

Government Communication

2003/04:110

Policies for Democracy

Govt. Comm. No.
2003/04:110

To be submitted to the Swedish Riksdag
Stockholm, 11 March 2004

Marita Ulvskog

Mona Sahlin
(Ministry of Justice)

Outline of contents

The present communication is divided into two principal sections:

The first part, (Chapters 2–7) presents a detailed account and analysis of the development of Swedish democracy from 2002 in light of goals established as part of a national strategy for safeguarding and deepening Swedish democracy. It also includes a report of actions taken. Where the outcome of these measures is already known, the extent to which they have contributed to long-term efforts to achieve these goals is discussed.

The second part (Chapters 8–12) concerns the future direction of the Government's democracy policies. Its concluding assessment is that future policies should incorporate initiatives designed to encourage greater, more broadly-based public participation on the one hand, and action aimed at promoting human rights on the other. The communication also sets out the Government's policy aims with regard to participation. These presuppose efforts to remove hindrances to – while strengthening conditions and generating opportunities for – greater, more equal participation.

The Government plans to implement measures aimed at highlighting and removing structural obstacles that serve to hinder individuals from accessing power and exercising political influence. The Government will also take steps to counter threats to democracy, e.g. in the form of threats or violence directed at elected political representatives. Other measures to improve conditions for representatives will also be introduced. The Government intends to further emphasise the importance of participation between elections and the need to view citizen involvement from a civil rights perspective. It will also clearly define the significance of the creation of an additional level at which to exercise political influence following Sweden's accession to the European Union.

1.	Introduction	6
1.1	The emergence of a democracy policy	6
1.2	Sustained follow-up and evaluation of performance and goal achievement	7
1.3	A communication on participation in the political process and future democracy policy priorities	10
2.	Goal 1: Voter turnout.....	13
2.1	Follow-up.....	13
2.1.1	Basic considerations	13
2.1.2	Voter turnout over time	14
2.1.3	Conclusions: follow-up.....	18
2.2	Explaining lower voter turnout	19
2.3	Follow-up of implementation	20
2.3.1	Amendments to the Elections Act	20
2.3.2	Action by the Election Authority.....	21
2.3.3	Time for Democracy.....	23
2.3.4	Funding for parliamentary parties for the dissemination of information to people from foreign backgrounds	25
2.3.5	Metropolitan policy	27
2.3.6	Youth policy measures.....	28
2.3.7	A new date for elections to the European Parliament	28
2.3.8	Conclusions: follow-up.....	28
2.4	Measures ahead of the 2004 elections to the European Parliament	29
2.4.1	Measures adopted by the Election Authority..	29
2.4.2	Funding for parliamentary parties for information purposes	29
2.4.3	Democracy-related measures ahead of the 2004 elections to the European Parliament	30
2.5	Other ongoing projects and initiatives	32
2.5.1	The 2003 Parliamentary Committee on the Elections Act.....	32
2.5.2	Electronic voting.....	32
3.	Goal 2: Elected political representatives	34
3.1	Follow-up.....	34
3.1.1	Basic considerations	34
3.1.2	Number of elected representatives and appointments.....	35
3.1.3	Representativity	36
3.1.4	Conclusions: follow-up.....	41
3.2	Follow-up of implementation	42
3.2.1	Basic considerations	42
3.2.2	Compensation	42
3.2.3	Education and training.....	46

	3.2.4	Threats and violence against elected representatives	47
	3.2.5	Conclusions: follow-up.....	48
3.3		Ongoing and planned measures and initiatives.....	48
	3.3.1	Elected representatives with disabilities	48
	3.3.2	Recruitment of elected representatives	49
	3.3.3	Efforts by other actors.....	49
4.		Goal 3: Participation between elections	50
	4.1	Follow-up.....	50
	4.1.1	Basic considerations	50
	4.1.2	Channels of influence at local level.....	51
	4.1.3	Channels of influence at national level.....	56
	4.1.4	Channels of influence at EU level	58
	4.1.5	Levels of public involvement and participation in political activities.....	60
	4.1.6	Participation in the activities of community-based organisations	63
	4.1.7	Perceived scope for exercising influence and knowledge of existing channels.....	64
	4.1.8	Conclusions: follow-up.....	65
4.2		Channels of influence	66
	4.2.1	Local government referendums	66
	4.2.2	Local school boards	68
	4.2.3	Citizens' proposals.....	70
	4.2.4	Some observations at national level	73
	4.2.5	Support for exchanges of information and experience	74
	4.2.6	General observations on local government efforts to develop local democracy.....	76
	4.2.7	Conclusions: an evaluation of some channels of influence.....	76
4.3		Ongoing and planned measures and initiatives.....	77
	4.3.1	Review of the referral process	77
	4.3.2	Greater transparency in financing of political party and preference vote campaigns	77
	4.3.3	Public meeting places	77
	4.3.4	Review of policy on organised community activity	78
	4.3.5	New organisations	79
	4.3.6	Follow-up of voluntary efforts.....	79
	4.3.7	The need for more data	79
5.		Goal 4: More equal participation.....	81
	5.1	Follow-up.....	81
	5.1.1	Basic considerations	81
5.2		Women and men	82
	5.2.1	Participation in different channels of influence.....	82
	5.2.2	Implemented measures and ongoing efforts ...	84
5.3		Children and young people	86
	5.3.1	Voter turnout among young people and their participation as elected representatives	86

5.3.2	Participation and influence among children and young people under 18.....	87
5.3.3	Other channels of influence for children and young people/young adults	88
5.3.4	Recent and ongoing efforts to boost voter turnout and strengthen young adults' participation in their capacity of elected representatives	89
5.3.5	Recent and current efforts to strengthen participation among children and young people between elections	89
5.4	People from foreign backgrounds	92
5.4.1	Participation in different channels of influence	92
5.4.2	Implemented measures and ongoing efforts ...	94
5.5	People with disabilities	97
5.5.1	Participation in different channels of influence	97
5.5.2	Implemented measures and ongoing efforts ...	97
5.6	The elderly	100
5.6.1	Participation in different channels of influence	100
5.6.2	Implemented measures and ongoing efforts .	101
5.7	Employed and unemployed.....	102
5.7.1	Participation in different channels of influence	102
5.7.2	Implemented measures and ongoing efforts .	103
5.8	The national minorities	104
5.9	Conclusions: follow-up of implementation and goal achievement	105
6.	(Not translated).....	106
7.	(Not translated).....	106
8.	The future direction of democracy policy	106
8.1	Human rights and democracy – a mutual dependence....	106
8.2	Basic policy considerations and some priority issues.....	107
9.	Prospects for greater and more equal participation	110
9.1	Information and expertise	111
9.2	Citizen involvement in community concerns	113
9.2.1	Political parties and other community-based organisations	114
9.2.2	New organisations	115
9.2.3	Public meeting places and other public spaces	116
9.3	Framework for empowerment, public access and accountability	118
10.	Obstacles to greater, more equal participation	120
10.1	Structural obstacles to the exercise of power and influence	120
10.2	Women's and men's power	122
10.3	Threats to democracy	124
11.	Scope for greater, more equal participation	126
11.1	Conditions for elected representatives	126
11.2	Channels of influence and forms of participation.....	128
12.	Our collective responsibility.....	132

