



Party government in flux

Changing conditions for party groups in the Swedish Riksdag

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Purpose and Research Questions

Party groups are the main actors in the Swedish parliament (*Riksdag*). Numerous studies have confirmed that the importance and independence of parliamentary party groups, party leaderships and party leaders have increased, and that this has come at the expense of the parties' rank-and-file membership organisations (Sjölin 1993; Pierre & Widfeldt 1994; Hagevi & Jahn 1999; Isberg 1999; Hagevi 2000; Davidsson 2006; see also Katz & Mair 2002). As The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, among others, has observed, the increased importance of and changing circumstances for parliamentary party groups is occurring at a time when research about the Riksdag has declined. We would argue that the same can be said about research on Swedish political parties (Erlingsson & Brommesson 2010). Our project addresses both of these shortcomings by analysing the changing conditions for party groups in the Swedish Riksdag.

Leading party researchers argue that political parties are undergoing a dramatic transformation. Traditional mass parties with a strong membership base transform into vote-maximising catch-all parties, and these develop into cartel parties – i.e. professional administrators of state power (Katz & Mair 1995). The theory of cartel parties is composed of two interrelated hypotheses. The first is that, in effect, cartelisation makes party members superfluous (Pierre & Widfeldt 1994; Mair 1997; Katz 2001). The other is that the differences among political

parties as regards the substance of politics declines (Heidar & Koole 2000; Blyth & Katz 2005). Researchers argue that the driving forces behind party transformation are their increased dependence on the state for financial resources to conduct politics (Pierre et al 2000; Gidlund & Koole 2001; Koß 2010), reliance on the mass media for political communication (Strömbäck 2009) and societal changes that reduce the degrees of freedom that parties have to conduct politics (Blyth & Katz 2005; Katz & Mair 2009).

Although the idea of cartel parties is not without its critics, it dominates modern theorising about political parties (Koole 1996; Widfeldt 1997; Kitschelt 2000; Detterbeck 2005; Scarrow 2006). At the same time, the empirical evidence in support of the central thesis of cartel party theory – that parties become more and more similar to each other – is strongly limited. This is true, not least, for empirical research on parliamentary party groups.

Thus, the *overall purpose of this research project* is to analyse whether the party groups in the Riksdag have in fact become increasingly similar to one another over the period from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 2010s. Only by studying developments over a long period of time is it possible to identify clear changes in the parliamentary party groups. The research design of the project is based on collaboration. Using a common theory, i.e. cartel party theory, a group of researchers with different areas of expert knowledge will examine the thesis of

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increased similarity by conducting empirical studies of party groups. In particular the researchers will analyse party group change in a number of respects. The project is organised as six distinct sub-studies, each of which focuses on clearly specified research questions. Together the sub-studies will provide a comprehensive view of the changes that have taken place in the party groups of the Riksdag over the past 25 years. Thus, the approach of the project is theory-testing.

Four of the project's questions and analyses are direct offshoots of the cartel party theory's assumption of uniformity (i.e. increased similarity):

- Have the social composition of the party groups and the pre-parliamentary political experience of members of the Riksdag become more homogeneous?
- Has there been a homogenisation of parliamentary party groups due to a decline in gender differences as regards the substance and form of politics?
- Do the party groups in the Riksdag depoliticise central policy areas by systematically excluding them from conflict in favour of seeking consensus?
- Do the parliamentary party groups adapt their policies to media logic at the expense of ideology logic?

Thus, in these sub-studies, cartel party theory's theses about the consequences of the professionalisation of politics, de-politicisation and the power of the mass media are scrutinised. However, cartel party theory has also been criticised from several different perspectives. One line of criticism is directed against the idea that transformational pressures influence all parties in exactly the same way. On the contrary, it is argued that there are contextual factors, for example party culture, that influence parties in distinctly different ways (Koole 1996). In light of this, the project therefore also explicitly addresses a fifth question:

- Have the internal cultures of the party groups become more similar?

Another type of criticism is directed against the narrow, rationalistic perspective of cartel party theory and the theory's assumption that parties are exclusively strategic actors. The theory neglects the normative side of politics, that members of party groups also act on the basis of, and are dependent on, theoretical norms of representation, or democratic-theoretical prerequisites (Sjölin 2005; 2008). At the same time, it is clear that in theories of representation, the ideal-type conceptualisation of the role of the politician has changed from largely loyal party representative to independent political entrepreneur (Manin 2002). The question to be addressed in the sixth sub-study is therefore:

- Has there been a homogenisation of representation norms in the parliamentary party groups, and, if so, what are the normative implications of this for political representation and democracy?

