

Election Analysis Sweden 2014

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Feminists in parliament: small success for the Left and significant gains for the Fascists

This year elections will be held in Sweden for the European parliament (on 25 May) and the municipal, regional and national assemblies (on 14 September). In addition to this, some municipalities and regions will usually also use this as an opportunity to hold referendums at the same time. On the election day for seats in the European Parliament, six municipalities will hold referendums on issues such as harbour area development, construction of a new sports stadium or reorganisation of schools. These referendums will probably contribute to voter participation in the EP elections in these areas.

The election threshold for the EUP election is the same as for national elections: 4%. Sweden uses open lists, with the possibility to choose favourite candidates. In the national elections, some candidates are strongly campaigning for their own personal placement within the party list, and although this was not so significant during the EUP election campaign, it was seen most frequently among the liberals and the right-wing parties.

The political situation with regard to the elections

This year is a “super-election year”, with EUP elections in May and national, regional and municipal elections in September. This has clearly had an impact on the campaigns for the EU Parliament, with an increased tendency to test out issues and slogans on voters for the upcoming national elections rather than actually address issues regarding the work of the EU.

The government (a coalition consisting of Moderaterna, Centerpartiet, Folkpartiet and Kristdemokraterna) have had grim results in the polls for almost a year; the Left, Greens and Social Democrats have gained, as have the far right Sverigedemokraterna party. In addition, Feministiskt Initiativ have led a very successful campaign with a limited budget, using social media to a large extent.

The economic situation is less than healthy, but better than in most European countries. (Unemployment stood at 8.7% in April)

Overview of the election results

The last election turnout was 43.8%, but this time 48.9% of citizens came out to vote, a very good turnout for a European election. But, as always, it was mainly voters from high-income areas that went to polling stations in greater numbers whilst voters in rural or low-income urban areas stayed at home.

Results and results of single parties/including numbers of seats

			2014	+/-	2009	seats 2014	+/-	seats 2009
3rd	Conservative	Moderaterna	13.6%	-5.2	18.8%	3	-1	4
	Neo-liberal	Centerpartiet	6.5%	+1.0	5.5%	1		1
1st	Liberal	Folkpartiet liberalerna	10.0%	-3.6	13.6%	2	-1	3
	Christian Democrat	Kristdemokraterna	6.0%	+1.3	4.7%	1		1
	Social Democrat	Socialdemokraterna	24.4%	-0.2	24.7%	6		6
	Left Party	Vänsterpartiet	6.3%	+0.6	5.6%	1		1
	2nd	Greens	Miljöpartiet de gröna	15.3%	+4.4	10.8%	3	+1
	Right extreme	Sverigedemokraterna	9.7%	+6.5	3.3%	2	+2	-
	Pirates	Piratpartiet	2.2%	-4.9	7.1%	-	-2	2
	FI	Feministiskt initiativ	5.3%	+3.1	2.2%	1	+1	-
	Turnout	Valdeltagande	48.9%	+5.0	43.8%			

Maybe we are seeing the beginning of a new era in Swedish elections. Until now, voters had voted based on socioeconomic issues, but now, with the Greens making significant gains, as well as the feminists and the Swedish democrats, voters are increasingly shifting their focus towards issues of socio-cultural belonging. The Left and the feminists are very similar when it comes to feminist issues (in an attempt to smear the feminists with a communist past, foreign Minister Carl Bildt claimed they were "Siamese twins"). According to an analysis made by the largest environmental organisation in Sweden, the Left have a better environmental policy than the Greens. But identity might triumph over policy proposals, at least in the EU parliamentary elections.

Election topics

Overall, the parties have been using slogans and topics that are similar to those that they will use in the national elections in September. The general idea is that the EUP election is some sort of dress rehearsal for national elections. The Left Party is going for "Not for sale", which in the national campaign takes aim at the privatisation of welfare institutions and venture capitalists in the Swedish school system. In the EUP campaign it translates to a broader aim, with workers' rights, the environment, women's rights etc. being brought into focus. The slogan "Out with the racists, in with the feminists", used by Feminist Initiative during their campaign, sums up their policies quite well. The Left and the feminists have really

appealed to their voters' fear of a large extreme right, and the Greens have done the same but with a greater focus on environmental issues. The feminists have also avoided the subject of which party group they will support, arguing that they need to negotiate with each of the groups in order to see where they can have the largest amount of freedom to go against the group line, if necessary, in order not to compromise their votes. Their newly elected MEP, Soraya Post, has stated in an interview that she leans towards GUE/NGL, but the party chair Gudrun Schyman says that they are open to an alliance with the Greens as well. There have been some campaigns to encourage people to vote, most of them rallying around the need to vote *against* far right parties.