1. Introduction

1.1 The emergence of a democracy policy

Historically, efforts by the Government and Riksdag¹ to develop the structures and functioning of Swedish democracy have involved constitutional reform and traditional legislative measures. Since the mid-1980s, however, a number of government inquiries have addressed wider concerns about the state of modern democracy and the ability of citizens to influence policy and decision-making processes. One of the most comprehensive and far-reaching of these was the Government Commission on Swedish Democracy (*Demokratiutredningen, dir.*² 1997:101, *dir.* 1998:100). Set up in 1997, the commission was tasked with shedding light on the new conditions, problems and opportunities facing Swedish democracy in the 21st century. Its appointment should be seen in the context of the major changes undergone by Swedish society in recent decades. These include internationalisation of the economy, Sweden's accession to the European Union, increased population diversity, new forms of public involvement in social and political issues, and the development of information and communication technology.

The new challenges facing Swedish democracy and the lowest voter turnout for several decades in the 1998 general election were the main reasons for the appointment, also in 1998, of a minister with special responsibility for democracy issues. This marked the start of more systematic efforts to structure national initiatives aimed at promoting democratic development. The spring of 2000 saw the launch of Time for Democracy (*Tid för demokrati*), a project for the further development of Swedish democracy.

In 2001, Democracy – a special policy area for democracy issues – was established in conjunction with the budget bill (*prop.*³ 2000/01:1) for that year. The overall goal of policy in this area is to safeguard and deepen democracy. The introduction of a new, dedicated policy area reflected the high political priority accorded to the issue. Another aim was to facilitate coordination of government efforts in this sphere and thereby ensure a coherent, concerted approach to democratic development.

In the spring of 2001, the Government completed the drafting of Democracy in the New Century (*Demokrati för det nya seklet, prop.* 2001/02:80), a bill setting out a new long-term strategy incorporating goals and measures aimed at safeguarding and deepening Swedish democracy. In it, the Government stated that Swedish democracy should be characterised by broad citizen involvement in the context of representative democracy. The four goals subsequently adopted by the

¹ The Swedish parliament.

² Committee terms of reference (*direktiv*).

³ Government bill (*proposition*).

Riksdag are concerned with achieving greater and more equal participation (*bet.*⁴ 2001/02:KU14; *rskr.*⁵ 2001/02:190). These are:

- Significantly higher voter turnouts at national (parliamentary) and local elections and elections to the European Parliament, beginning with the 2002 general election.
- An increase in the number of citizens holding some form of political appointment or position⁶. An initial interim goal is 10,000 more elected political representatives at municipal and county level by 2010. An increase in the number of people who have held a political appointment at some time in their lives.
- More and better opportunities for citizens to participate in and influence the political process; and an increase in the overall number of citizens taking part.
- More equal participation: a broader cross section of the population, including young people and young adults, the unemployed and people from foreign backgrounds⁷, must be encouraged to take part in and bring their influence to bear on the political process.

Initiatives aimed at promoting democracy were further developed and deepened in 2002 and 2003. A great deal of work has been devoted to enhancing knowledge and understanding of the democratic process, the preconditions for its existence and the way in which it works. Particular efforts have been made to disseminate information about the outcome of previously implemented measures. The work of safeguarding and deepening democracy in Sweden is well developed and, in terms of breadth and scope, is regarded as unique by international standards.

Public participation in and influence over the political process are key goal-fulfillment criteria in several policy areas. Their importance in the public health policy sphere, for example, is constantly emphasised. The government bill, Goals for Public Health (*Mål för folkhälsan, prop. 2002/03:35*) states that active involvement and influence are essential to public health, which is why they have been designated a special target area (one of eleven). They are equally important factors in the promotion of sustainable development, in connection with work on Agenda 21, metropolitan policy, integration policy, child policy and youth policy.

1.2 Sustained follow-up and evaluation of performance and goal achievement

In its democracy bill, the Government underlines the importance of following up and evaluating the effects of its long-term strategy to

⁴ Committee report (*betänkande*).

⁵ Parliamentary communication (*riksdagsskrivelse*).

⁶ For the purposes of the present communication, a political appointment is defined as an official position, office, commission or assignment of a political nature, held or executed on a voluntary, often part-time, generally unremunerated basis (especially at neighbourhood and district council level), by an elected political representative. Examples include serving on local government committees and advisory bodies, municipal auditing, etc.

⁷ Citizens born in or outside Sweden, both of whose parents were born abroad.

safeguard and deepen Swedish democracy. The Government has also declared its intention to monitor other efforts to promote democracy at municipal and county council level. An account of the follow-up and evaluation measures implemented to date is set out below. More details on the findings of the reports are contained in the following sections.

Survey of democracy indicators

In November 2003, Göteborg University was commissioned by the Government to submit proposals on the types of statistics to be produced in connection with regular follow-ups of goal achievement and the implementation of certain measures in the democracy bill. Its report, Follow up Indicators of Democratic Development in Sweden (*Indikatorer för uppföljning av demokratiutvecklingen i Sverige*) concluded that certain indicators were lacking. For example, there were none on why people choose not to vote, on access by disabled registered voters, on whether and to what extent citizens believe they can influence political conditions and developments at local, national and EU level, or on the extent of their knowledge of the various ways in which influence can be brought to bear. This survey of democracy indicators and its accompanying proposals serve as an important basis for continued efforts by the Government to produce a system for following up implementation of measures to develop democracy in Sweden. The proposals were also used as a basis for the present communication.

Database of revitalisation work by municipal and county councils

In 2003, Statistics Sweden (*Statistiska centralbyrån, SCB*) was assigned by the Government to update a database created by the Agency for Administrative Development (*Statskontoret*) containing information relating to local government revitalisation work, including data on voter turnout at elections, majority parties, forms of local government cooperation, enterprises under municipal or county council ownership, government-citizen relations and democracy-related issues. The information dates from 1999, 2001 and 2003, allowing comparisons over time. In December 2003, SCB compiled data from the database for its report, Local Democracy: Development and Functioning (*Den lokala demokratis utveckling och funktionssätt*). The Government intends to pursue this initiative and make the database more accessible.

Breakdown of elected representatives at municipal and county level

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities (*Kommunförbundet*) has conducted regular statistical surveys of political representatives, including breakdowns by age, gender, assignment, etc. since 1971. In the period leading up to the present parliament (2002–2006) the Agency for Administrative Development proposed in its report, Follow up of Revitalisation Projects in Municipal and County Councils (*Uppföljning av förnyelsearbetet i kommuner och landsting, 2002:5*) that the central Government take over responsibility for collecting data on politically

elected representatives at municipal level, and in the process widen the scope of its survey to include county councils.

