



Swedish National
Election Studies

Report 2020:15

Absentee voting in
Sweden 1944-2018

Hilma Lindskog

Swedish National Election Studies

Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg

2020.12.15

www.gu.se/valforskningsprogrammet



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

Valforskningsprogrammets rapportserie

Sedan 1950-talet genomför forskare knutna till Valforskningsprogrammet i Göteborg empiriska undersökningar av hur den svenska demokratin mår och utvecklas. Rapportserien är vår viktigaste publikationskanal för att bidra till samhällets kunskapsförsörjning på demokratiområdet. Målsättningen är att sprida grundläggande fakta och forskningsresultat som rör val och väljarbeteende till en bred publik av forskare, studenter, journalister, politiker och allmänhet.

SNES program report series

Since the 1950s, the researchers associated with the Swedish National Election Studies Program at the Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, conducts empirical research on the well-being and development of the Swedish democracy. The report series is one of our main publication outlets. The aim is to publish basic facts and research results about elections and voting behavior to a broad audience of researchers, students, journalists, politicians and the public.

Party abbreviations

-  = Left Party (V)
-  = Social Democratic Party (S)
-  = Green Party (MP)
-  = Center Party (C)
-  = The Liberals (L)
-  = Conservative Party (M)
-  = Christian Democratic Party (KD)
-  = Sweden Democrats (SD)

Refer to this report:

Lindskog, Hilma (2020). Absentee voting in Sweden 1944-2018. Swedish National Election Studies Program, Report 2020:15. University of Gothenburg, Department of Political Science.

Editor of the SNES program report series:

Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson

Absentee voting in Sweden 1944-2018

HILMA LINDSKOG

Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg

Sammanfattning

Svenska väljare förtidsröstar i allt högre utsträckning. Vid valet 2018 uppmättes den högsta andelen förtidsröstare hittills. Nästan varannan väljare röstade före valdagen (44,5 procent). Det finns dock skillnader mellan olika väljargrupper i hur ofta möjligheten att förtidsrösta används. Valundersökningarna visar att flera ekonomiska och sociala faktorer påverkar huruvida individer väljer att rösta i förtid eller på valdagen. Personer som bor i städer, är lågutbildade och äldre tenderar att förtidsrösta i högre grad än andra grupper. Analyserna visar även att sammansättningen av gruppen förtidsröstare förändrats över tid. Exempelvis ser vi ett skifte från valet 2010 när de individer som tillhörde yrkeskategorin arbetare blev mer benägna att förtidsrösta än yrkeskategorin tjänstemän. Vid valen 1982–1991 uppmättes vissa betydande skillnader i benägenhet att förtidsrösta beroende på partianhängarskap. I närtid finns det inga framträdande samband mellan partianhängarskap och sannolikheten att förtidsrösta – med ett undantag. Personer som röstade på Sverigedemokraterna i valet 2018 röstade i högre grad i förtid. Vidare var detta samband starkare i valdistrikt med en liten andel SD-väljare, vilket tyder på att det finns en stigmaeffekt som påverkar valet av röstsätt.

Abstract

The proportion of absentee voters in the Swedish electorate has vastly increased the last decades. The highest level so far occurred in 2018 when almost every second vote was cast before the day of the general election (44.5 per cent). Voting absentee is more common among certain groups of voters. Several economic and social factors impact not only if individuals participate in national elections, but also *how* they participate. Individuals living in towns or cities, low educated and elderly people tend to vote absentee to a higher degree than other groups, as shown by the SNES data. This report further shows that the composition of the group of early voters has changed over time. For example, we see a shift from the 2010 election when the individuals who belonged to the occupational category workers became more likely to vote early than the occupational group categorized as middle class. Moreover, the elections 1982 – 1991 showed some significant differences in tendency to vote absentee among voters with different party affiliations. In recent elections, there has been no clear partisan patterns behind voting absentee – with one exception. Sympathizers of the Sweden Democrats were clearly more likely to vote absentee than on the Election Day in the general election 2018. The data in this report further shows evidence that this relationship was stronger in regions with a small share of SD-sympathizers, thus implying that a stigma effect could be at play.

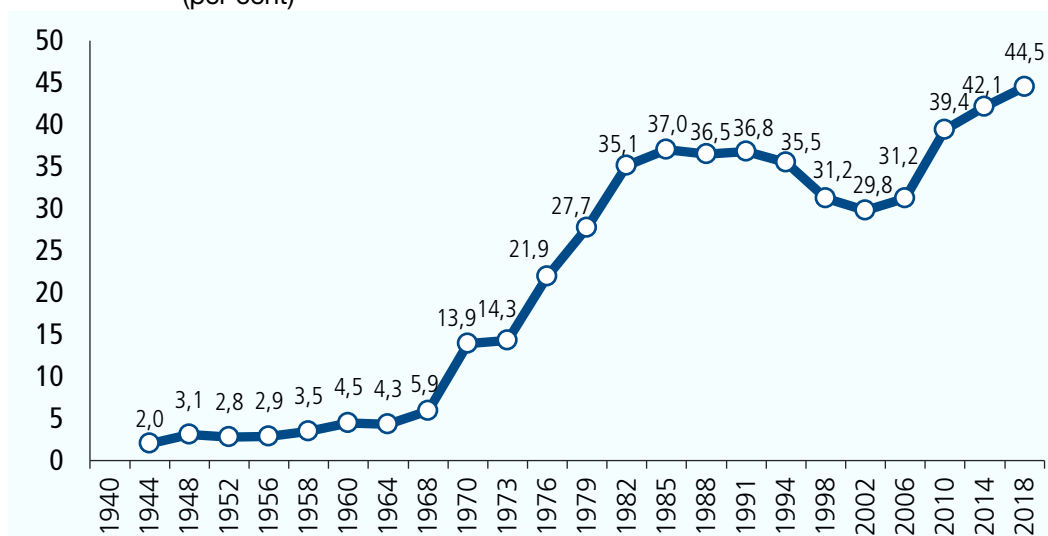
Electoral turnout and procedures of absentee voting

Turnout in elections is found to increase by a voting procedure that is as accessible and simple as possible (Brothén 2002; Finseraas & Vernby 2014; Gronke et al. 2007; Thompson et al. 2020). One common voting procedure that provides flexibility in time and space is absentee voting. Hence, absentee voting can have a positive effect on turnout since it allows individuals to vote in an extensive period of time and at other locations than at the polling station in one's local constituency. In Sweden, absentee voting is a well-developed and established voting procedure. The first time it was possible to vote by mail, not having to appear in person at the precinct place on Election Day, was in the municipality- and county elections in 1942. However, only persons who in various ways were hindered to visit their local polling station on the Election Day at that time were permitted to vote absentee. Since 1942, the opportunities and use of absentee voting have been vastly expanded. From the election in 1970 and onwards, the special reasons needed to be eligible for absentee voting are eliminated and the accessibility for voting in advance has gradually increased extensively (Brothén 2002).

