

Sweden



Facts & Figures

Population

10.4m

Political system

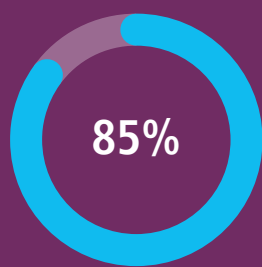
**Unitary
parliamentary
constitutional
monarchy**

Varieties of Democracy
regime type

**Liberal
democracy**

Varieties of Democracy
Liberal Democracy Index
ranking (2021)

1



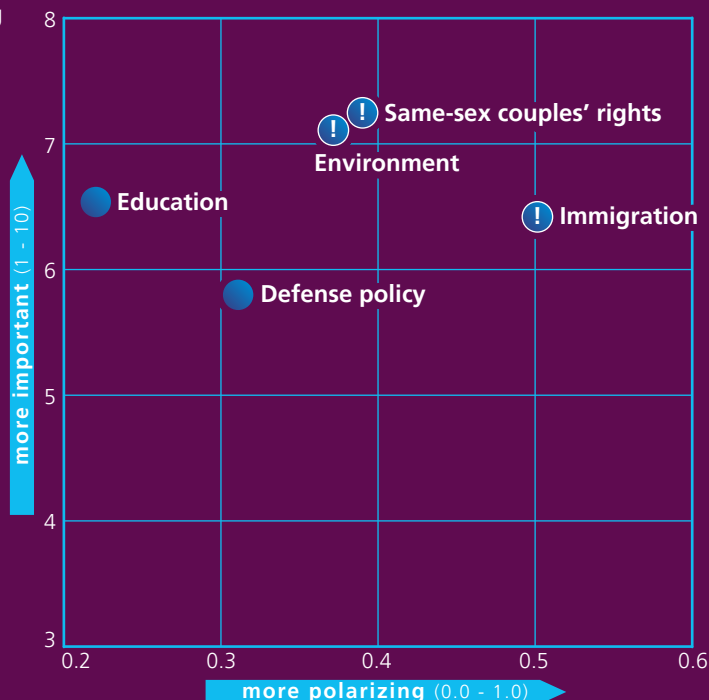
Democratic competence of Swedish respondents

Percentage of respondents who on average rate the four democratic items as more democratic than the ten undemocratic items in our survey

Which issues let politicians get away with undemocratic behavior?

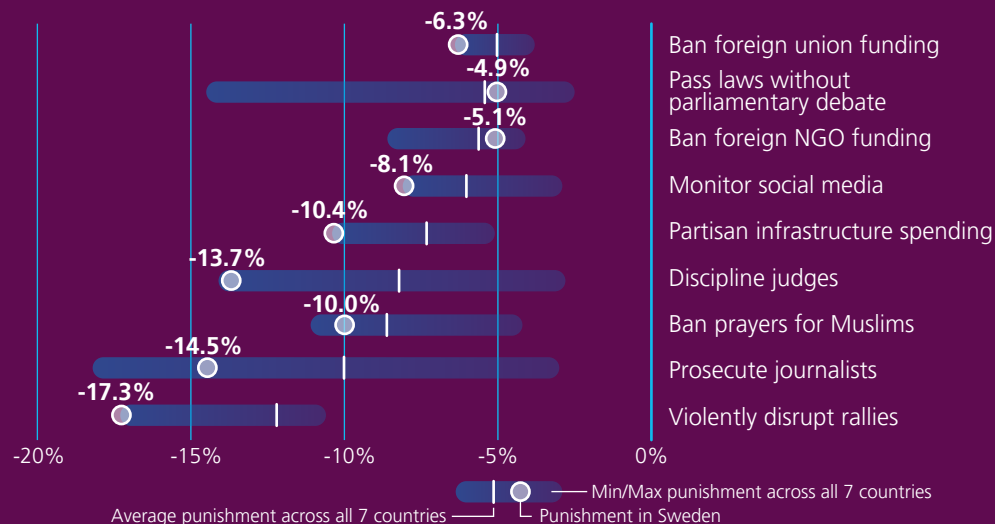
Issues displayed according to their importance to voters and degree of polarization

! Issues for which voters forgive undemocratic behavior



How much are key elements of liberal democracy valued?

The higher the vote loss for an undemocratic policy proposed by a political candidate, the more a certain democratic element is valued.