In May 2003, SCB was assigned by the Government, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the Federation of Swedish County Councils to carry out a full survey of elected representatives serving at municipal and county level in 2003. In the autumn of 2003, Uppsala University was commissioned to analyse the resulting data in cooperation with SCB. An account of the project was presented in the report, *Elected Political Representatives in the 21st Century: a Survey of Political Representatives and Representativity in Municipal and County Councils in 2003 (Det nya seklets förtroendevalda – om politikerantal och representativitet i kommuner och landsting 2003)*.

Statistical analysis of voter turnout

As in previous elections, SCB produced statistics on voter turnout in the 2002 parliamentary election. In the autumn of 2002, the Ministry of Justice also commissioned a researcher employed at the Department of Political Science at Uppsala University to analyse voter turnout in the 2002 municipal elections. The findings were reported in the ministerial memorandum, *Who Votes and Why? – An Analysis of Voter Turnout in the 2002 Municipal Elections (Vem röstar och varför? – En analys av valdeltagandet i 2002 års kommunfullmäktigeval, Ds⁸ 2003:54)*.

Statistical analysis of the activities of community-based organisations

In 2001, SCB was commissioned by the Government to draw up a report on the scope of organised community activity⁹, i.e. activities undertaken by advocacy groups, grass-roots organisations, voluntary, non-profit associations, stakeholder groups and other non-governmental organisations. This was to be based on a special study of commitment to and active engagement in voluntary, non-profit associations and cooperative societies conducted in 2000 as part of SCB's regular surveys of living conditions (*Undersökningar om levnadsförhållanden, ULF*). The report, *Organised Community Activity in Sweden: Welfare, Social Capital and Training in Democracy (Föreningslivet i Sverige – Välfärd, Socialt kapital, Demokratiskola, rapport 98)* was presented in March 2002.

Follow-up of Time for Democracy

In January 2003, Mid-Sweden University (*Mitthögskolan*) was commissioned by the Government to evaluate development efforts in connection with the Time for Democracy project. The assignment was to include a general appraisal of development measures and an assessment of the extent to which these have succeeded in stimulating participation in the democratic process. Its report, *Democracy Needs Time (Demokrati tar tid)*, presented to the Government in September 2003, also included proposals on the design of future support for democracy development.

⁸ Ministry publications series (*departementsserien*).

⁹ The term will be used in this sense throughout the present communication.

Additional funds were allocated to the political parties in the Swedish Riksdag for the production and dissemination of information for immigrants in the run-up to the 2002 elections. Göteborg University was assigned by the Government to assess the impact on immigrants of information from the parliamentary parties on voter participation. Its findings were set out in the report, *Political Advertising or Networking? (Politisk annonsering eller nätverkande?)* published in November 2003.

Survey of research in the fields of democracy, public administration, and non-governmental organisations.

In December 2002, the Government commissioned the National Science Council (*Vetenskapsrådet*) to conduct a survey of national research into democracy, public administration and non-governmental/community-based organisations with a view to further enhancing public knowledge of ongoing democracy-related research.

Follow-up of citizens' proposals initiative

1 July 2002 marked the introduction – through amendments to the Local Government Act (*Kommunallagen*, 1991:900) – of the citizens' proposals initiative. At the Government's request, Örebro University has followed up results achieved to date and detailed its findings in the 2004 report, *Concrete Politics in Everyday Life: Follow-up of Citizens' Proposals in Municipal and County Council Assemblies (Vardagens konkreta politik – uppföljning av medborgarförslag i fullmäktige)*.

Follow-up of application of new provisions on compensation

Published in March 2004, the report, *The Right of Politically Elected Representatives to Compensation under the Local Government Act: An Implementation Evaluation (Förtroendevaldas rätt till ersättning enligt kommunallagen – en utvärdering av genomförandet)* presented the findings reached between the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004 by a researcher commissioned by the Ministry of Justice to examine the application of Local Government Act provisions relating to compensation for loss of income and other costs incurred by elected representatives while carrying out their political duties.

1.3 A communication on participation in the political process and future democracy policy priorities

Continuous follow-up, analysis and discussion

In its democracy bill, the Government promised to report continually and appropriately on the development of Swedish democracy in light of the goals implicit in its overall aim of safeguarding and deepening that democracy.

The Riksdag Standing Committee on the Constitution (*Konstitutionsutskottet, KU*) has called for an in-depth analysis of the outcome of recent government efforts to encourage higher voter turnouts, and for an inquiry into why a higher turnout was not achieved at the last general election (*bet. 2002/03:KU1, bet. 2003/04:KU1*). The committee also stated that it expects the Government to continue its efforts in connection with the follow-up study and evaluation strategy for the Democracy policy area.

In its 2004 budget bill (*prop. 2003/04:1*) the Government announced that it would report on the development of democracy in relation to stated goals in a communication to the Riksdag in the spring of 2004.

Democracy – its preconditions and its functioning – should be the subject of continued discussion within the Government, the Riksdag, political parties, local government, the mass media, and among citizens. The presentations, assessments and evaluations contained in the present communication are aimed *inter alia* at encouraging such discussion.

Part 1: Follow-up and evaluation of implementation and goal achievement

The present communication is divided into two main sections. The first part (Chapters 2–7) contains a presentation and in-depth analysis of the type called for by the Committee on the Constitution. It records and assesses the development of Swedish democracy from 2002 in light of the goals implicit in its overall aim of safeguarding and deepening that democracy, namely higher turnout at elections, a rise in the number of elected political representatives and greater scope for wider and more equal participation in the political process between elections. It also includes an account of actions taken. Where the outcome of these initiatives is already known, the extent to which they have contributed to long-term efforts to achieve the stated objectives is discussed. An account of ongoing and planned measures is also provided.

Enhanced social representativity is a common aim in all the goals. The production of detailed data on participation in and between elections by voters and elected representatives, broken down by gender, age, etc. comes under Goal 4, equal participation. In addition to the four goals, the democracy bill defined a number of key action areas requiring general measures aimed at safeguarding and deepening democracy in Swedish society. Democracy is not the only policy area where such measures are needed, however. As discussed in greater detail below, these include efforts to strengthen human rights, democracy at local government level and the machinery of public administration.

Part 2: Future aims and direction of the Government's democracy policies

The second part of the present communication (Chapters 8–12) deals with the future direction of government policies on democracy and areas that should be given priority to facilitate long-term efforts to achieve the stated goals of greater and more equal participation. A number of new measures which the Government plans to adopt are also presented here.

Throughout the present report the terms ‘citizens’, ‘people’ and ‘inhabitants’ are used synonymously. Where a specific nationality is

intended, the term citizen is qualified accordingly: e.g. 'foreign citizen' Skr. 2003/04:110
or 'Swedish citizen'.