One important reform concerning the procedures of absentee voting was enacted in 2006 when the Swedish municipalities became responsible for managing early voting, instead of the Swedish post offices. The shift was a result of the privatization of the post offices previously run by *Posten AB*, which had led to the closure or reallocation of a large number of post offices. The decline of post offices in certain parts of the country reduced the accessibility for voting absentee. Thus, since the election in 2006 the responsibility was transferred to local election boards (*valnämnder*) and since then the absentee voting has been taking place in libraries, local county's offices and in similar public places (Dahlberg, Oscarsson & Öhrvall 2008).

Voting prior to the election has been a popular procedure among Swedish voters for decades, as shown in Figure 1. Already in the beginning of 1980s, more than a third of the votes cast were absentee votes and in the general election 2018, the number had increased to the highest level so far with almost every second vote being an absentee vote (44.5 percent). The figure further illustrates an increase in the share of absentee voters after the reform 2006.

Figure 1 Share of absentee voters in Swedish general elections 1944 – 2018 (per cent)



Note: Information on absentee voting in Sweden is taken from the publications by Brothén, Martin [Red.] (2002) Svenska poströstare. Gothenburg University: Department of Political Science, and Dahlberg, Stefan, Oscarsson, Henrik & Öhrvall, Richard (2008). Förtida röstning i Sverige. Gothenburg University: Department of Political Science. Sweden Election Authority and Statistics Sweden.

Who votes absentee?

Economic and social factors have been shown to impact individuals' voting participation, but also to impact *how* you vote, e.g., if you vote at the polling station on the Election Day or absentee. One salient issue that arises from the clear pattern of increased share of absentee voting over time is therefore who the absentee voters are, and if there are any time trends as to which groups of voters utilize this opportunity. The last time individual level factors impact on absentee voting was investigated in a Swedish context was in 2008 (see Dahlberg, Oscarsson & Öhrvall 2008). This section aims therefore to provide a basic and updated description of who the absentee voters are by focusing on the main individual level determinants put forward in previous research.

Since early voting procedures provide a greater convenience for the individuals eligible to vote, it has been discussed if absentee voting could increase the electoral participation among certain groups of voters (Brothén 2002; Berinsky et al. 2005; Gronke et al. 2008; Thompson et al. 2020). Citizens with weak social and economic resources generally vote to a lesser extent than the more affluent voters and could hypothetically benefit from the reduced costs in time and effort derived from the absentee voting procedures. However, prior studies have had mixed results trying to demonstrate any strong effects of early voting on turnout. In general, it seems, absentee voting has only a moderate positive effect on electoral participation (Berinsky et al. 2001; Gronke et al. 2008; Thompson et al. 2020). Moreover, Finseraas & Vernby's (2014) findings from Norway show how increased voter participation due to absentee voting benefits the turnout among individuals from the lower end of the socio-economic strata, in particular those who were living in rural areas. Berinsky et al. (2001), however, find the opposite pattern as it was mainly the high-resource citizens who utilized the absentee voting procedures. The non-voters did accordingly not become mobilized by the voting method, instead the already existing biases in participation increased (see also Berinsky 2005). In Sweden, Brothén (2002) suggests that the occurrence of absentee voting on a national level increases the overall turnout by at least 4 percent, and does so without reducing any socio-economic biases among the population's electoral participation. The absentee voting has rather, at least historically, been more prevalent among high-resource voter groups.

The Swedish National Election data, presented in Table 1 and Table 2, shows that there is a higher propensity for absentee voting among low educated, elderly people and individuals living in towns and cities. Furthermore, there are some unexpected findings. The most striking finding illustrated by the tables is conceivably the reversed pattern of occupation after 2010 (see also Figure 2). There is now a higher proportion of individuals who classify as workers who vote early as opposed to the more affluent voters classifying as middle class, even if there is only a slight difference between the groups. One possible explanation for this shift could be the overall increased share of voters among social groups that has had a general lower turnout than average (Brothén 2002; Elgenius & Wennerhag 2018). A similar pattern is also found when examining the proportion of absentee voters among different educational levels. Highly educated individuals had a higher proportion of absentee voters in 1998 than the other educational levels (the same goes to the two additional elections in the 1990s not shown in the tables: 1994 and 1991). Since that point in time, however, the lower educated have been overrepresented among those who use the early voting procedures.

Table 1 Share of absentee voters in different groups, Swedish general elections 1982–2018 (per cent)

	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Total	33	35	34	34	42	27	28	30	36	40	45
<i>Sex</i>											
Man	31	33	32	31	38	22	25	28	34	38	44
Woman	35	37	36	46	45	29	31	34	38	42	45
<i>Age</i>											
18-21	34	22	26	22	37	24	21	23	29	30	36
22-30	35	33	32	31	36	18	24	26	34	35	45
31-40	27	29	28	29	34	21	18	21	25	24	36
41-50	26	30	28	31	39	24	23	25	29	30	35
51-60	30	30	34	33	31	23	28	30	38	44	41
61-70	43	45	42	43	50	34	39	40	45	54	52
71-80	47	51	49	47	56	41	44	47	53	56	56
<i>Country of birth</i>											
Native born	32	33	33	34	41	27	27	28	36	40	44
Foreign-born	37	33	23	39	43	28	28	29	37	44	47
<i>Civil status</i>											
Married/ Cohabitant	28	29	26	28	35	22	25	25	33	38	42
Single/Widow/Divorced	40	40	36	32	44	26	28	37	39	47	50
<i>Residence</i>											
Rural area	25	27	27	33	35	20	18	23	32	35	40
Small urban area	30	28	27	28	40	25	26	27	36	40	43
Large town or city	34	36	36	33	39	28	28	28	37	43	45
Sthlm, Gbg, Malmö	35	40	31	32	47	26	31	33	34	40	49

