and equal way. Second, the legal system must satisfy certain fundamental requires which are respected by administrative authorities and enjoy public legitimacy. Third, democratic government must be able to perform its tasks and implement its decisions.

This ideal of democracy contains three different elements. This means that democracy cannot be reduced to one single value. Democracy is not just popular government, as democratic political systems must also fulfill the criteria of constitutional and effective government. Democracy is not only proper legal treatment and due process - i.e., constitutional government - because citizens in a democratic political system must have the final say and government must be able to perform its tasks effectively. Finally, democracy cannot be delimited to effective government. The need for strong leadership must be balanced with the need for popular consent and legal impartiality.

The three cornerstones of democracy - popular, constitutional, and effective government - constitute an inescapable predicament. The different fundamental values may and frequently do come into conflict with each other. It has even been shown theoretically that it is impossible to construct an entirely perfect democratic form of government. Dilemmas and the balancing of the fundamental values are an inherent part of democracy. The problems of

balancing conflicting values cannot be left to experts or outsiders. Ultimately it is only the people and their elected representatives who through public debate and dialogue can find practical solutions that satisfy the fundamental requirements of democracy.

The debate on how these fundamental values should be balanced can be made more manageable if the values are given concrete form. This is what the Democratic Audit has done in its evaluations of Swedish democracy. Operational definitions have been given to the three cornerstones of democracy. In all we use thirteen different indicators in our audit.

### Popular government

The principle of popular government is the first cornerstone of democratic government. A number of special demands are put on popular democratic government. The people must be able to control the political agenda. They must ultimately be the group who decides which issues should be the focus of legislative action. The people must be able to form their own opinions on these issues. There is, in other words, a demand that citizens can inform themselves. Effective participation is crucial for the political process in democracy. Our third, fourth, and fifth indicators measure the quality of electoral campaigns, voluntary associations/civil society, and local self-government. Democracy also requires decision-making equality. Every citizen must have the same right to participate in the making of decision without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, etc. Every member of the public must tolerate and respect the right of other citizens to hold different points of views. In our audit we have formulated seven indicators to measure this value. They are presented below as statements formulating ideal types or ideal situations.

#### *Control of the agenda*

A requirement of good democratic governance is that all citizens decide on the future of their own society. An important first condition is, of course, that there is something to decide on. It is, therefore, crucial in democracy that citizens have ultimate control over how the political agenda is set. A minimal requirement in any representative democracy is that the legislative branch should have the deciding say over its own agenda.

#### *Enlightened understanding: the public sphere (Öffentlichkeit)*

Government by the people is realized through the free formation of opinion. Democracy is a method for solving conflicts through dialogue. Our democratic ideal requires that the political views of the people are based on informed understanding. Dialogue is the life-blood of democracy. A necessary requirement is, therefore, a functioning public sphere. It is crucial that the mass media provide the public with alternative sources of news as well as different interpretations of events. In other words, there must be pluralism in the mass media. All citizens must have the opportunity to reflect upon the political process and formulate their own opinion.

#### *Effective participation: election campaigns*

Elections are the primary means in representative democracy for citizens to demand accountability of their politicians. Generally, elections and electoral campaigns should realize the ideal of independent, reflective citizens who under the same conditions first discuss and then decide on issues which they have themselves decided as common concerns. Election campaigns must give the citizens these opportunities.

### *Effective participation: voluntary associations*

Arenas where people can meet and discuss issues of common importance are necessary in order that the inhabitants of a country become true citizens and do not remain anonymous and powerless in society. This means that a well-functioning civil society is crucial for democracy. Ideally-speaking, voluntary associations tend to promote democratic dialogue. Social movements, study circles, and political parties create social capital. Active participation in civil society contributes to the creation of trust and solidarity among citizens. Voluntary associations function as a school in democracy.