2. Goal 1: Voter turnout

Summary: The first goal – a long-term objective – of the Government’s democracy policies is high voter turnout at elections. However, although the downward trend in voter turnout was reflected in levels of participation in the 2002 general election, the drop in turnout between the 1998 and 2002 elections was considerably smaller than that between the 1994 and 1998 elections. This would seem to indicate a break in the prevailing trend. In some counties and municipalities turnout has actually risen. The fact that turnout among non-Swedish citizens in local elections has stabilised is another favourable sign, although the continuing decline in participation among first-time voters and rising disparities in turnout between certain population groups give cause for concern. However, voter turnout in Sweden is still high by international standards.

Measures adopted in recent years to boost voter turnout have yielded favourable results in terms of improved, simplified voting procedures and facilities, and greater knowledge of democracy promotion methods and approaches.

It is vital that all measures form part of long-term initiatives in which efforts to promote democracy between elections are combined with selective measures aimed at boosting turnout in the run-up to elections. It should be emphasised, however, that higher turnout cannot of course be achieved solely through government policy measures. Responsibility must also be shared among other actors, primarily the political parties.

2.1 Follow-up

2.1.1 Basic considerations

The Riksdag approved a government motion proposing that significantly increased voter turnout in national and local government elections, as well as in elections to the European Parliament, be adopted as a long-term goal in this area. An initial interim goal was higher turnout in the 2002 general election.

Particular attention should be focused on the need to substantially increase election turnout in population groups where voting is less widespread, such as young people/young adults, the unemployed and people from foreign backgrounds. In its democracy bill, the Government affirmed that high turnout was important for several reasons: it confers legitimacy on elected assemblies and gives more citizens an opportunity to take part in social and political affairs, instead of being excluded from the process. One of the purposes of a general election is to give concrete, representative expression to the political divisions in society.

The Government has introduced a broad range of measures, including legislation, information campaigns and project funding, as part of its long-term drive to encourage higher voter turnouts. Basic considerations

include the need to improve voter access and awareness of what the right to vote implies.

However, higher turnout cannot be achieved solely through government policy measures. Other actors, political parties in particular, must also accept a share of responsibility in this matter.

The findings of surveys of voter turnout over time provide a basis for determining the extent to which the goal for the 2002 general election was achieved. Most of the statistical material presented here was compiled by SCB and based on a random selection of registered voters. Swedish citizens residing abroad are not included, however. Unless otherwise stated, all figures refer to parliamentary elections. The report is followed by an account of measures taken to promote greater voter participation (see Chapter 5 for more detailed information on turnout for different population groups).

The section concludes with a presentation of a number of ongoing projects aimed at promoting higher voter turnouts in the future.

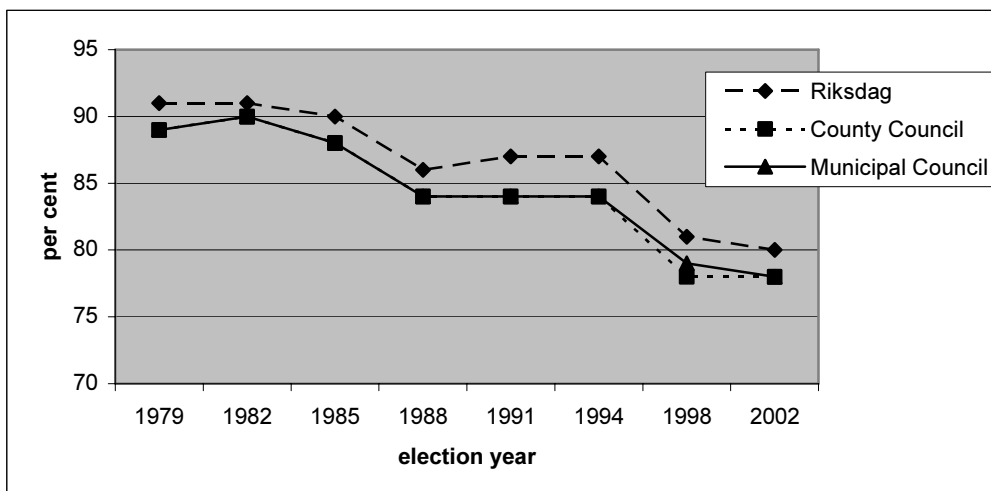
2.1.2 Voter turnout over time

Voter turnout in Riksdag (parliamentary) and local government elections

As shown in Diagram 1 below, voter turnout in the 2002 elections remained lower than in 1998, with drops of 1.3, 0.6 and 0.7 percentage points in parliamentary, county council and municipal elections respectively. However the decline was not as steep as that recorded between the 1994 and 1998 elections with drops of 5.4, 6.2 and 5.8 percentage points in respective elections.

The number of preference votes, i.e. votes cast for a particular candidate in a particular constituency, fell between 1998 and 2002 by 4 percentage points in elections to the Riksdag and municipal and county councils.

Diagram 1. Voter turnout in parliamentary and local government elections, 1979–2002.



Source: Statistics Sweden

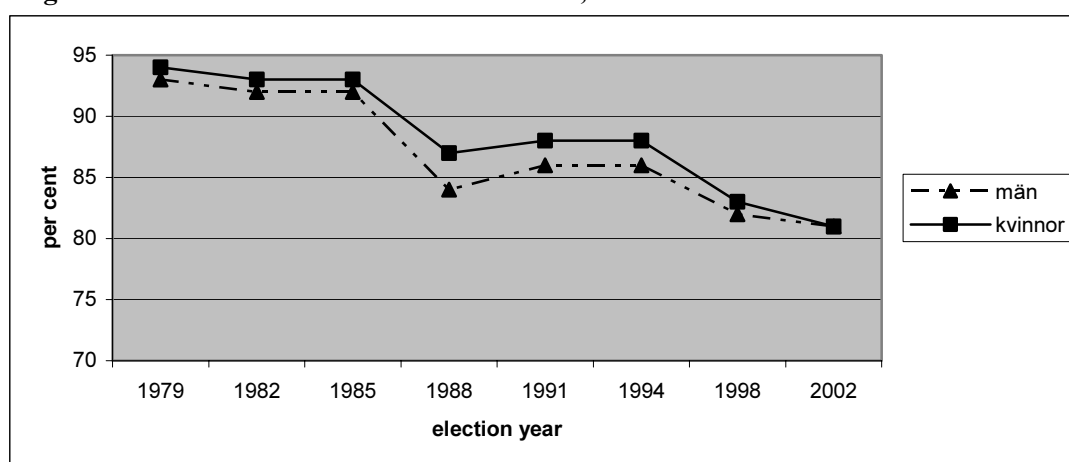
A geographical comparison reveals that voter turnout in the 2002 parliamentary elections increased in only one constituency (Blekinge

County) and fell in the remaining 28. However, the figures for local government elections showed a rise in turnout in 25 municipalities and 3 counties. A comparison of districts in metropolitan municipalities showed that turnout picked up in 10 of the 24 districts covered by the local development agreements forming part of the Government's national metropolitan policy.