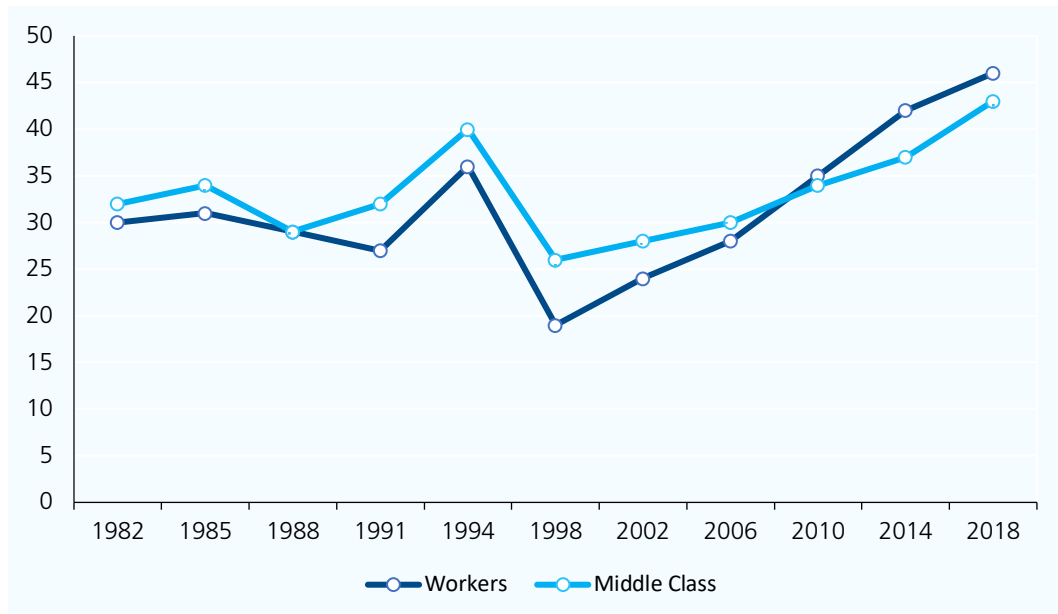
Note: The result shows the share of absentee voters out of the entire sample group from each years' election study (per cent). Information on absentee voting in Sweden 1982 - 2006 is taken from Dahlberg, Stefan, Oscarsson, Henrik & Öhrvall, Richard (2008). *Förtida röstning i Sverige*. Gothenburg University: Department of Political Science, and extended from the Swedish National Election Studies 2010 – 2018, Gothenburg University. The variables age and country of birth are confirmed against official records while civil status and sex is based on the questionnaire. Place of residence is based on the questionnaire and complemented with official records. The development over time among women and men as well as among the places of residence is illustrated in the appendix (figure 5 and figure 6).

Table 2 Share of absentee voters in different groups, Swedish general elections 1982–2018 (per cent)

	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Total	33	35	34	34	42	27	28	30	36	40	45
<i>Level of education</i>											
Low	29	33	33	31	40	27	33	35	43	46	50
Medium	33	32	33	32	39	23	23	26	32	43	44
High	35	34	28	33	41	29	28	27	32	37	42
<i>Occupation</i>											
Workers	30	31	29	27	36	19	24	28	35	46	46
Middle class	32	34	29	32	40	26	28	30	34	38	43
<i>Full/part time workers</i>											
Full time	27	32	32	32	39	26	26	28	34	40	44
Part time	29	32	31	34	42	25	30	31	37	40	45
<i>Employment sector</i>											
Public	32	33	33	32	42	30	29	30	38	44	45
Private	31	32	31	32	39	22	25	28	32	38	43

Note: The result shows the share of absentee voters out of the entire sample group from each years' election study (per cent). Information on absentee voting in Sweden 1982 – 2006 is taken from Dahlberg, Stefan, Oscarsson, Henrik & Öhrvall, Richard (2008). *Förtida röstning i Sverige*. Gothenburg University: Department of Political Science, and extended from the Swedish National Election Studies 2010– 2018 (the variable occupation 1982 – 2010), Gothenburg University. The table is based on questions from the questionnaire. The variable "occupation" is based on the stated occupational group. The development over time among the educational groups is illustrated in the appendix (figure 7)

Figure 2 Share of absentee voters in Swedish general elections among workers- and middle class voters (per cent)



Source: Swedish National Election Studies, Gothenburg University: Election studies 1985 – 2018.

Note: The figure shows the share of absentee voters out of the sample from each year's election study (see table 1 for details). The occupational categories were constructed based on data from the stated occupational group.

Party support among absentee voters

Apart from social and economic factors, political stances could differ between the absentee voters and the individuals who vote on the Election Day. Looking at the parties' support 2018 in Table 3, we can conclude that the majority of parties' constituencies do not have a clear tendency to either vote absentee or at the polling station on the day of the election. One important exception is the Centre Party where the voters were somewhat less likely to vote absentee (2.3 percentage points). However, the most salient exception is the Sweden Democrats in the election 2018. The Sweden Democrats was without doubt more popular among the absentee voters in this year's election (20.0 per cent) than among the individuals who voted on the day of the general election (15.1 per cent). The difference was close to five percentage points with an increase by two percentage points since the prior general election 2014. Among the early absentee voters 2018, almost 25 percent of the individuals were voting for the Sweden Democrats.

As can be seen in Table 4, the average gap between the citizens voting on the Election Day and the absentee voters has gradually been reduced in Sweden, even if it differs some between the elections. The table further shows that the patterns of voting absentee in parties' constituencies to various degrees have fluctuated over time. Some parties have had small or non-existent changes in the share of absentee voters in their constituency whereas other parties have had greater fluctuations. Historically, the Moderate Party has had substantial changes in propensity of absentee voting since 1982. This year and the following year the Moderate Party had seven and nine percentage point higher support among the absentee voters than the election day voters, a pattern that has been reduced over time. The Left Party and the Christian Democrats variation have been close to zero, while the, as mentioned, the Moderate Party as well as the Centre Party have had more prominent differences (-3.2 and +2.4 percentage points on average 1982 – 2018).

Table 3 The parties' support among election day voters and absentee voters and among early and late absentee voters, 2018 (per cent, percentage difference).

Party choice 2018	Total number of voters	Total absentee voters	Early absentee voters	Late absentee voters	Polling station voters	Difference polling station– absentee voters
Left Party	8,0	8,4	7,1	9,2	7,9	-0,5
Social Democrats	28,3	28,5	31,1	26,6	27,9	-0,6
Green Party	4,4	4,1	2,9	4,9	4,7	+0,6
Centre Party	8,6	7,5	6,1	8,4	9,8	+2,3
Liberals	5,5	5,0	4,5	5,3	6,0	+1,0
Christian Democrats	6,3	5,6	4,2	6,6	6,9	+1,3
Moderate Party	19,8	19,3	18,2	20,1	20,2	+0,9
Sweden Democrats	17,5	20,0	24,5	17,2	15,1	-4,9
Feminist Initiative	0,5	0,5	0,4	0,5	0,4	-0,1
Other Parties	1,1	1,1	1,0	1,2	1,1	±0,0
Sum (percent)	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	
Number of respondents	--	4 212	1 747	2 465	5 210	

Source: Swedish National Election Studies, Gothenburg University: Election study 2018.