### *Effective participation: local self-government*

Involvement in local affairs has been seen as a school in democracy. Civic virtue stems from engagement in local political life. Local government has even been seen as an experiment laboratory for national politics and recruitment ground for national politics. The idea behind decentralization is that political decisions as much as possible should be made by the people who are affected by them. When seen in relation to the nation-state, local self-government is an expression of the decentralization of political power. Local and regional government can, therefore, be seen as furthering popular government if they practice good democratic traditions. Here we are, for instance, interested in the role of political parties, civil society, and the mass media at the local level.

### *Decision-making equality*

Democracy means that all citizens and social groups have the same right to participate in political bodies. Systematic under-representation of different social groups is an important sign of weakness in the government structure of any country. Systematic and permanent under-representation of certain groups undermines the credibility and legitimacy of the political process.

### *Toleration*

The concept of citizenship is central in democratic theory. In comparison to traditional society, where a person's social status depended on his or her family background, gender and social class, democratic society is based on equality. All citizens have the same right to take part in the political community. Citizenship is a combination of rights and duties. An important duty is toleration. Anti-discrimination is an important basis for democracy. Everyone has the same right to formulate and express her or his opinions. Toleration is the duty to respect the rights of others. Intolerance seriously threatens the requirement in democracies for free exchange of thoughts, opinions, and ideas.

### Constitutional government

The power of the state in democracy must be subject to limitations. Such limitations are justified by reference to the rights of minorities and liberal freedoms. Political power must be exercised in a legal fashion. It can be discussed how strong these limitations should be. Laws and rights which regulate the democratic process itself are naturally compatible with the ideals of democracy. Yet there are many important rights which do not, strictly-speaking, relate to the political process. The rights of minorities and the protection of the integrity of the individual set limits on the decision-making powers of the majority. There is, in other words, a potential conflict between popular government and the principles of constitutionalism.

Constitutional democracy presupposes, however, that it is possible to find practical solutions which meet the requirements both of rule of law and government by the people.

In order for a state to qualify as a polity governed constitutionally there are several requirements that must be fulfilled. Individual citizens must enjoy a number of fundamental rights and freedoms. The exercise of political power must respect the principle of due process. The power of the state must be organized according to the principle of separation of powers. These requirements have been formulated as three separate indicators.

#### *Rights and freedoms*

There are two important ways of measuring whether a political system fulfills the demand for citizen rights and freedoms. The first measurement concerns whether rights and freedoms have formally been incorporated into the constitutional documents of a country. The other measurement focuses on how the rights are exercised in practice. It is not uncommon that there is quite a difference between the formal and real rights of citizenship. For instance, research conducted for the Swedish Study of Power and Democracy showed clearly that certain groups in society are more capable of using their rights and freedoms than others.

#### *Rule of law*

The principle of rule of law means that individual citizens must not be discriminated against or be treated arbitrarily by government. Every person must have access to effective means for the assertion of their rights against government.

#### *Separation of powers*

Montesquieu's idea that only power can check power is as relevant today as when he formulated it in 1748. Constitutionalism implies that political power must be divided and regulated. A polity built upon legal principles must consist of several different centers of power. Particularly important is the existence of independent institutions for supervision and oversight of the political system. A well-functioning court system is an example of such an institution.

#### Effective government

Many social scientists would argue that effective government is not a crucial aspect of democracy. In a historical perspective, it has mainly been anti-democratic political theorists who promoted ideas regarding effective government and the need of strong leaders. The experience of Europe in the interwar years clearly shows, however, that democracy must take government effectiveness. Weak governments that are not capable of solving social problems have on several occasions led to the fall of democratic political systems.

When we include effective government as a crucial element in our theoretical ideal of democratic government, we do so under the assumption that the need for government effectiveness cannot by any means be achieved at the expense of our other crucial elements, popular and constitutional government. The effectiveness of democracy is identical with the capacity of the people to realize common goals through collective action under democratic forms of regulation. Three indicators of good effective government are used by the Democratic Audit.