Voter turnout: men and women

The longstanding disparity in voter turnout between women and men is clearly shown in the diagram below. Although more women vote than men, the gap began to close after the 1994 general election and virtually disappeared in the 2002 election.

Diagram 2. Voter turnout for women and men, 1979–2002.



Source: Statistics Sweden

However, a closer analysis of the electorate shows that the relationship between men and women is not as clear-cut as the diagram might suggest. This matter is examined more fully below.

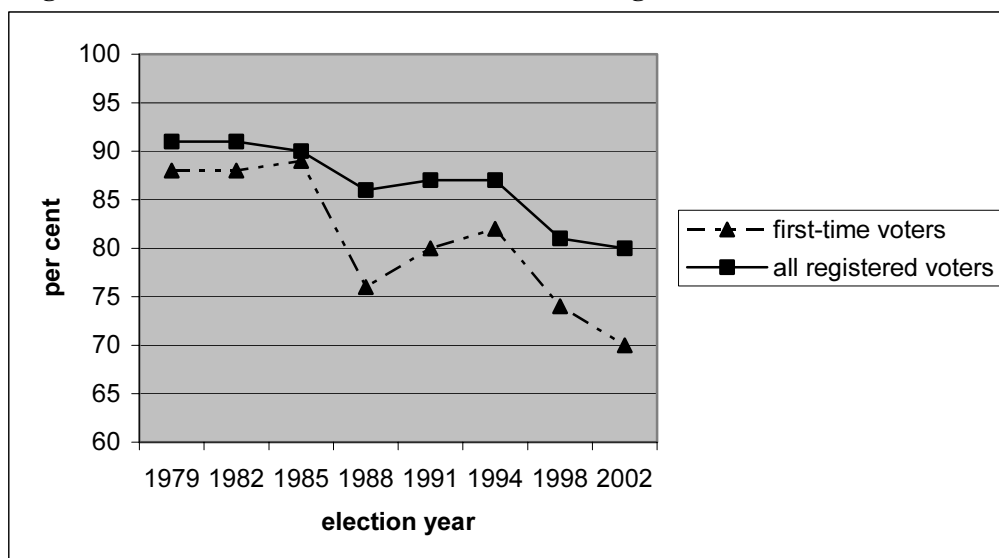
Voter turnout: various age groups

Research has shown that people who exercise their right to vote at an early age, i.e. when they first become eligible to vote, tend to continue doing so in subsequent elections. It is therefore of particular interest to follow election turnout trends among *first-time voters*. Diagram 3 below compares turnout for first-time voters¹⁰ with turnout for all registered voters. It shows that the fall in turnout over succeeding general elections since 1985 has been considerably greater among first-time voters than for all voters. Turnout among the former was around 70 per cent, a drop of 4 percentage points on the 1998 election. This may be compared to the total fall in voter turnout for the period, namely 1.3 percentage points. Contrary to the general trend – a narrowing gap between men and women – the disparity among first-time voters increased in the 2002 election by 6 percentage points over the 1998 election, when young men recorded a higher turnout than women. In the 2002 election, however, the

¹⁰ People aged 18–22 and were thus too young to have voted in a previous general election.

figure for women first-time voters was 4 percentage points higher than for men. Skr. 2003/04:110

Diagram 3. Turnout for first-time voters and all registered voters, 1979–2002.



Source: Statistics Sweden

Election statistics would also seem to indicate that turnout increases with age only to decline when voters reach 65–69. Only voters in the 55–59 and over-70 age brackets recorded a rise in turnout between 1998 and 2002 (approx. 1 and 2 percentage points respectively). This increase has not been statistically validated, however. Turnout is higher among men than women in the oldest age group, while young and middle aged women generally score higher than their male counterparts.

Voter turnout: socio-economically vulnerable groups

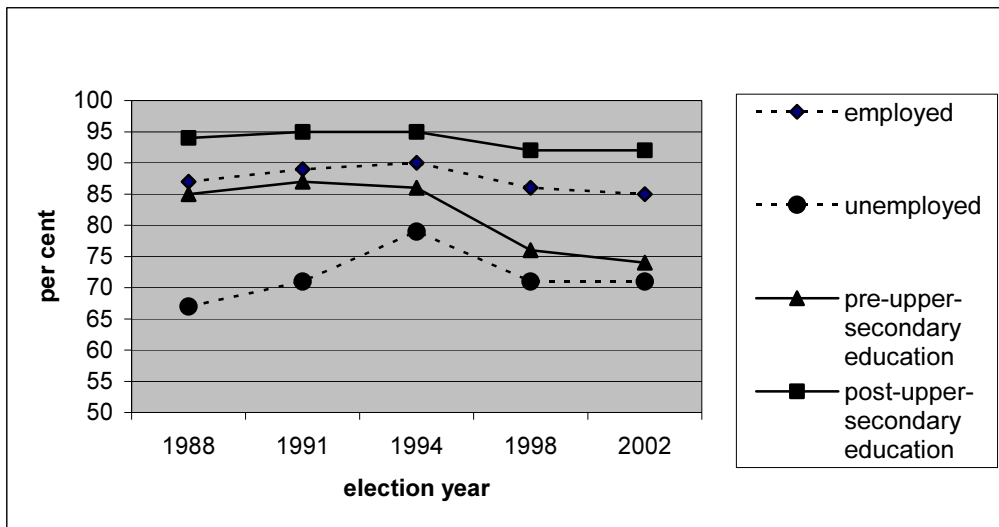
Voter turnout is appreciably lower among lower-qualified, lower-paid and unemployed people than among people who are highly qualified, highly paid and in work.

As Diagram 4 shows, the difference turnout between *employed* and *unemployed* voters did not increase between 1998 and 2002. Turnout among employed voters in the 2002 election was around 85 per cent, a drop of about 1 percentage point. This figure has not been statistically validated, however. Turnout among unemployed voters was around 71 per cent, the same in as in 1998. Women scored higher than men in both categories (employed and unemployed).

Diagram 4 also tracks turnout among voters with *pre-upper-secondary* and *post-upper secondary education*. Unlike the case in the comparison of employed and unemployed voters, the gap between voters with pre-upper-secondary and post-upper-secondary education has widened significantly in recent years and especially in the 1998 general election. Turnout among voters in the former group was 74 per cent in 2002, a drop of around 2 percentage points on the 1998 election. This figure has not been statistically validated, however. Turnout for the latter group in the 2002 election remained unchanged at about 92 per cent. Turnout among voters with *upper-secondary education* was around 81 per cent in

2002, a drop of about 2 percentage points on 1998. Women scored higher than men in all three categories. Skr. 2003/04:110

Diagram 4. Turnout among employed and unemployed voters, and among voters with pre- and post-upper-secondary education, 1988–2002.