Note: The analysis is an update of previous analyses of absentee voting made by Dahlberg, Stefan, Henrik Oscarsson & Richard Öhrvall (2008). *Förtida röstning i Sverige*. Gothenburg: Department of Political Science, Gothenburg University. The data has been weighted against the official result from the election. Information about the time for voting was obtained in 2018 from the Election studies post-election survey. Party choice has been corrected using the variables of voting intention, best party and like/dislike parties. The question wording concerning absentee voting was: "Did you vote absentee in this year's general election?". If answering yes to this yes/no-question, the follow up was if you voted the last week of the election or earlier during the election campaign.

Absentee voters and stigma

Why are voters of the Sweden Democrats more inclined to absentee voting? The recent election in Sweden provide us with an opportunity to test the hypothesis of social stigma. The hypothesis of stigma and party choice is based upon the assumption that voter's choice is impacted by the views and reactions of other citizens discrediting the party as an illegitimate vote choice (Harteveld et al. 2019; 2018). The analysis thus adds to the tradition of understanding voting as an act marked by social awareness, and not as an isolated event. Furthermore, the procedure of the Swedish voting system involves practice where the voter picks out ballots publicly. If an individual intends to vote for a stigmatized party, in this case the Sweden Democrats, it may therefore be more comfortable to avoid choosing ballots beside others by voting absentee.

Examining the impact of *other people's* perception about a party and the possibly electoral consequences of these perceptions is an under researched area, in particular with regards to absentee voting. Prior research has mainly focused on individual level factors when studying electoral outcomes, such as if a political party is perceived as legitimate and acceptable by the voter or not (see Harteveld et al., 2019). There are, however, evidence implying that this perspective is oversimplified to explain voter's party choice. The stigma which, to different degrees, is associated with radical right parties could be understood as a constrain to their ability to mobilize voters and expand their party support in elections. It could be the mechanism which deter citizens to vote for radical right parties even if the citizens support them substantially (Harteveld et al. 2019; 2018; Ivarsflaten & Stubager 2012).

Harteveld et al. (2019) test the stigma effect directly. They find (although only tentative) evidence in their experimental survey study that the stigma associated with the Sweden Democrats is related to the deterrence among certain citizens to support them in elections. Moreover, Harteveld and Ivarsflaten (2018) finds evidence that women are more discouraged by the stigma associated with the radical right parties, thus partially explaining the gender gap among these party's electorate. No one has, however, tested whether the choice of voting procedure could bring clarity to the impact of social stigma and electoral outcomes. By the means of absentee voting, the citizens intending to vote for the Sweden democrats could possibly avoid being exposed to the stigma the party is associated with.

The general assessment of the Sweden Democrats and their electoral successes since they entered the Parliament eight years ago has been, to say the least, divided. Overall, the Sweden Democrats has been highly disliked, as shown by the Swedish National Election Study (Oscarsson & Holmberg 2016; see also Oscarsson 2019) The majority of the electorate (52 per cent) thought negatively about the party 2014, and rated the party to the lowest possible alternative on a dislike scale – an immensely difference from the average of six per cent among the established parties. Moreover, Vestin (2020) finds that the party over time has become less disliked, especially among the older generations. Still, the Sweden Democrats has never been a well-liked party and was 2018 the party considered worst by 55 percent in the national election study (Oscarsson 2019). The disapproval is further a phenomenon that is found both among the Swedish voters in general and also among the established parties. The established parties in the Swedish parliament distance themselves from the Sweden Democrats and tries to prevent them to acquire policy influence (Loxbo & Bolin, 2016).

As shown in table 4, the Swedish general election 2018 was characterized by a high share of absentee voters among the voters of the Sweden Democrats, and thus make an interesting case to further explore the stigma hypothesis. Voting is a secret act, yet the component of believing other people regard the Sweden Democrats as an unacceptable alternative could possibly impact if an individual ultimately vote for them – even if he or she affiliates with the characteristics and programme of the party (Harteveld et al., 2019; Harteveld et al. 2015). It could also alter how a person vote. The potential relationship between stigma and absentee voting has, to our knowledge, not previous been explored and could broaden the understanding of voting behaviour. The opportunities to vote absentee could thus have further democratic implications if it enables citizens to vote for their preferred party regardless if others would object. It could increase the secrecy of the voting act.

Table 4 Party support among election day voters and absentee voters in Swedish national elections 1982-2018.

	Election year											Average
	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018	1982-2018
Left Party	+2	±0	±0	-1	+1	-1	+1	-1	±0	±0	-1	+0,0
Social Democrats	+2	+3	+2	+6	+1	+2	+1	-1	-2	-4	-1	+0,8
Green Party	±0	±0	-2	+1	+2	-1	±0	±0	+2	+2	+1	+0,7
Centre Party	+3	+4	+3	+1	+2	±0	+3	±0	+1	+3	+2	+2,4
Liberals	+3	+1	-2	-1	-2	±0	-3	+2	+1	-1	+1	-0,1
Christian Democrats	-2	-1	±0	-2	±0	+3	±0	-1	±0	±0	+1	-0,3
Moderate Party	-7	-9	-2	-6	-4	-4	-2	-2	-1	+1	+1	-3,2
Sweden Democrats	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	±0	-2	-5	-2,3
Other Parties	±0	±0	±0	±0	±0	±0	-1	±0	±0	+1	-0	±0,0
Absolute average	2,4	2,3	1,4	2,3	1,5	1,4	1,4	0,9	0,8	1,6	1,4	1,6

Source: Oscarsson, Henrik & Sören Holmberg (2020) Swedish voting behaviour. Swedish National Election studies, Working Paper Serier. Report 2020:1. University of Gothenburg, Department of Political Science.