These two questions give the project theory-critical and theory-development ambitions. The questions serve as "critical" tests for cartel party theory. Decisive evidence that party groups in the Riksdag are influenced by different contextual factors and different normative ideas about the role of representation undermines empirical support for the fundamental assumptions of cartel party theory. In this case, questions about the importance of contextual factors and norms for understanding the actions of parties will be essential for further development of a party theory framework.

Theory, the state of research and the project's contribution

In this section we further elaborate the research questions in the six sub-studies, their connection to cartel party theory, the current state of relevant empirical research and the specific contribution each sub-study is expected to produce.

THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF POLITICS AND THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE RIKSDAG

Researcher: Magnus Hagevi

The first sub-study examines whether or not the social composition of the party groups and the pre-parliamentary political experience of the members of the Riksdag has become more homogeneous since the late 1980s. According to the ideal of mass parties, political parties are open to all members. The rise of state-financed party funding enables cartel parties to increasingly employ professional politicians (Borchert 2003). As a result, the norm of self-selection is increasingly replaced by the norm of employment: to be recruited, hired and paid by an employer. Compared to self-selection, it is presumably more common that a person who is hired will be similar to, and have similar characteristics as, the person responsible for recruiting/hiring (Hensvik et al 2009). Since professionalisation itself implies that an individual can devote more time to his/her political career, it might also mean that those party members who are elected to the Riksdag will display greater uniformity.

In this sub-study we examine whether state-financed party funding for party groups increases more than funding for rank-and-file membership organisations. The professionalisation of politics is also analysed: among those newly elected to the Riksdag, are there more professional politicians than in the past? If so, what is the political background of these politically experienced newcomers – party employment, other elected positions for a political party or some other professional political role? Finally, we examine whether the social characteristics and pre-parliamentary political experience of members of party groups have become more similar, as well as whether these similarities are greater among those who were professional politicians when first elected to parliament compared with those who were not.

The sub-study will increase our knowledge

about several social characteristics of members of the Riksdag. It complements previous research about the social composition of the Riksdag, which has shown that the share of members of the Riksdag who were professional politicians when first elected to parliament has increased since the 1930s (Brusewitz 1936; Sköld & Halvarsson 1966; Holmberg & Esaiasson 1988, Esaiasson & Holmberg 1996; Hagevi 2003). In addition, it relates the social composition of the party groups and pre-parliamentary political experience to the professionalisation of politics by examining, with the help of existing research, the development of publicly-financed party funding at the national, regional and local levels (Gidlund 1983, 1985; Wiberg 1991; Pierre et al 2000; Gidlund & Koole 2001; Koß 2010).

DE-POLITICISED PARTY GROUPS?

Researcher: Karl Loxbo

Research on cartel parties has become increasingly interested in a process referred to as de-politicisation: whether established parties have become more ideologically similar and have gradually developed a shared, closed policy agenda (Katz & Mair 2009). In the same spirit, Blyth and Katz (2005) argue that parties that were once ideological opponents now work together to dampen the expectations of the electorate. Literature on de-politicisation has pointed to EU policy (as well as economic internationalisation) as a core area for the cartelisation of European party systems. Questions which, in practice, are decided within the framework of EU institutions are assumed to be de-politicised and exempt from inter-party conflict, and this is seen as the most important explanation for cartelisation (Mair 2007; Katz & Mair 2009:754; cf. Bartolini 2005). A consequence of this is that established parties develop an incentive to downplay the importance of questions that were once at the heart of political conflict. Another phenomenon that is seen as neutralising political conflict is when parties

cooperate over political blocs to change comprehensive welfare programmes, for example Swedish pension reform (Loxbo 2007; 2009a). At present we do not know how common this method of closed cooperation is. It is still unclear how cartelisation – if it exists – functions in practice, in the everyday work of parties in parliament. Previous research has provided contradictory and anecdotal evidence about the relationship between cartelisation and de-politicisation. This sub-study aims to remedy these shortcomings.