### *Resource control*

An important part of independent decision-making capacity is control over an adequate supply of available resources. Resources come in many forms. Examples are financial and environmental resources. For an audit of contemporary Swedish politics, it is beyond doubt that economic resources are of particular importance. This is the case because Sweden has, for some time now, experienced problems with government financing and has, over the years, accumulated a considerable public sector debt.

### *Decision-making capability*

The ability of politicians to make lasting decisions is an important requirement for effective government and, thereby, democracy. Political institutions must be constructed in such a way that they make collective decision-making possible even when differences of opinion are large and the issues complicated. Political actors also have a responsibility to promote decision-making capability.

### *Outcome control*

Political systems can choose among different strategies to implement their decisions and monitor the effects of legislation. A central issue concerns the way administrative bodies handle legislative decisions. It is important that street-level civil servants do not transform the will of the people as reflected in legislative decisions in their daily contacts with citizens. Legislative decisions must be implemented correctly for government to be considered effective and democratic.

A crucial question for the Audit is whether it is possible to use the same framework to assess democracy at different levels of government. The answer is by no means an obvious one. For instance, many scholars have argued that local democracy is essentially different than national democracy and must, therefore, be analyzed on the basis of special normative demands. The research underway by the Democratic Audit is an attempt to prove the opposite, i.e., that the basic democratic criteria apply to all territorial levels. Most Swedish audit reports have studied the national level and some have also dealt with the European Union and local self-government.

The 1997 report devoted a special section on local democracy in Sweden. Data from all municipalities covered the following variables.

### Popular government

- agenda-setting activity of locally elected councilors
- local referenda
- mass media pluralism
- public library resources
- local web sites
- council meetings open to the public
- radio and TV broadcasts from council meetings
- participation in local elections
- local political parties
- membership in political parties
- voluntary associations
- study circles, popular education
- sub-municipal units, neighborhood councils

- school boards with parental representation
- social representativeness of local councils: women, youth, workers, immigrants
- toleration, low level of racist incidents
- acceptance of homosexuals

#### Constitutional government

- low level of rights violations
- children's rights (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)
- local authorities obeying rule of law (data from ombudsmen and administrative courts)
- freedom of information, access to official documents
- municipal archives
- local separation of powers, pluralist organization
- local auditors

#### Effective government

- budget control
- solidity, equity/asset ratio
- low debt burden
- decision-making capability: low level of party fragmentation in the local council
- implementation, index of local service delivery (proportion of target group)



### 3 Organization

The Democratic Audit of Sweden was established by the Center for Business and Policy Studies (Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle, SNS) in 1994.

SNS is a private, non-profit organization that seeks to promote research on economic and social issues of importance to public decision-makers, making it readily accessible to a broad audience.

SNS was established in 1948 as an association of concerned individuals in the Swedish business community. SNS has today more than 4 000 members in 44 local chapters, of which 12 are outside Sweden. It has also about 270 corporate subscribers, including Sweden's largest corporations and most important government agencies. SNS also commissions applied social science research at leading universities into topical policy problems. It is one of Sweden's major publishers in the social sciences, and an important organizer of conferences and meetings on economic and social affairs.

SNS attempts to be a bridge between social science research and decision-making in business and public life. It provides an independent forum for discussion of policy issues among prominent individuals in business, politics, the media and the academic community. As an organization, SNS does not take a stand on policy issues.

For more than two decades, the SNS has published annual reports on the state of the Swedish economy. Over the years, the economists who conduct this audit have pointed to problems within the political system as one explanation for weak economic performance. This criticism was an important impetus for the creation of the Democratic Audit. A group of independent political scientists is commissioned to study the political system in Sweden and assess the state of Swedish Democracy on an annual basis.

So far seven reports have been published. The research team normally consists of four or five scholars, mostly political scientists, but also sociologists and legal scholars. Most of the participants are Swedes, but members of the Audit teams have also come from Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Germany. At the beginning some of the authors participated for several years. Now the whole research team is usually replaced each year. The participating scholars are recruited by SNS. The work of the Democratic Audit is carried out under conditions of complete academic freedom. The authors are solely responsible for the contents of the report.