Note: The result shows the differences in percentage points between the proportion of party votes from the polling station and the absentee votes. The differences in support between the polling station voters and the absentee voters have been rounded off to integers. A plus sign (+) indicates more support among the election day voters than from the early voters, while a sign of minus (-) indicates stronger support from the early voters than from the election day voters. The average applies to the absolute percentage difference for 7/8 parties as well as the group of others. Data for the 1982-2006 elections have been taken from the book "Förtida röstning i Sverige" (2009). For corresponding analyses based on the Swedish television's election studies (SVT/Valu) see Holmberg et al. (2020) Lyssna på väljarna. The results for 2014- and 2018-years elections are weighted by the official election results. Feminist initiative was 2014 somewhat stronger among absentee voters 3.2 percent) than among election day voters (3.0 percent).

Testing the stigma hypothesis

If there is a stigma effect, we expect the propensity of early voting to be higher among voters with a strong preference for SD because they want to avoid picking ballots on crowded polling stations on Election Day. If so, the social stigma would be stronger in areas and places where there are few other SD-sympathizers as opposed to in areas where it is less controversial being an SD-sympathizer. Thus, the proportion of SD-sympathizers in a voter's constituency is expected to moderate the effect of being an SD-sympathizer and the tendency to vote absentee. The strength of the party affiliation, e.g. the party conviction, will be taken into account since it is possible that strongly convinced voters cast their vote before the Election Day – an alternative explanation for the higher proportion of absentee voters among the Swedish Democrats electorate. Their voters are less likely to consider other party alternatives, unlike other parties' voters who are more ambiguous in their vote choice (Vestin 2019). We will further control for education, occupation, place of residence and age – variables which increase both the likelihood to vote absentee as well as the likelihood to vote for the Sweden Democrats. Basic descriptive statistics over early and late absentee voters as well as voters casting their vote on Election Day 2018 is presented in table 5a and 5b.

Table 5a Proportion of early and late absentee voters in different socio-economic groups, Swedish general election 2018 (per cent)

	Total share of absentee voters (a)	Early absentee voters (b)	Late absentee voters (c)	Voters at the polling station (d)	Net balance %polling station(d) – %absentee voters(a)
Total	45	18	26	56	+11
<i>Sex</i>					
Man	44	18	25	56	+10
Woman	45	18	28	55	+12
<i>Age</i>					
18-21	36	7	29	64	+28
22-30	45	13	32	55	+10
31-40	36	11	25	64	+28
41-50	35	11	24	65	+30
51-60	41	17	24	59	+18
61-70	52	25	27	48	-4
71-80	56	29	27	44	-8
<i>Country of birth</i>					
Native born	44	18	26	56	+12
Foreign-born	47	18	29	53	+6
<i>Civil status</i>					
Married/Cohabitant	42	17	25	58	+16
Single/Widow/Divorced	50	20	30	50	±0
<i>Education</i>					
Low	50	24	26	50	±0
Medium	44	18	26	56	+12
High	43	16	27	57	+14
<i>Residence</i>					
Rural area	40	16	23	60	+20
Small urban area	43	18	26	57	+14
Large town or city	45	18	26	56	+11
Sthlm, Gbg, Malmö	49	19	30	51	+2
<i>Occupation</i>					
Workers	46	18	28	54	+8
Middle Class	43	18	25	57	+14
<i>Full/part time</i>					
Full time	44	18	26	56	+12
Part time	45	16	29	55	+10

Source: Swedish National Election Studies, Gothenburg University: Election study 2018.

Note: The proportion of absentee voters (a) and polling station voters (d) sum to 100 percent in this table. The differences in support between the polling station voters and the absentee voters have been rounded off to integers. A plus sign (+) indicates more Election Day voters than early voters in the group. A minus sign (-) indicates more early voters than Election Day voters in the group.

Table 5b Proportion of early and late absentee voters: Political factors
Swedish general election 2018 (per cent)

	Total share of absentee voters (a)	Early absentee voters (b)	Late absentee voters (c)	Voters At the polling station (d)	Net balance %polling station(a)- %absentee voters(b)
Total	45	18	26	56	+11
<i>Political interest</i>					
Very interested	45	21	24	55	+10
Quite interested	44	18	27	56	+12
Somewhat/not interested	44	17	27	56	+12
<i>Strength of party affiliation</i>					
Convinced follower	46	25	21	54	+8
Follower	43	20	23	57	+14
Only preference	44	17	27	56	+12
No preference	43	15	28	57	+14
<i>Party identification</i>					
Left Party	44	17	27	56	+12
Social Democrats	46	22	24	54	+8
Centre Party	39	15	24	61	+22
Liberals	44	17	27	56	+12
Moderate Party	43	18	25	57	+14
Christian Democrats	43	13	30	60	+17
Green Party	40	13	27	60	+20
Sweden Democrats	50	25	25	50	±0
<i>Political knowledge</i>					
Very high	47	22	25	53	+6
Rather high	44	18	26	56	+12
Not very high	45	17	28	55	+10
Not at all high	43	14	29	57	+14
<i>Left-right ideology</i>					
Clearly left	46	21	25	54	+8
Somewhat left	44	16	27	56	+12
Neither left/right	44	18	26	56	+10
Somewhat right	41	15	27	59	+18
Clearly right	47	20	26	53	+6
<i>%SD-sympathizers in constituency</i>					
Low (0-15%)	44	17	27	56	+12
Medium (15-30%)	45	19	26	55	+10
High (25-50%)	40	14	26	60	+20

Source: Swedish National Election Studies, Gothenburg University: Election study 2018.

Note: The proportion of absentee voters (a) and polling station voters (d) sum to 100 percent in this table. The differences in support between the polling station voters and the absentee voters have been rounded off to integers. A plus sign (+) indicates more Election Day voters than early voters in the group. A minus sign (-) indicates more early voters than Election Day voters in the group. It can be noted that those who identifies with the Sweden Democrats has the highest share of absentee voting. Party identification has been based on two questions from the questionnaire: which party the respondent thinks is best and which party the respondent feels closest to.

Support for the stigma effect

Why did SD-sympathizers show a tendency to vote in advance 2018? Was it because a social stigma related to voting for SD? The logistic regression output in table 6 demonstrates that there are significant effects of being an SD-sympathizer and voting absentee, as suggested. SD-sympathizers are 6.3 per cent more likely to vote absentee than voters from the other parties (model 1). Furthermore, the interaction term between being an SD-sympathizer and the support for the Sweden Democrats in the local constituency had a significant effect on the dependent variable (model 2). There is indeed a decrease in absentee voting among Sweden Democrats living in constituencies with many other supporters. The level of significance remains when the control variables are included, thus supporting the main hypothesis of social stigma (model 4).

The alternative explanation concerning the strength of the party conviction as a possible mechanism for the higher share of absentee voting (among the Sweden Democrats), did not find any support. Stronger party conviction did not have a significant effect on the likelihood to vote absentee nor did it reduce the effect of being an SD-sympathizer on the dependent variable.