Source: Statistics Sweden

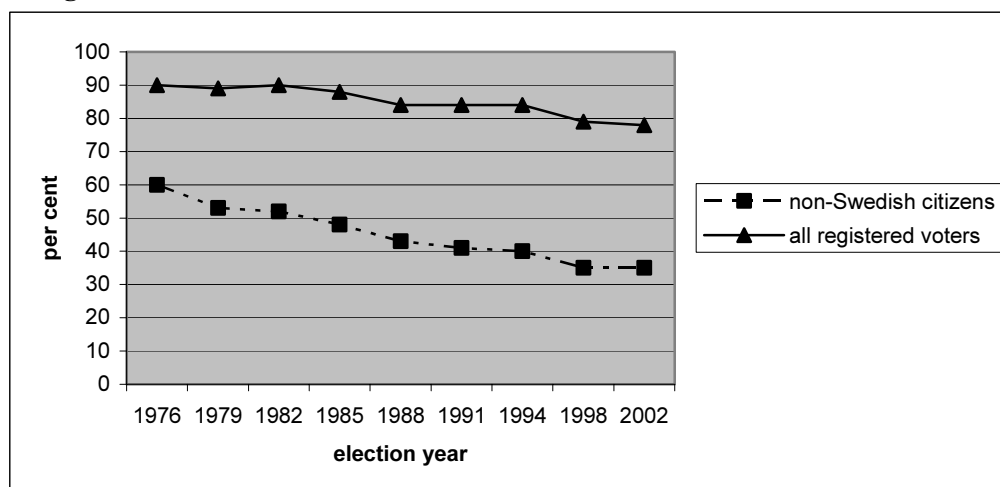
It may also be noted that voter turnout among people with incomes of over SEK 100,000 per year was approximately 72 per cent in the 2002 election, a drop of about 2 percentage points on the 1998 election. However, some 92 per cent of voters earning SEK 300,000 or more per year went to the polls in the 2002 election, a reduction of less than 1 percentage point over 1998. As the drop was greater among the lower paid than among high-income earners, the gap between these two categories has widened, albeit marginally. The figure for the latter category has not been statistically validated, however. Turnout among women voters earning less than SEK 100,000 per year and SEK 300,000 or more per year was higher than among men in the same categories.

Voter turnout: people from foreign backgrounds

The difference in turnout between *Swedish-born* and *foreign-born* voters is also considerable. Some 83 per cent of the former and 67 per cent of the latter voted in the 2002 parliamentary election¹¹. The figure for Swedish-born voters remained unchanged from 1998, while only 70 per cent of voters born abroad went to the polls. The drop in turnout among voters in the latter group has not been statistically validated, however. Although turnout among women and men born in Sweden was comparable, more foreign-born women than men went to the polls.

¹¹ Only Swedish citizens are eligible to vote in parliamentary elections.

Diagram 5. Voter turnout at municipal elections for non-Swedish citizens and all registered voters.



Source: Statistics Sweden

Diagram 5 shows that turnout among *non-Swedish citizens* in the 2002 municipal elections¹² was the same – 35 per cent – as in 1998. In the 2002 election 39 per cent of women voters in this category went to the polls as against 31 per cent of the men. Turnout among first-time voters with foreign citizenship was as low as 26 per cent, compared with 70 per cent for all first-time voters.

2.1.3 Conclusions: follow-up

Although declining voter turnout continued with the 2002 general election, the drop in turnout on the 1998 election was substantially smaller than that between the latter and the 1994 election. This would seem to indicate a break in the prevailing trend. The fact that turnout among non-Swedish citizens in local government elections has now stabilised is another favourable sign, although the continuing decline in participation among first-time voters and growing disparities between certain population groups give cause for concern. However, voter turnout in Sweden is still high by international standards.

A direct comparison of parliamentary elections and the September 2003 referendum on the adoption of the euro cannot be made as these involve different election criteria. However, it may be of interest to note in this connection that turnout in the referendum was 82.6 per cent, 2 percentage points higher than that in the 2002 parliamentary election. SCB aims to publish data and statistical analyses of the referendum turnout in the spring of 2004.

¹² Under a special dispensation in the Elections Act (*vallagen* – 1997:157) non-Swedish citizens are entitled to vote in municipal and county council elections, but not in parliamentary elections.

Why some people choose not to exercise their right to vote

Political science researchers point to a number of reasons why citizens do not exercise their right to vote. Frequently mentioned factors include individual characteristics including level of education and civic skills, and specific determinants such as the nature of the election campaign in question. The constitutional framework also has a bearing on election turnout.

It is vital that long-term efforts to promote higher voter turnout be supported by extensive knowledge of the various factors involved. However, the Government has a particular interest in identifying the reasons for the lower turnout in the latest elections.

Factors behind lower voter turnout in the 2002 election

Concerned by the downward trend in voter turnout, the Ministry of Justice commissioned a researcher from the Department of Political Science at Uppsala University to conduct a detailed study of voter participation in the 2002 election. In the report, *Who Votes and Why? – An Analysis of Voter Turnout in the 2002 Municipal Elections (Ds 2003:54)* the compiler examines a number of possible factors behind voter turnout for different population groups. The study confirms the existence of a pattern referred to in several earlier surveys, namely the tendency of older people, people born in Sweden, married people and cohabitees, highly qualified people and high-income earners to vote in greater numbers than young people/young adults, immigrants, single men and women, the lower-qualified and the lower-paid. According to the study there is no connection between gender and voting propensity.

However, the study does show that the positive connection between voter turnout and background factors such as education, age and income loses much of its significance when other aspects are considered, such as activity in voluntary associations and other community-based organisations, trust in others, degree of political interest and identification with a political party. One of the conclusions of the study is that the propensity to vote, i.e. voter turnout, is not a function of *socio-economic conditions as such*, but is determined by personal values and other attributes. These factors largely coincide with people's socio-economic status, however. Thus socio-economic background has an indirect, as opposed to a direct, effect on voter turnout.

However, the above connection does not appear to apply in the case of two background factors: civil status and citizenship. The author of the report has attempted to account for this on the basis of earlier research findings and his own hypotheses. With regard to civil status, the author believes that turnout is higher among married people and cohabitees due to social pressure to vote from spouses, partners or others. As regards the propensity (or otherwise) of immigrants to vote in local government elections, the author maintains that the right to vote in parliamentary elections (conditional on Swedish citizenship) may be a determining factor.

The study also covers change and development within the electorate. Variables included membership of associations and other community-based organisations, degree of trust in one's fellow-citizens, interest in politics, party identification and the prevalence of the view that every citizen should exercise her or his right to vote (expressed in the study as "*the view that voting is a civic virtue*"). According to the author, conditions in terms of membership of associations, etc. and interest in politics had not changed appreciably between 1997 and 2002. However, trust in others and the extent to which voting is viewed as a civic virtue had both increased. On the other hand, the downward trend in terms of party identification continued. The author has speculated *inter alia* that the drop in voter turnout was marginal simply because between 1998 and 2002 the two factors – degree of trust in one's fellow-citizens and the extent to which voting is viewed as a civic virtue on the one hand, and the degree of party identification on the other – have been moving in opposite directions and thus cancelled each other out.