The Democratic Audit is financed by grants from different research foundations in Sweden. Some of the support has also come from multi-client sponsors. The sponsors were invited to join a reference group, which also presents its separate opinion on the annual reports.

An important aim of the Democratic Audit is to contribute to the public debate on democracy. The audit reports are written for the general public. They are reviewed by journalists, included as course readings at the university and in classes offered by adult study associations, and discussed within political parties and civil society associations. Members of the Audit frequently give lectures on their results and participate in seminars organized in local SNS chapters around the country.

## 4 Empirical results

The first annual reports gave comprehensive assessments of the overall status of democracy in Sweden, in Swedish municipalities, and the European Union. In later years the reports have focused upon particular aspects of the democracy, such as political parties, global governance and accountability in a parliamentary system.

### **1995 – Democracy as dialogue,**

by Bo Rothstein, Peter Esaiasson, Jörgen Hermansson, Michele Micheletti, and Olof Petersson

The 1995 report established the basis for democratic auditing. Popular, constitutional and effective government were operationalized in thirteen criteria.

The audit used the criteria in two ways. First, Swedish democratic performance was compared to the ideal type for each criterion. Second, an assessment was made of the direction in Swedish performance over the past few decades, i.e., if democratic practice is improving by becoming more similar to the ideal type or whether the trend is that democracy is deteriorating and becoming more dissimilar to the ideal type for each criterion.

The report shows that Swedish democracy can generally be characterized as satisfactory when compared to the ideal type but that the general trend is negative. In particular democratic practice is deteriorating on those criteria that were once the foundation of the Swedish model: control over resources, control over the political agenda, effective participation in civil society, decision-making capacity of government, and control over implementation.

### **1996 – Democracy and leadership,**

by Olof Petersson, Jörgen Hermansson, Michele Micheletti, and Anders Westholm

A problem that appears on several indicators involves political leadership. Events in Swedish politics in the past year show clearly that the country must seriously discuss how leadership in a democratic system should be understood. Democracy is a theory about the conditional concentration of power. A clear division of responsibilities and effective methods for accountability are two central prerequisites for democratic leadership.

The constitution that governs a country sets the setting for democratic leadership. Traditionally political scientists have compared two different political systems (the Westminster and Swiss models) in order to understand the degree of variations in constitutional framework. The study shows that this approach is inadequate. Not only is it important to understand the differences between majority systems and proportional systems. It is necessary to understand that political systems also are constructed after whether they facilitate the concentration of political power and whether they distribute or balance political power among several political actors. Swedish constitutional framework is a combination of proportionalism and concentration of power, a framework that puts particularly high demands on democratic leadership.

The 1996 report presented a comprehensive study of the leading decisionmakers in Swedish society. Swedish politicians are compared with the power elite in six other spheres, the civil service, private business, interest groups, mass media, academia, and culture. As has been shown in studies on other countries, Swedish politicians are not especially socially representative of the general population. Yet the study shows that they have several significant distinctive characteristics. Compared to many other democracies, Swedish politicians come from a relatively broad strata in society. Also, the number of women among the power elite has increased in recent years. The proportion of women among Sweden's top politicians is currently 43 percent.

There are several circumstances in Swedish politics that facilitate democratic leadership but that there are also several characteristics of the system that prohibit its development. The SNS Democratic Audit clearly shows that a serious problem is the unclear division of roles and responsibilities among the various political actors involved in democratic government. Another problem concerns the social and informal gatekeeping characteristics that threaten the goals of equal access to the political system. It is also evident that elected officials have not been successful in making citizens understand the conditions under which politicians work. Swedish politics need, therefore, a more creative political pedagogy. There is a lack of great political communicators.

### **1997 – Democracy across borders,**

by Olof Petersson, Jörgen Hermansson, Michele Micheletti, and Anders Westholm

As in the earlier reports, the Democratic Audit provides a summary of the state of democracy in the Swedish political system. Democracy received a passing grade in certain areas - civil society, politicians as a fairly descriptive representation of the electorate, liberal freedoms, the rule of law and decision-making capacity. The weak points are inadequate control over the political agenda, problems in the public sphere, intolerance, lack of clarity in the separation of powers and weaknesses when it comes to economic resource control.