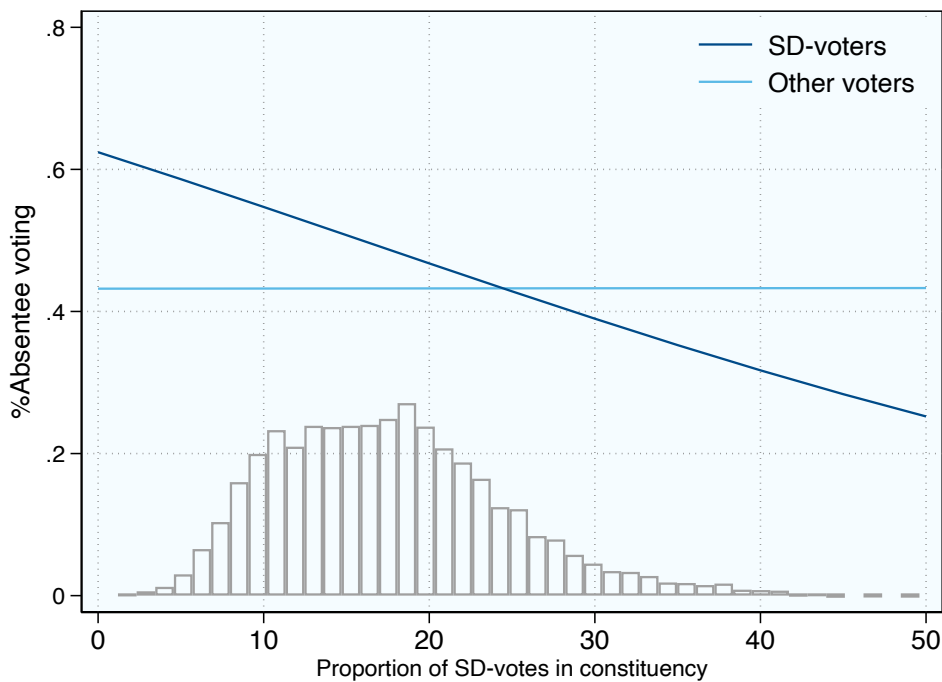
Table 6 Propensity to vote absentee. Swedish national elections 2018. Logistic regression analyses.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
SD-sympathizer (0/1)	0.254**	0.857**	0.858**	0.797**
Interaction SD#ShareSDinarea (.01- .47)		-0.030*	-0.030*	-0.030*
<i>Controls</i>				
Party identification				
Only party preference (ref.cat)				
Weak identification			-0.062	-0.169
Strong identification			0.138	0.085
Place of residence				
Countryside (ref.cat)				
Rural area				-0.568***
Small town				-0.351**
City/Big town				-0.161
Education (1-3)				
Age (18-85 yrs)				0.045
				0.013***
Occupation				
Middle class (ref.cat)				
Workers				0.167*
Pseudo R ²	0.002	0.003	0.004	0.017
Number-of respondents	4791	3941	3882	3449

Note: *= $p < 0.05$ **= $p < 0.01$ ***= $p < 0.001$. Swedish National Election Studies, Gothenburg University: Election study 2018. The results are weighted against the official election results. No differences were found between men and women among the Sweden Democrats electorate. Education is coded into a three-level scale where one corresponds to a highest educational level of elementary school, two upper secondary school or post-secondary and three if the individual has started university studies. Being an SD-sympathizer is based on the information about "Best Party" from the questionnaire. When instead using "like/dislike SD", "Intention of voting for SD" and "Party choice SD" as alternative main independent variables, only "Party choice SD" had a significant interaction effect.

Figure 3 illustrates the difference in propensity to vote absentee among SD-voters with varying share of SD-sympathizers in the local constituency. The fewer people supporting the Sweden Democrats, the more likely the voter seemed to be to vote before the Election Day. The predicted likelihood of an SD-sympathizer to vote absentee in a constituency with only five percent of SD-supporters is 59%, and 55% in a constituency with ten percent of supporters. The likelihood of voting absentee is further reduced to 39% in a constituency with a higher share of SD-supporters than average, 30%. When conducting a test of significance on the differences in margins for SD-voters, the output demonstrates that there are significant differences between the predicted values of absentee voters in constituencies with a small and a high share of support for the party. Figure 4 further shows the overlapping confidence intervals among the voters of the Sweden Democrats and among all voters in constituencies with more support for SD, hence less stigmatized contexts. The pattern confirms the hypothesis of a significant effect only in contexts which are highly stigmatized, whilst there should be no expected differences between the voter groups in context where casting a vote for SD is a common party choice.

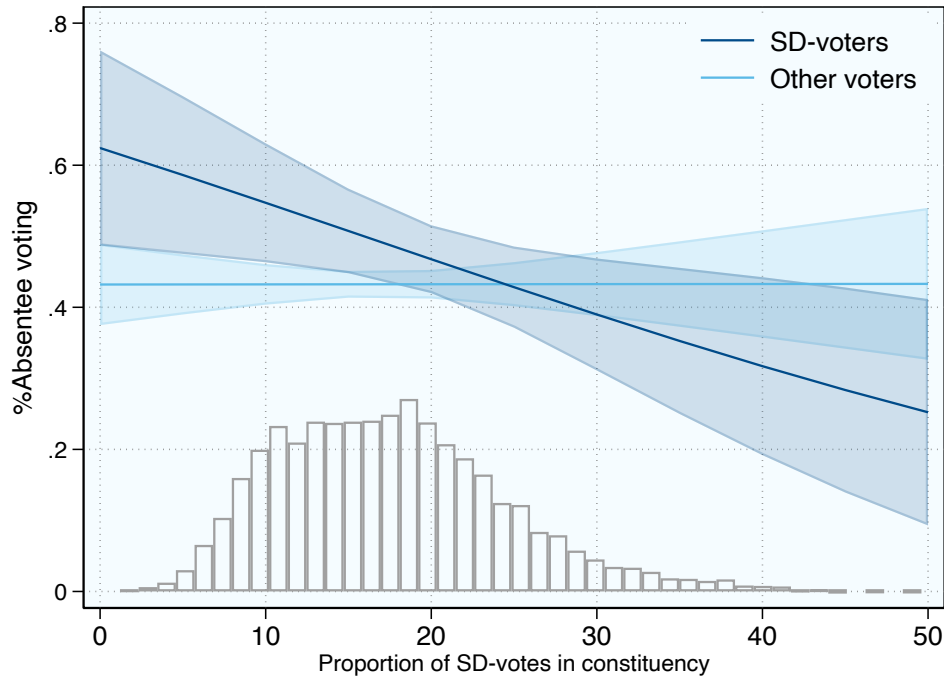
Figure 3 Propensity to vote absentee in constituencies with different share of SD-sympathizers. Swedish national elections 2018.