GENDER CONVERGENCE IN THE RIKSDAG'S PARTY GROUPS

Researcher: Helena Stensöta

According to the mass party model, different social groups have varying interests, and this is manifest in the values they represent in the Riksdag. Research on gender in parliaments have shown that women prioritise social and family policy more than men do, and that, to a greater degree than men, they see themselves as representatives of their gender (Norris, Vallance & Lovenduski 1992; Skjeie 1992; Wängnerud 1998; Heidar & Pedersen 2006). Research has also shown that women and men practice politics in different ways (Mackay 2001). However, according to cartel party theory, members of party groups are not primarily representatives for different interests; rather they act as profession politicians whose interests increasingly coincide. New research also shows that the political priorities of female and male members of parliament increasingly converge (Wängnerud 2010), which can be seen as an effect of the processes that cartel party theory calls attention to. The third sub-study is aimed at looking deeper into the question of whether gender differences in the Riksdag, and in particular in party groups, have decreased over time. Can a homogenisation of party groups be observed in the form of fewer gender differences as regards political priorities and political practice?

Previous research on gender issues in parliament has examined whether women as politicians have had an impact on the parliament and its party groups (Skjeie 1992; Wängnerud 1998, 2010; Lovenduski 2005; Beckwith 2007). Our sub-study analyses the declining difference between women's and men's political priorities in the Riksdag. Rather than explaining change in terms of gender, we look at cartelisation and party culture as possible explanations.

MEDIATISATION OF THE PARTY GROUPS' FOREIGN POLICIES

Researchers: Douglas Brommesson and Ann-Marie Ekengren

The fifth sub-study examines whether party groups adapt to a homogenising media logic at the expense of a differentiating ideology logic. The impact of media logic is studied by comparing the foreign policies of Swedish party groups (where there is consensus foreign policy) with those of party groups in Great Britain (where foreign policy is conflictual). Foreign policy is studied as a critical case insofar as it has long been sheltered from publicity and heated debate in the media.

Cartel parties increasingly use the mass media for political communication (Katz & Mair 2002). The parties' media activities are based on expensive communication strategies, which contributes to their need for financial support. This is an example of mediatisation – a process in which fundamental aspects of politics assume media forms (Hjarvard 2007) – which, in accordance with media logic, implies that the communication of party groups becomes homogenised. Media logic includes a narrator technique and valuation of newsworthiness suitable for capturing the attention of a media audience. It is based on, among other things, simplification, sharp debate, personalisation and stereotyping (Nord & Strömblad 2005). When party groups adapt the substance of their politics to a common media logic, it reduces

their opportunities to adopt ideological standpoints. Whether this has occurred is tested in a comparative analysis across time (1988–2010) and space.

We study mediatisation as an important aspect of cartel party theory, one which is rarely tested empirically (cf. Strömbäck 2009). We provide new knowledge about how a consensus culture mediates the effects of mediatisation (cf. Dettebeck 2005).

CHANGED PARTY CULTURE?

Researcher: Katarina Barrling Hermansson

Cartel party theory and theories that emphasize the importance of party culture – i.e. self-image and social norms about how parliamentary work should be conducted – are competing theoretical approaches. Cartel party theory expects party culture to collapse when faced with crass reality. Thus, as a result of increased cartelisation, party cultures should become more similar. Since cultural norms are relatively stable (Chabal & Daloz 2006), it is particularly interesting to investigate whether these changes have also had repercussions at a deeper cultural level. On the other hand, if party cultures have resisted cartelisation and still seem to diverge from one another, then this contradicts the idea of cartelisation and poses a challenge for it. Party cultures can then obstruct the ends-means rationality that cartel party theory presupposes.

According to culture theories, party groups do not behave as profit-maximising firms, but rather as a sort of micro-society in which social norms can operate to block actions that are means-ends rational from a strictly political perspective. Thus, in this fourth sub-study we analyse four dimensions of party culture: views about the relationship between the individual and the group, sense of political responsibility and knowledge about and importance of social community within the group. Using these dimensions we compare party cultures in the Riksdag in

2010 with corresponding cultures that were studied in research conducted between 1998 and 2002. Have party cultures in the Riksdag become more similar?

The sub-study is related to previous research that argues that party cultures have deep historical roots (Barrling Hermansson 2004; cf. Jensen 1993; Kitschelt 1994; Isberg 1999; Abélès 2000; Esaiasson & Heidar 2000; Chabal & Daloz 2006). This implies that these cultures might be capable of resisting the cartelisation of party groups. On the other hand, growing cartelisation might have changed party cultures, which is something that will be examined in this sub-study.