The evaluation of the European Union shows a number of democratic weaknesses. The EU suffers from several democratic deficits. Popular government is the most serious weakness. The Democratic Audit questions whether the EU can be said to meet minimum requirements of popular government. Other defects can be noted in relation to the criterion on effective government, though these are not as serious. Constitutional government is the only democratic cornerstone that receives a passing grade.

Results from the audit of municipal democracy are entirely different. Popular government is satisfactory. The most serious weaknesses of municipal democracy concern legal and constitutional issues. Constitutional government is the Achilles heel. Municipal reforms and reorganizations have led to problems regarding the rule of law, predictability, the division of responsibilities, scrutiny and control.

A survey investigation of voters and their representatives which the SNS Democratic Audit conducted for this report shows that democracy is not doomed. Many voters are involved in societal matters and actively follow politics at the local, national, and international levels. Elected representatives are seriously concerned about the weaknesses in the political system. Both voters and representatives believe that democracy functions best at the local levels,

where decisions are seen as most essential for the well-being of the people. Today citizens are more independent, knowledgeable and critical. They want to be involved in politics in a more significant way than in the past. Civic associations play an increasingly important role both locally and globally. The mass media and new information technology make it possible for people to meet together and exchange ideas. A global consciousness is the prerequisite for popular government and world peace.

The report from the SNS Democratic Audit began by questioning whether democracy has a future in a world of porous territorial boundaries and increasing complexity. The report ends with the conclusion that democracy, regardless of its weaknesses and problems, will not only survive but will develop and become more embedded in the global political system.

### **1998 – Democracy and citizenship,**

by Olof Petersson, Jörgen Hermansson, Michele Micheletti, Jan Teorell, Anders Westholm

Today Swedes participate less in politics. There is also a drop or stagnation over the whole span of political resources from the ability to write a formal complaint about a decision of a public agency to active involvement in political meetings, participation in demonstrations, direct contact with decision-makers, and voter turnout.

Particularly notable is the drop in activity in political parties. Now less than eight percent state that they are a member of a political party. Even fewer go to political meetings or have a position of trust within a political party.

Civil society is not in much better shape. Our results show that the number of members in civic associations is decreasing. Today there are fewer Swedes who have a position of trust in a civic association. The proportion who are actively involved in associations has decreased dramatically as well. The group of people who are social movement entrepreneurs is becoming smaller and smaller. The existence of broad social movements, an important basis of traditional Swedish democracy, is now threatened.

The study shows that the state of Swedish democracy is not all bleak. Women and men are now on more equal foot in many areas, though in some of them men are still more active than women. Belief in the openness of the political system and in one's own ability to influence the situation of the country has increased. There is no evidence that intolerance is growing. The results show that the qualities of toleration, discussion, knowledge, and contact with people one does not know or people who are different than oneself tend to reinforce each other. A noticeable development is the trend towards more toleration and broad-mindedness among the younger generations.

The report shows that Sweden should no longer be considered a homogeneous country as there are great differences among divergent groups of people. Immigrants and the unemployed are to large extent not involved in organized political life. The unemployed have much lower levels of engagement in civic associations and take much less contact to exercise influence over politics. This is also even the case when it comes to voter participation and other political means of expressing one's opinion.

Immigrants are also political outsiders. Immigrants believe that they are less able to appeal a decision of a public agency and that it is more difficult for them to influence their own

situation. They also take fewer initiatives to influence their situation in the different social roles investigated in the study. The development over time is discouraging. The gap between immigrants and the rest of the population has been maintained or widened over the past ten years.

A combination of weak individual resources and badly functioning institutions is the reason. Many established organizations are better at maintaining the positions that they have reached than at adapting themselves to new social and political challenges. It is a serious flaw in Swedish democracy that new immigrants are not more welcome to enter Swedish society.