Source: Swedish National Election Studies, Gothenburg University: Election study 2018.

Note: A similar pattern can be found on an aggregated level (share of SD-votes in the municipality correlate $r=-0,08$ with the share of absentee votes in the municipality). No significant differences between the predicted values were found in the logistic regression analysis. There were 6004 constituencies in Sweden in 2018.

Figure 4 Propensity to vote absentee in constituencies with different share of SD-sympathizers. Swedish national elections 2018. 95% Confidence intervals



Source: Swedish National Election Studies, Gothenburg University: Election study 2018.

Discussion of the stigma effect

The findings in this report support the main hypothesis of social stigma. In constituencies with little support for the Sweden Democrats, hence a supposed stigmatized context for a SD-sympathizers, SD-voters tend to vote absentee instead of in person. Some objections can be made concerning the results. At first, the overall higher propensity of absentee voting among Sweden Democrats could have occurred because of an unsuccessful election campaign during the time close to the election. If so, it would clarify why the party had weaker support among the voters on the Election Day but not among the absentee voters. It would, however, not explain why the patterns of absentee voting vary depending on the share of support in the constituency. A second objection to the results is the insignificant differences in propensity to vote absentee among women and men voting for the Sweden Democrats. Since women have been shown to be more sensitive to a stigma-effect, they would theoretically be expected to vote absentee to a higher extent. As a final point, it could be hypothesised that the stigma effect in fact could be even stronger than suggested. Individuals who are uncomfortable admitting they support the Sweden Democrats could be expected to be less likely to both participate in election surveys and to express their actual preferences if they do accept participation.

Summary

Voting absentee has become a popular voting procedure in Sweden. The share of absentee voters has increased with almost fifteen percentage points among the Swedish electorate since the election 2002, reaching the record high number of 45.5 per cent in the election 2018. As shown in the report, there are differences both between groups and trends over time as to which voters utilize the opportunity to vote early. Individuals living in towns or cities, low educated and elderly people vote absentee to a higher degree than other groups. Also, the occupational group workers have recently started to vote absentee to a higher extent than the middle-class voters. There have not been any strong partisan patterns among the absentee voters in recent times, apart from among the electorate of the Sweden Democrats. This report further shows that the propensity to vote absentee among the Sweden Democrats is higher than average in constituencies with a small share of SD-sympathizers, but the likelihood to vote early is reduced in constituencies with a high support for the party. The results align with the idea of a stigma effect, e.g. that the perception of other people's negative view of a party impacts the way voters vote.

References

- Berinsky, Adam J, Nancy Burns, and Michael W Traugott. 2001. "Who Votes by Mail? A Dynamic Model of the Individual-Level Consequences of Voting-By-Mail Systems." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65(2): 178–197.
- Berinsky, Adam J. "The Perverse Consequences of Electoral Reform in the United States." *American Politics Research* 33.4 (2005): 471-91.
- Brothén, Martin [Red.] (2002) *Svenska poströstare*. Gothenburg Univeristy: Institution of Political Science
- Dahlberg, Stefan, Oscarsson, Henrik & Öhrvall, Richard (2008). *Förtida röstning i Sverige*. Gothenburg University: Institution of Political Science.
- Dahlberg, Harteveld, Eelco, Andrej Kokkonen, and Wouter Brug. "Social Stigma and Support for the Populist Radical Right: An Experimental Study." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 42.3-4 (2019): 296-307. Web
- Elgenius, Gabriella, and Wennerhag, M. "The Changing Political Landscape in Sweden Political Cleavages, Actors and Processes." *Sociologisk Forskning*, 2018, Vol. 55, Iss. 2-3, Pp. 139-154 55.2-3 (2018): 139-54.
- Finseraas, Henning, and Kare Vernby. "A Mixed Blessing for the Left? Early Voting, Turnout and Election Outcomes in Norway." *Electoral Studies* 33 (2014): 278.
- Gronke, Paul A., Eva Galanes-Rosenbaum, Peter A. Miller, and Daniel Toffey. "Convenience Voting." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11.1 (2008): 437-55
- Harteveld, Eelco, Stefan Dahlberg, Andrej Kokkonen, and Wouter Brug " Social Stigma and Support for the Populist Radical Right: An Experimental Study " *Scandinavian Political Studies* 42.3-4 (2019): 296-307
- Harteveld, Eelco, Wouter Van Der Brug, Stefan Dahlberg, and Andrej Kokkonen. "The Gender Gap in Populist Radical-right Voting: Examining the Demand Side in Western and Eastern Europe." *Patterns of Prejudice* 49.1-2 (2015): 103-34 .
- Harteveld, Eelco, and Elisabeth Ivarsflaten. "Why Women Avoid the Radical Right: Internalized Norms and Party Reputations." 48.2 (2018): 369-84.
- Ivarsflaten, Elisabeth, and Rune Stubager. "Voting for the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe: The Role of Education." *Class Politics and the Radical Right*. Taylor and Francis, 2012. 122-37
- Loxbo, Karl, and Niklas Bolin. "Party Organizational Development and the Electoral Performance of the Radical Right: Exploring the Role of Local Candidates in the Breakthrough Elections of the Sweden Democrats 2002-2014." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 26.2 (2016): 170-90. Web.
- Oscarsson, H. & Holmberg, S. 2016. *Svenska väljare*. Stockholm, Norstedts juridik: Wolters Kluwer.

Oscarsson, Henrik. "Partierna. Det Nya Landskapet." 2019. RJ:S Årsbox 2019: Det Nya Sverige, 2019.

Thompson, Daniel, Jennifer Wu, Jesse Yoder, and Andrew Hall. "Universal Vote-by mail Has No Impact on Partisan Turnout or Vote Share." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 117.25 (2020): 14052-14056.

Vestin, Erik (2020) Den hemliga historien om partiernas stöd 1986–2019 i Ulrika Andersson, Anders Carlander & Patrik Öhberg (red) *Regntunga skyar*. Göteborgs universitet: SOM-institutet.