Swedish parties presented in the survey



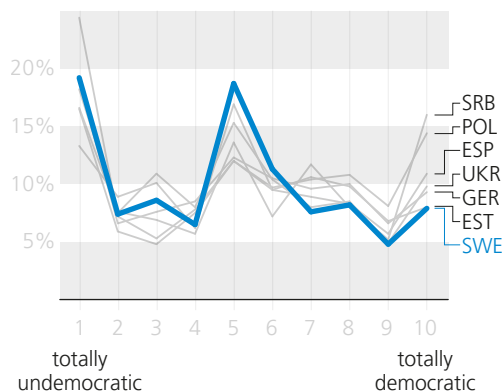
English name	Swedish Social Democratic Party	Green Party	Left Party	Moderate Party	Sweden Democrats	Centre Party
Swedish name	<i>Sveriges Socialdemokratiska arbetarparti (S/SAP)</i>	<i>Miljöpartiet de Gröna (MP)</i>	<i>Vänsterpartiet (V)</i>	<i>Moderaterna (M)</i>	<i>Sverige-demokraterna (SD)</i>	<i>Centerpartiet (C)</i>
European affiliation	S&D	Greens/EFA	GUE/NGL	EPP	ECR	ALDE
Currently governing						

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AND SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

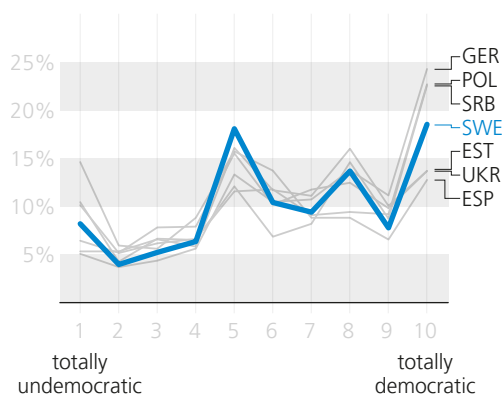
Among all seven European countries in our sample, Sweden seems to be the democratic champion. Some findings however deserve further observation in the future to ensure that Sweden remains a well-functioning democracy.

Across the entire sample, the respondents from Sweden have the best understanding of what democracy is (and what it is not) and they also showed the greatest support for democracy and its principles. Indeed, democratic competence of Swedish citizens is 85%.³⁴ While 20.9% of Swedes find it rather or completely democratic³⁵ if “The military removed a corrupt president”, this is still the lowest share of people agreeing to that statement compared to the other six countries. For the Swedes, it is furthermore important to live in a country that is governed democratically (mean score 8.8) and to have a democratic political system (93% find it either “very good” or “fairly good”). They also clearly find democracy better than any other form of government as 92% of them either “strongly agree” or “agree” with that statement. Moreover, the features of an authoritarian system – such as “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament” or “having the army rule” – are highly unpopular with the Swedish population. Indeed, 85% of Swedes find the former situation and 88% find the latter situation either “very bad” or “fairly bad.”

“How democratic do you find the practice of the military removing a corrupt President?”



“How democratic do you find the practice of the country’s high court ruling that a government policy was unconstitutional?”



Democracy

Swedes show the greatest support for democracy and its principles.

³⁴ If we define a “democratically competent” respondent as someone who, on average, rates the four democratic items as more democratic than the ten undemocratic items present in the survey.

³⁵ Rating it with an 8, 9 or 10 on a scale from 1 to 10.



Swedish voters show the greatest willingness to punish undemocratic behavior, with a -10% punishment rate.

There were only two questions where Swedes were not among the most democratic respondents: Most notably, they ranked the statement “The prime minister conceded a narrow election” least democratic when comparing the Swedish score to all other countries (with a mean score of 6.1 on a scale from 1 to 10). They also rated the statement “The high court rated a government policy unconstitutional” relatively low (with a mean score of 5.9), on par with Poland and Estonia and behind Serbia and Germany.

The Swedes appear to be more satisfied with

how their democracy performs than the respondents of other countries. Across the entire sample, the Swedes see their country as being governed the most democratic (mean score 6.7.) and they are also the most satisfied with how their democracy works (mean score 6.1). However, the level of satisfaction can hardly be described as high. This is also manifested in the fact that 44% of Swedish respondents (albeit the lowest number among seven countries) find it “fairly good” or “very good” if experts, not the government, make decisions for the country.