Other studies

In recent years, a number of other surveys of voter turnout have been conducted in addition to the above study of the 2002 municipal and county council elections. Mention may be made of the studies detailed in the research report, *Changing Trends in Voter Turnout (Valdeltagande i förändring, SOU¹³ 1999:132)* compiled by the Commission on Swedish Democracy. The report, which includes analyses of voter turnout for the period up to the 1998 election, also contains a study of the decline in turnout between 1985 and 1998. Like the study of the 2002 election, it attributed the fall in turnout to declining party identification. The compilers also maintained that the view of voting as a civic virtue had lost ground in the period 1985–1998. This was adduced as a further explanation for the decline in voter turnout.

2.3 Follow-up of implementation

The Government is pursuing a long-term strategy designed to boost voter turnout. A number of examples of government initiatives aimed at achieving a higher turnout in the 2002 election are given below. Reference is also made to efforts in connection with the national referendum on the adoption of the euro.

2.3.1 Amendments to the Elections Act

In the spring of 2002, the Riksdag approved amendments to the Elections Act (*Vallagen, 1997:157*) extending the right to vote by post to all registered voters resident abroad, and empowering officials in all polling stations to issue duplicate voting cards (i.e. new copies of voting cards) where possible. The amended act also prescribes stiffer requirements on the adaptation of polling stations to the needs of the disabled. Other

¹³ Official Government Reports (*statens offentliga utredningar*).

changes include a provision enabling people who have been remanded in police custody, placed in a correctional institution or, for reasons of security, cannot vote in the same polling station as the general public, to vote by proxy.

2.3.2 Action by the Election Authority

The central electoral organisation was changed ahead of the 2002 general election. The new Election Authority (*Valmyndigheten*), set up in July 2001, took over from the National Tax Board (*Riksskatteverket*) as the central election authority).

Accessibility

According to the Election Authority's recent report, Observations on the General Election of 15 September 2002 (*Erfarenheter från valen den 15 september 2002–2003:1*) the production and distribution of *ballot papers, voting cards and other election material* was organised and carried out efficiently. Complaints from various sources that voting cards had not been distributed in time proved on subsequent examination to be exaggerated. Such cases were extremely limited in extent with only a few isolated postcodes affected. In many cases, voting cards posted to Swedish citizens residing abroad were delivered too late by foreign postal services. However, this did not actually prevent anyone from voting, as voting cards are not required when voting by post from abroad.

The conferral of extended powers to issue *duplicate voting cards* led to an immediate increase in their number, from approximately 51,000 in the 1998 election to around 66,000 in the 2002 election. One explanation for the large number of cards issued is poor addressing.

Changes were also introduced in connection with *advance voting* in the run-up to the 2002 election. The siting of postal voting stations was affected by organisational changes within the Swedish Postal Service (*Posten Sverige AB*), which then backed out of a preliminary undertaking to organise polling facilities in old-age homes, prisons, supervised shared residential accommodation for the elderly and the disabled, and other institutions. Responsibility for this service, referred to as *institutional voting*¹⁴, has been taken over by Sweden's municipal councils.

With regard to *postal voting*, the Government instructed the Election Authority to apply the same standards in 2002 as those laid down for the 1998 election. This involved the preparation of at least 1,300 postal voting stations. The final number of postal voting stations in the 2002 election was 1,481. There were, however, critical comments from some quarters regarding opening hours and voting arrangements in some stations. Approximately 1.6 million postal votes were cast, the same number as in the 1998 election. However, the proportion of postal votes to total votes fell from 31.2 per cent to 29.8 per cent.

¹⁴ Voting by people confined to institutions such as old-age homes, prisons, supervised shared residential accommodation for the elderly and the disabled, etc. Polling facilities – polling staff, booths, ballot papers, etc. – are provided on the institution's premises.

It may be mentioned in this connection that the total number of postal voting stations installed for the euro referendum came to 1,590 and that over 1.8 million votes were posted, corresponding to 31.5 per cent of all votes cast.

As regards 'institutional voting' (see above) the Election Authority appealed to the country's municipal councils to assume responsibility for this procedure in the 2002 election. Not all councils did so, however. In some cases, staff were instead specially trained to act as proxies for people unable to vote themselves. Voting took place in just over 1,800 institutions. The number of votes received by local election boards from inmates of institutions totalled 32,000, an increase of 7,000 on the 1998 election. Preliminary figures for the 2003 euro referendum indicate that the total number of 'institutional votes' was approximately 30,000.

New measures adopted for the 2002 election were the extension of powers to issue duplicate voting cards to foreign missions and the right to vote by post from anywhere in the world. Despite the previously mentioned problems arising in connection with tardy delivery of voting cards, the number of votes from Swedish citizens residing abroad rose from around 32,000 in the 1998 election to just over 37,000 in 2002. Some 19,000 of the latter were cast at *embassy polling stations*, while approximately 18,000 were *postal votes*.

Finally, it may be noted that 51,000 votes were cast by Swedish citizens residing abroad in the 2003 referendum, an increase of 14,000 on the 2002 election.

Information

In the run-up to the 2002 election, all voters received a *voting card* with information on where and how to vote. All printed information was also available on the Election Authority's *website* (www.val.se), which had been further improved since the 1998 election. Radio and TV carried advertisements with the message that further information on polling stations and voting procedures was available both on the website and at a special telephone number with an 020 prefix. A subsequent evaluation of the TV campaign revealed that just over half the respondents had seen the advertisements (three-quarters in the case of people under 25) and that 95 per cent of older and 89 per cent of younger voters felt they had been adequately informed about the election.

A brochure entitled Useful Information about the Election (*Bra att veta om valet*) was produced and translated into 13 languages. The brochure, which was posted – and translated into further languages – on the Election Authority's website, was distributed partly through locally based authorities and organisations (immigrant services bureaux, democracy projects, etc.) and partly in connection with a number of activities supported by the Election Authority, including a motorised tour, complete with 'ambassadors', in which the brochures were handed out in areas with large immigrant populations in Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö. The brochures were also placed in magazine racks in cinemas and sent out to schools along with educational material on school elections. Its contents were recorded on cassette and distributed to

some 15,000 visually impaired people. It was also published in easy-to-read format and distributed to some 4,500 addresses.

In a new initiative for the 2002 election, all first-time voters were sent a *postcard* directly addressed to them, reminding them that they were now eligible to vote – for the first time. In addition, special information material on the new right to *vote by post* from anywhere in the world was produced for Swedish citizens residing abroad.

As regular staff found it difficult to cope with the influx of telephone and e-mail inquiries from the public, a special 020 telephone helpline was opened in April 2002 to handle election queries. The most common reason for calling was to request a new voting card.

All in all, efforts by the Election Authority to inform the general public about where, when and how to vote were more extensive in a number of respects in 2002 than in the 1998 election.

Additional information measures were implemented in the run-up to the 2003 referendum. These included fuller information printed on the voting card and the reinforcement of election helpline staff to answer telephone calls and e-mails.