### **1999 – Democracy the Swedish way,**

by Olof Petersson, Klaus von Beyme, Lauri Karvonen, Birgitta Nedelmann, Eivind Smith

The 1999 Audit looks at Swedish democracy from a European perspective. The Audit is made up of four foreign academics who are very familiar with social life in Sweden. Sweden can definitely develop into a better constitutional democracy in the view of the Audit. Democracy has to be something more than simply a state in which the majority rule through legislation. Constitutional government sets out additional requirements concerning due process, rights and freedoms and the separation of powers. There is therefore no contradiction between constitutional government on the one hand and popular and effective government on the other. On the contrary a properly functioning democracy requires orderly and effective forms through which to implement the will of the people.

Representative democracy presupposes a responsive interplay between voters and their representatives. Those elected to office should not simply listen, they must also argue actively for their own point of view. Leading Swedish politicians, not least members of the governing party, have failed on this count with regard to the European issue, in the view of this year's Democratic Audit. A public forum for the discussion of European issues is required in order to provide a broad basis of popular support for the debate. It has proved very difficult to change the climate of debate in Sweden so as to include a discussion on European issues which would be reciprocal, objective and continuous. This gives the SNS Democratic Audit grounds for maintaining that Sweden, as a member state, suffers from a democratic deficit in terms of its approach to discussion of EU affairs.

The SNS Democratic Audit recommends that Sweden should not adapt itself on every point to a model based on a single European norm, which can scarcely be said to exist in any case. On certain points, such as the principle of public access to official documents and the Swedish model of autonomous administrative agencies, it is Europe that has lessons to learn from Sweden. There are, however, many aspects of the Swedish polity which could usefully be changed so as to strengthen democracy. A greater degree of awareness about Sweden's past and about her nearest neighbors would provide a better basis on which to conduct a critical and independent discussion with the aim of finding ways to improve the country's democratic institutions.

## 2000 – Democracy without parties?

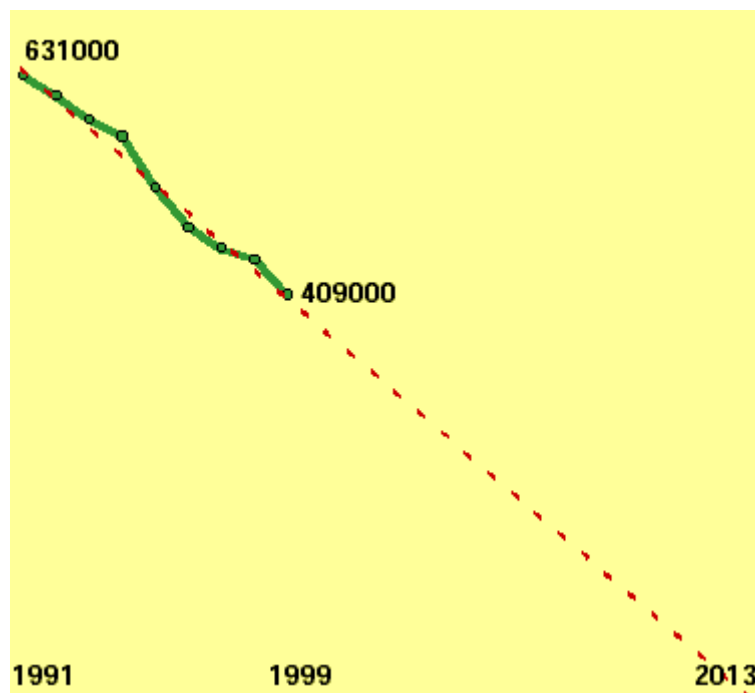
by Olof Petersson, Gudmund Hernes, Sören Holmberg, Lise Togeby, Lena Wängnerud

In the view of a majority in Sweden today the political parties are not working satisfactorily. That same majority fails to award the parties a passing grade in relation to taking responsibility for difficult and long-term decisions, to giving their members influence over party policy, to persuading suitable individuals to stand for elected office and to implementing the demands and wishes of the public.