Some examples:

SSU – social democratic youth association, made a video-clip called *Never forget to vote*, featuring the grandchild of the Nazi officer Rudolf Höss, explaining that it may be easy to forget your past, but you still have to face up to it.

The local branch of the Left Party in Biskopsgården, a suburb in Göteborg with a population largely on low incomes, has made videos featuring local people explaining why people in Biskopsgården (and everywhere else) need to vote.

- EU and racism
- EU and working conditions
- EU and the right to asylum
- Candidate Malin Björk, from Göteborg greets voters in Biskopsgården (in English as the population of the suburb are from all over the world).

Results of the left parties

Left Party: 6.3%, 1 MEP (Malin Björk), a small gain of votes.

Feminists: 5.5%, 1 MEP (Soraya Post) – a huge gain.

What is interesting is that the Left Party and the Feminists made gains at the same time. In polls carried out by the SVT (Swedish Public Service television), voters answered questions on where they see themselves on the political spectrum, for instance as left- or right-leaning. 86% of the feminist voters regarded themselves as left-leaning in terms of their political views. What is more, whilst both the Left Party and Feminist initiative have gained voters and the Greens have gained a significant number of voters, the social democrats have not lost as many as feared. So the “cannibalism of the Left”, which many feared, has not really materialised.

Left Party voters

According to the poll made by SVT (Swedish Public Service TV), the Left Party might have a higher number of female voters and young voters. The old (64 and above) tend to go to the social democrats. The feminist voters are young, urban women, with an academic background, or with a history of involvement with the non-parliamentary Left.

Which social movements were relevant for the political situation and the elections?

A new anti-racist movement has really come to the fore during this election, not necessarily helping specific parties but making a statement that people really should vote, and subsequently vote against the far right. In December 2013, a protest organised by the local population in the suburb of Kärrtorp outside Stockholm in opposition to Nazi activities in the

area, was attacked by a group of 30 Nazi activists armed with bottles, knives and bats. The attack was met with resistance and the locals, together with a small group of anti-fascist militants, chased the Nazis into the nearby forest, where all of them were arrested by the police. The following week 16 000 people gathered in Kärtrorp in a very powerful demonstration of protest against extreme right violence. All party leaders, except the prime minister, were present but not allowed to speak. Only people from local organisations made speeches, stating that they were grateful for the support shown, but that they were not letting themselves become a tool in a political party agenda.

Grass roots organisation

At the same time, protests in some 30 cities in Sweden and Finland took place in solidarity. On the 8th March, after the International Women's Day demonstration in Malmö, in southern Sweden, a group of left-wing feminist protesters were attacked and stabbed by a group of Nazi activists from the small Svenskarnas Parti (Party of the Swedes, former National socialist front). One of the Nazi activists had just recently returned from Ukraine, where he had joined a Swedish Nazi volunteer group which was fighting alongside Svoboda and the Right sector. The police did not arrest him on the spot and he has now fled the country, but three of the other Nazi attackers were arrested. No one died, but one left-wing activist was in a coma for a couple of weeks and is now recovering.

Massive support came from all over Europe, showing solidarity with the victims. Although these events did not exactly mark the start of this new anti-racist/anti-fascist movement, they did shine the media spotlight on all the ongoing struggles and brought groups together. All of a sudden, reports started to come in from hospital staff refusing to meet with Sweden Democrat politicians visiting their work place as well as firefighters driving away their trucks in order to spoil photocalls when the SD campaign came to visit etc. And, when they were criticised by SD officials in the media, huge support campaigns erupted on social media seemingly out of nowhere, like *Brandmän mot rasism* (fire fighters against racism). During the Sweden Democrats campaign, they have been met with noisy protests, thousands of turned backs and pointed middle fingers, as well as sabotaged posters, denied ad campaigns in some media along with protests against the media that took their money. They too have played the part of the bullied victim, seeking sympathy.

The Feminist Initiative is a 100% grassroots organisation: it has no employed officials and a huge social media fan base twittering every move of party chair Gudrun Schymans' campaign. Members of the anti-racist movement have traditionally been, to a large extent, Left Party voters, but the feminists have clearly made huge gains here. The feminists have been very active in the protests whereas the Left Party have been more invisible and have sometimes even spoken out against protests which have turned into violence. It is possible that when Left Party chairperson Jonas Sjöstedt actively spoke in opposition of protests against the Sweden Democrats by making noise at their meetings, the party lost some voters to the Feminist Party. The overall strategy of the Left Party leadership has been to attract voters from the middle by not appearing too radical, and by focusing on serious economic issues and not the phrase "radicalism".

Finally, in Sweden, the fact that Tsipras campaigned for the chair of the commission has played a very marginal role in terms of turn out.