Appendix

Figure 5 Share of absentee voters in Swedish general elections among men and women 1982 – 2018 (per cent)

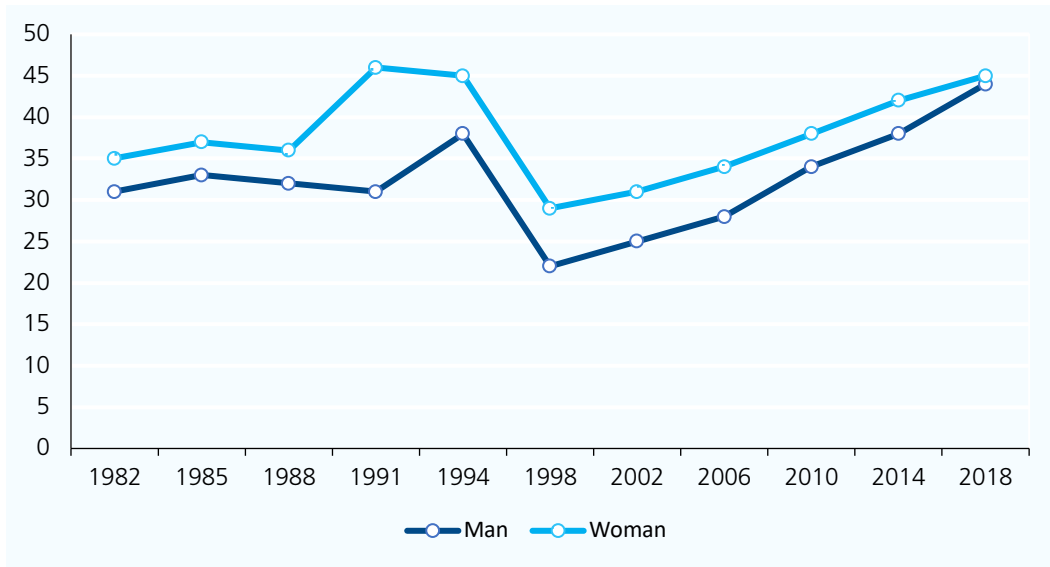


Figure 6 Share of absentee voters in Swedish general elections among different place of residence 1982 – 2018 (per cent)

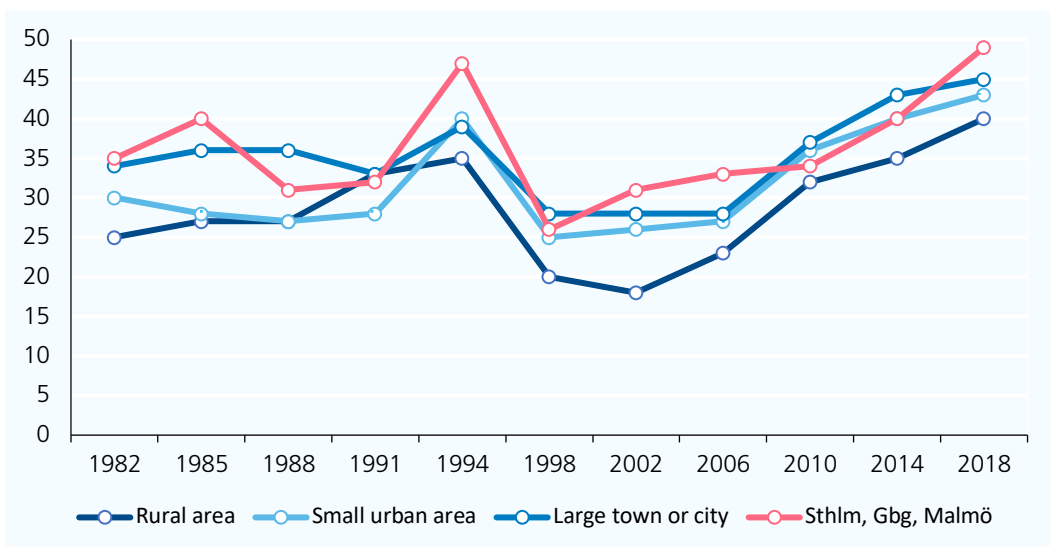
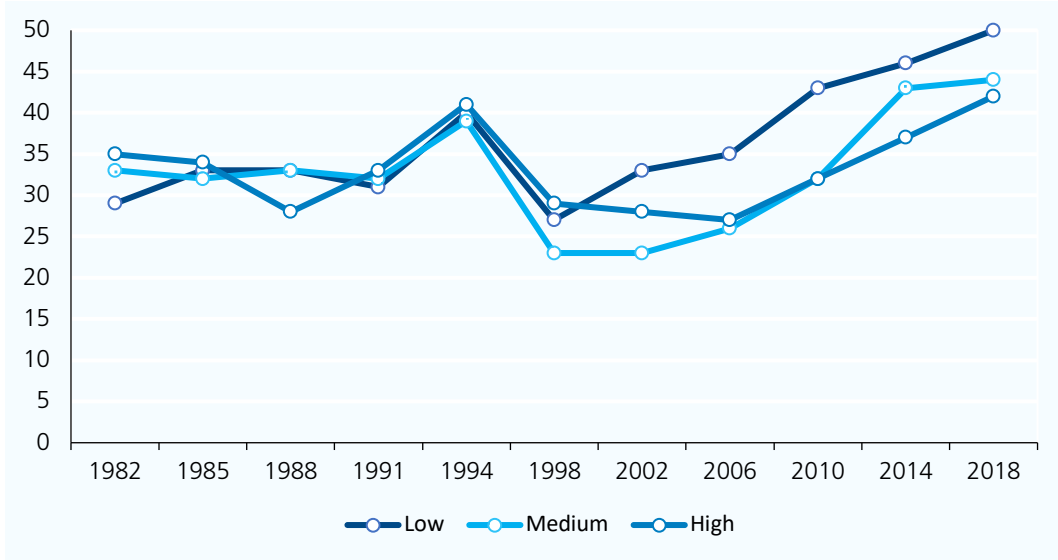


Figure 7 Share of absentee voters in Swedish general elections among educational groups 1982 – 2018 (per cent)



The Swedish National Election Studies Program was established in 1954 by Jörgen Westerståhl and Bo Särilvik and is today a high profile network of researchers at the Department of Political Science in Gothenburg. The Program serve as a collaborative platform for Swedish and international scholars interested in studies of electoral democracy, representative democracy, opinion formation, and voting behavior.

The aim of our research is among others to explain why people vote as they do and why an election ends in a particular way. We track and follow trends in the Swedish electoral democracy and make comparisons with other countries.

Professor Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson is the director of the Swedish Election Studies Program.