ARE SWEDISH VOTERS WILLING TO PUNISH

UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR?

Swedish voters showed the greatest willingness among the seven countries under investigation to punish undemocratic behavior. The average punishment is a loss of -10.0% of the overall vote share for the candidate who adopts an undemocratic position. The most punishing undemocratic positions are “violently disrupt opponent’s rallies” which results in a -17.2% vote

share loss and “prosecuting journalists” with a -14.4% vote share loss. On the other hand, the Swedes punish “passing laws without parliamentary debate” and “ban foreign NGO funding” the least, as the candidates advocating those undemocratic positions lose only -4.8% and -5.0% of the vote share respectively.

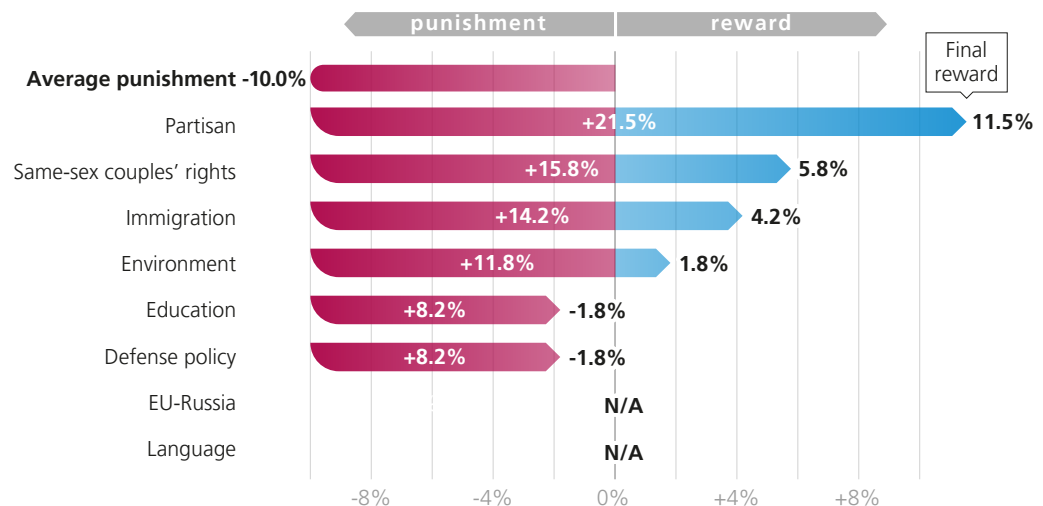
PARTY LOYALTY AND POLICY INTERESTS: WHICH ISSUES ARE

MORE IMPORTANT THAN UPHOLDING DEMOCRATIC STANDARDS?

Swedish voters forgive undemocratic behavior of a candidate when they are from their favorite party. They do the same when it comes

to identity-based interests, and partly for socio-economic interests, but not for defense policy interests. This is particularly the case with

Existence of trade-offs/compensation for undermining democracy



partisan interests, as the undemocratic candidate from the respondent's favorite party is compensated for that mere fact. Hence, they are not punished, but end up being rewarded with a +11.5% vote share increase, which is, however, the lowest rewarding rate among the seven countries under investigation. Partisan interests are followed by identity-based interests. The undemocratic candidate with a favorite policy on same-sex couples' rights or immigration can count on a final +5.8% and +4.2% vote share increase respectively. In the case of immigration, this is the highest rewarding rate among the five countries under observation in which this issue is salient. That means that there is a higher chance than in Estonia, Spain, Germany and Poland that the position on immigration of a

candidate has the potential to be instrumentalized for an unpunished undemocratic behavior.

The Swedes also show willingness to forgive undemocratic behavior for a favorite policy on the environment, albeit to a lower degree: the final rewarding rate is +1.8%. Notably, the willingness to punish disappears when it comes to a voter's favorite policy regarding education. Despite advocating for it, an undemocratic candidate is still punished by losing -1.8% of the vote share in the end. In addition, there is a lack of willingness to reward undemocratic candidates who advocates for a voter's favorite defense policy as well. The undemocratic candidate ends up losing -1.8% of the vote share.