POLITICAL ROLE FOR A NEW ERA

Researchers: Mats Sjölin and Henrik Enroth

The sixth sub-study analyses and interprets the normative implications of cartel party theory from the perspective of democratic theory. One question of interest is whether the role of politicians in party groups has changed as regards how they represent voters when making decisions. The point of departure is a classic problem of normative representation theory, the mandate-independence controversy – the ethics of organisation vs. the ethic of individualism (Pitkin 1967; Sjölin 2005). The modern theory of representation has identified a shift in the ideal political representative from loyal party representative to political entrepreneur (Ahlbäck et al 2007; Manin 1997; Wägnerud 2006; Karvonen 2010). In the cartel party, however, politicians are agents of the state rather than entrepreneurs. This discrepancy clearly shows that normative representation theory needs to be developed in light of the findings of empirical research (Mansbridge 2003; Urbinati 2006; Sjölin 2008). In this sub-study we interview both veterans of the Riksdag and new-comers in order to study changes in normative role conception (cf. Isberg 1999, Brothén & Gilljam 2006).

In addition, it is also important to examine

the consequences of cartel party theory for representative democracy more broadly. We use the results of the other five sub-studies to do this. In general there is a divide between empirical research on representative democracy and normative democratic theory. By conducting a normative analysis on a broad empirical foundation this project enables us to study the possibilities for political representation in contemporary democracy as it functions today, rather than referring to participatory or deliberative democracy as ideal types (cf. Plotke 1997).

Method and material

The strategy of the project is to collect several different types of empirical material and to use both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. This increases our ability to draw general conclusions about the changed role of the party groups in the Riksdag and to test the validity of cartel party theory in several different respects.

Diachronic analysis, and especially analyses of change over a period of time as long as from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 2010s, creates particular methodological challenges. In particular, we need to collect a large quantity of data that is comparable over time. We tackle this problem in a variety of ways:

- In several cases we can use data from directories to conduct time series analyses.

An example of this is mapping the social characteristics of party groups and using members' pre-parliamentary experience to analyse professionalisation. Here we can take advantage of both previous compilations of data and earlier analyses (Esaïsson & Holmberg 1996; Hagevi 2003). It is also easy to complement these sources with information from biographical directories that cover recent years. Another example is de-politicisation in the Riksdag. Previous research has examined reservations in parliamentary committees (Sannerstedt & Sjölin 1992, Sjölin 1993), and this can be expanded by collecting additional data on reservations, thus bringing the research up to the present.

- We have received preliminary approval to use survey data from previous studies of the Riksdag.
- In some cases project members will develop completely new types of data that are comparable over time. One example is the mediatisation of politics, in which foreign policy debates in the Riksdag over the past 20 years will be analysed.
- In other cases, we will develop data on today's party groups and compare it with older, similar studies. For example, this will be done in the sub-study on party cultures (Barrling Hermansson 2004) and the sub-study on the role of politicians (Isberg 1999; Davidsson 2006).

Quantitative data and analysis of documents

Table 1. Project interviews with members of party groups.

Sub-study	Interviews	Selection focus for elite interviews
Professionalisation	No	---
Gender	Yes	Gender, Cohort
De-politicisation	Yes	EU committee, Group leader
Mediatisation	Yes	Foreign policy politicians
Culture	Yes	Party affiliation, Veteran
Political role	Yes	Veteran/new-comer Back-/frontbenchers

are nonetheless insufficient to achieve the purposes of the project. An important part of the empirical material will therefore come from interviews with members of the Riksdag's party groups. Elite interviews are needed to capture the more complex dimensions of the conditions for the party groups (Berry 2002). As part of this, in keeping with the goals of the project, we will conduct retrospective interviews with veterans of the Riksdag in order to increase our knowledge about changes over time.

The structure of the project makes it possible to use some of the data in several of the sub-studies. Interviews are one such example. We expect to conduct some 75 interviews. They will be coordinated by the project's leadership group and will be used in five of the six sub-studies (see the overview in table 1). Another example is that the sub-study on gender issues will also analyse data from the sub-study on professionalisation, party culture and the role of politicians from a gender perspective.

The theses of the cartel party theory contend that societal developments influence all parties in the same way, not just in Sweden but in all mature democracies. It is therefore important to compare our analyses of changed circumstances for party groups in the Swedish parliament with developments in other European countries. To accomplish this, the British parliament will be used as a reference case in some of the sub-studies. Using Britain enables us to compare Sweden with a case that differs in terms of election system (proportional/majority) and political culture (consensus/conflict).

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