The research group draws attention to the declining membership figures for the parties and considers that this trend gives cause for concern. If the trend continues at the same rate, the parties will have lost their entire membership in 2013. "Grass-roots party members" are already becoming a rarity. Parties are becoming identical with politicians. Ultimately the only people to assemble at local party meetings will be the very same individuals who would otherwise come together at meetings of the school board, the neighborhood council and the county council.

Diagram [Fig. 7.1 in the Swedish report]

Members in Swedish political parties 1991-1999 and forecast



The members of the Audit sound a warning note in relation to the decline of the parties. There are social tasks that only political parties can manage. The unique role of the parties is to weigh contrary demands and find a working compromise. How much should the theatres receive in state subsidy while hospital patients are having to queue? How high should taxes be to improve welfare when companies have to compete with low-cost countries?

Making such impossible choices is the primary responsibility of the parties. A successful party is capable of creating appropriate contexts. Out of a tangle of different proposals and

particular points of view, the party creates an ideology and a plan of action which provides an overarching purpose, a vision of a different society.

A society without parties would lead to increased power for rich special interests, technocracy and charismatic leader-figures. The kind of society envisaged would be based on a combination of elitism and populism. Small elite groups and authoritarian leaders would be able to stir up prejudice through the use of modern media and effective propaganda techniques.

The verdict with which the Democratic Audit concludes its report is that without political parties, democracy would sooner or later abolish itself.

### **2001 – Transnational democracy,**

by Olof Petersson, Karl Magnus Johansson, Ulrika Mörth, Daniel Tarschys

Globalization and Europeanization need not lead to a weakening of democratic government. Major opportunities exist for strengthening the democratic aspects of international politics. These involve a policy committed to creating a democracy without borders.

It is not the intent of the Democratic Audit to underestimate in any way the problems that lie ahead for democratic globalization and an improved European democracy, its members nevertheless insist that there are no grounds for defeatism. It is entirely possible to adapt our democratic institutions and legislative rules to the kind of decision-making increasingly taking place at international level. The difficulties apparent in achieving this goal are not cause for resignation but rather provide a reason for giving this matter greater attention and assigning it higher priority.

Democracy has already begun the search for new ways of working. One obvious trend in recent years is that national parliaments are devoting much more attention to international issues. Transnational parliamentary assemblies have also acquired greater influence, the European Parliament above all. Transnational contacts between the political parties are increasing.

The EU currently devotes just over a third of its budget to what is known as structural policy, the aim of which is to promote social and economic cohesion. There is every opportunity to transfer resources to a new kind of structural policy, a structural policy for democracy. Political and cultural cohesion could be improved by promoting transnational democracy.

The cause of the current democratic deficit is due not only to shortcomings in the formal decision-making rules and the relations between various institutions, but, equally importantly, to the absence of a democratic infrastructure, of functioning systems for news distribution, opinion formation and cross-border contacts between the social movements.

Major efforts are needed to create a public sphere in Europe and lend real meaning to the notion of European citizenship. The Democratic Audit proposes that efforts should be devoted to stimulate the media and lend greater weight to European and global issues in schools and education in general. Greater resources must be devoted to break the barriers of language or European cooperation will become a monopoly of the well-educated.

## **Note**

This paper builds on work presented at The First Annual Meeting and International Conference on Public Sector Transition, organized by The Association for Studies of Public Economics in Russia in cooperation with The School of Management, St. Petersburg State University and CECID, Stockholm University, held in St. Petersburg, May 25–26 2001 and The international seminar "Democratic audit in Sweden and the opportunities of its implementation in Russia", organized by The Human Right Research Center of the State University, Higher School of Economics, held in Moscow, December 18 2001.



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### Web site, with more references:

- <http://www.const.sns.se/dr/english> [English]
- <http://www.sns.se/dr> [Swedish]