ARE SUPPORTERS OF A CERTAIN POLICY INTEREST³⁶ MORE

FORGIVING OF UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR THAN OTHERS?

If we divide respondents along a left-leaning/right-leaning axis, we can identify more nuanced findings about the willingness to punish undemocratic behavior. Specifically, when it comes to the issue of same-sex couples' rights, those on the fringes of the political spectrum show less attachment to democratic principles. While the final rewarding rate among the voters on the right is +4.5%, among the left-leaning voters it is even higher at +6.9%. When it comes to immigration, only center-left voters do not forgive undemocratic behavior, as they still punish with a considerable final

-5.6% vote share loss. The rest of the electorate acts otherwise. The strongest tendency can thereby be observed within the group of center-right voters who reward an undemocratic candidate for their favorite immigration policy³⁷ with a final +12.5% vote share increase. This is the highest final rewarding rate across entire sample.

When it comes to the issue of environment, right-leaning voters seem to be much more forgiving (the undemocratic candidate would end up with a +4.1% vote share increase) than left-leaning ones (+0.4% vote share increase).

WHAT ROLE DOES POLARIZATION PLAY?

In the case of Sweden, we can indeed observe a wide-ranging correlation between the increased polarization along some issues and the willingness to forgive undemocratic behavior for related

interests. This foremostly applies to the issue of immigration, followed by same-sex couples' rights and environmental issues.

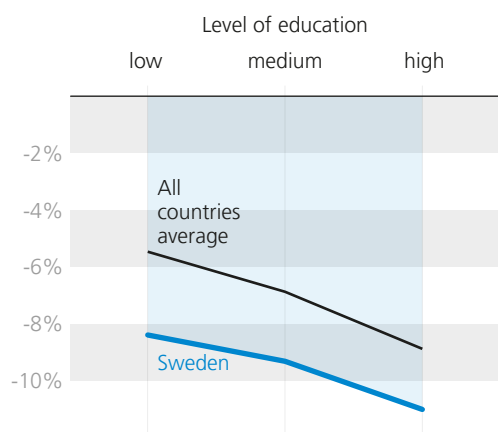
Polarization matters

Swedes show a willingness to forgive a candidate's undemocratic position in all issues that are polarizing in Swedish society.

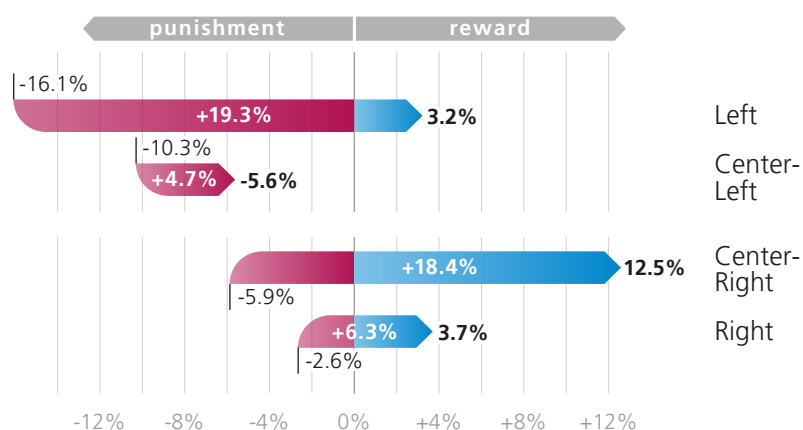
³⁶ Please find an overview of all tested policy positions on pg. 13.

³⁷ "Ban immigration from outside of the EU."

Average electoral punishment by respondents education



Immigration: shift in punishment when presented with favored policy



WHO ARE THE MAIN 'DEFENDERS OF DEMOCRACY' IN SWEDEN?

Young people and women punish undemocratic behavior more than the rest of the respective sub-group. Interestingly, part-time workers punish more than full-time employees (but perhaps that is due to a higher share of women working part-time). In terms of attitudes, the results are not surprising: Those who show an increased interest in politics and have higher levels of political knowledge, who are democratically competent and more trustful, as well as less religious people and those who lack an authoritarian personality show a greater willingness to punish undemocratic behavior.

When it comes to education, the more educated punish slightly more. But just like in Spain and Germany, the level of education does not have a great effect on the degree of punishing undemocratic behavior, especially not between medium and high levels of education.

Who then shows less willingness to punish politicians who violate democratic principles? The unemployed together with those taking care of family members and those with a more negative economic assessment of their country and their family.

WHICH PARTY'S VOTERS PUNISH

UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR THE MOST?

When it comes to party affiliation, voters of all Swedish parties show a general willingness to punish undemocratic politicians. Yet one can also

observe great variations: The voters of the far-right Swedish Democrats (SD) punish undemocratic behavior the least, as the punishment rate

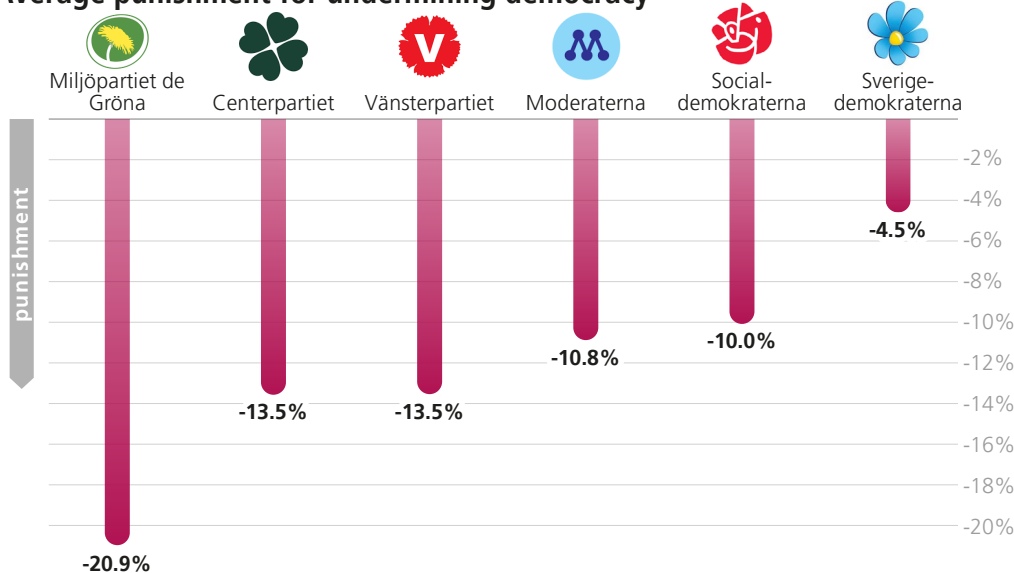
among them is only -4.5% of vote share loss. Also, the willingness to punish does not apply to all undemocratic positions, as SD voters reward the “ban on prayers for Muslims” with a +7% vote share increase. The voters of the parties that are playing the most important role in the Swedish political system – the Social-Democrats (S) and the Moderates (M) – show more willingness to punish violations of democratic principles with a -10% and a -10.8% punishing rate

respectively. However, voters of the Social-Democrats reward “passing laws without parliamentary debate” with +7.5%. The voters of the far-left party Vänsterpartiet and the voters of the Centre Party punish identically – -13.5% –, while the voters of the Greens punish the most with a -20.9% punishing rate. Interestingly, the punishing rate of those who do not vote in the elections is by far the lowest: -2.6%.

Center-right voters & immigration

Center-right voters show the greatest willingness to reward an undemocratic candidate who also proposes the voters’ favorite immigration policy with a final +12.5% vote share increase.

Average punishment for undermining democracy



Summary for Sweden

A large majority of respondents in Sweden support democratic standards and the rule of law. Across the entire sample, Swedes are also the most satisfied with how their democracy works. Swedes express their high regard for democracy not only in their responses to the direct questions, but also in our candidate choice experiment: the Swedes punish undemocratic behavior at the ballot box more strongly than respondents of all other countries. They are most likely to defend the right of assembly and electoral fairness as well as the freedom of the press.

As in all other countries under investigation, however, party loyalty is the most important determinant of voting behavior. Swedes completely forgive a candidate their undemocratic behavior if they are from their favorite party. In contrast to other countries under investigation, we can see that all issues for which Swedes show a willingness to forgive undemocratic behavior are the ones that are polarizing in Swedish society. These include identity issues (rights for same-sex couples and immigration) as well as one socio-economic issue: environmental policy. Hence, identity issues and, even more so, polarization play an important role when it comes to punishing undemocratic behavior in Sweden.