Summary assessment

The Government considers that measures implemented by the Election Authority contributed substantially to efforts to achieve a higher voter turnout. Amendments to the Elections Act and the work of the Election Authority ahead of the 2002 general election helped improve voter access in a number of respects. The evaluation of the public information measures also showed that a large percentage of registered voters felt they had been adequately informed about the election.

However, there is a need for further follow-up studies of the information measures and their impact on population groups with low turnout records, such as people from foreign backgrounds and young people/young adults. The Government has accordingly called attention to the need for further follow-up studies of the Election Authority's public information measures in its 2004 appropriation directions.

With regard to advance voting, it is difficult to say to what extent voter turnout has been affected by the various measures adopted, such as changes in the siting of postal voting stations. However, the increased proportion of postal votes in the 2003 referendum on the adoption of the euro may be a sign of widespread future interest in postal voting.

2.3.3 Time for Democracy

A long-term development project

The year 2000 saw the launching of Time for Democracy, a two-year project for the development of Swedish democracy. Its aims were to enhance citizens' awareness of the democratic process and promote their participation in that process, particularly at election time. A total of SEK 35 million was allocated to the entire project.

Financial support, in the form of grants for democracy development, was extended to voluntary, community-based organisations, local

government authorities, etc. Close to 1,200 applications were processed and 142 projects were granted support. Several of these were primarily concerned with boosting voter turnout among women, young people and young adults, people from foreign backgrounds, the disabled and the unemployed. For example, the Association for the Future of Angered (*Föreningen Angereds Framtid*) was granted support for a project aimed at informing immigrant members of the community about the 2002 election. Another example was the Centre for Easy Reading (*Centrum för lättläst*) which received funding to produce easy-to-read versions of *inter alia* parliamentary parties' election manifestos and political programmes, mainly for people with certain disabilities. Further examples of projects aimed at increasing voter turnout are presented in Chapter 5.

Efforts also included arrangements to mark the 80th anniversary of the establishment in Sweden of universal suffrage, and the 25th anniversary of the introduction of the right of foreign nationals to vote in local government elections. Efforts included the production and distribution of the magazine *Votes (Röster)*, the organisation of a number of seminars on various democracy-related themes and the production and distribution of an anthology of research activities in the field, *Universal Suffrage is 80 Years Old (Rösträtten 80 år)*. The aim of the magazine, targeted mainly at upper-secondary school pupils, was to encourage them to vote in the 2002 election. However, both the magazine and the anthology were also distributed to a large number of organisations, libraries, independent adult education colleges (*folkhögskolor*¹⁵), institutions of higher education, political parties, etc.

A special website, Democracy Forum (*Demokratitorget*, www.demokratitorget.gov.se) was also created as part of the project. A more detailed description of the website is provided in section 4.2.5.

Evaluation

The Government's development efforts in this field were evaluated by Mid-Sweden University. Its findings, set out in the report, *Democracy Needs Time*, confirmed the very considerable success of government support for the various democracy development projects. Almost all the projects achieved their individual targets as well as their objectives in the main Time for Democracy project. However, the evaluation team stressed the need to view development work of this kind in a long-term perspective. Continued support, according to the team, would probably be even more effective if greater emphasis was placed on the long-term, sustainable aspects of democracy enhancement.

The evaluation found that project participants took a more active part in the democratic process after project completion. More than a third of the project coordinators questioned felt that the project had prompted participants to take part in general elections to a greater extent than in the past. According to the evaluators, projects aimed at people from foreign backgrounds were highly successful in boosting turnout in this group. Projects targeted at young people under 26 also had a favourable impact in this respect. However, the evaluation revealed that more than a third of

¹⁵ Also translated as 'folk high schools'.

all project coordinators were unable to state whether the projects had prompted more participants to take part in general elections than in the past. Coordinators also considered that the projects had enhanced participants' knowledge and understanding of democracy and that they discussed general social issues with those around them to a greater extent than previously.

In connection with the celebrations marking the 80th anniversary of the establishment of universal suffrage and the 25th anniversary of the introduction of the right of foreign nationals to vote in local government elections, the evaluators referred to the favourable impact of the magazine *Votes*. For example, a third of the teachers interviewed stated that the magazine had been used as teaching material in civics classes.

Summary assessment

The Government's assessment is that the development project, *Time for Democracy*, afforded participants valuable knowledge and experience *inter alia* of a range of approaches to the task of broadening and deepening public participation in the democratic process. The Government also regards the reportedly favourable impact of many of the projects on voter turnout in general elections as a highly encouraging sign. This applied particularly to projects aimed at people from foreign backgrounds. There are also indications that the projects had a beneficial effect on participants' knowledge and understanding of the democratic process and on their readiness to discuss social issues with those around them. However the Government considers that development efforts of this kind should be seen in a long-term perspective, a view also emphasised in the evaluation.

2.3.4 Funding for parliamentary parties for the dissemination of information to people from foreign backgrounds

Funding for targeted information campaigns

In the period leading up to the 2002 election, special funds were allocated to the parliamentary parties for the purpose of disseminating information to people from foreign backgrounds. As in 1994 and 1998, the purpose of the scheme was to mobilise immigrant members of the community who did not vote. This time, however, the total allocation amounted to SEK 29 million, compared to SEK 12.4 million in 1994 and 1998. The motive for this substantial increase was the continued decline in turnout among voters who were not Swedish citizens.

Information provided to the immigrant population in the run-up to the 2002 election was followed up and evaluated. This had not been done previously. The study, carried out by Göteborg University at the Government's request, was mainly concerned with information disseminated by the parliamentary parties. To place their efforts in a wider context, however, it also covered activities by other actors. The university was instructed to study the impact of the information on voter turnout among the immigrant population. The survey featured interviews with representatives of the parliamentary parties, a voter questionnaire

and questionnaire-based study, and in-depth interviews with foreign-born citizens standing as candidates in the local government elections. Skr. 2003/04:110

Effects of the funding

The findings of the follow-up study were published in the report, *Political Advertising or Networking?* The general view among the party representatives interviewed, according to the report, was that the measures adopted had had a favourable impact on voter turnout. However, it also called attention to a matter of some concern, namely the parties' varying views concerning the effectiveness of information projects in dealing with low voter turnout among the immigrant population, i.e. the absence of concerted support for the project's basic premise. The study also reported that some parties failed to account for the way in which funds were used, and that in some cases appropriations were spent on previously planned, regular campaign activities not always clearly connected to the funding project's original purpose. The report also stated that some parties were critical of the fact that information about the special project reached them too late to be of use.

According to the study, the special information project and its associated measures were successful in the sense that the groups normally associated with low voter turnout were over-represented among those receiving a relatively large volume of targeted information and relatively little information of a more general nature. Respondents in the questionnaire-based study felt that most of the targeted measures had had some influence on their own decision to vote in the election and/or in their own choice of party. In their concluding analysis, however, the compilers of the report stated that the measures had no apparent effect – in the short term – on people's propensity to vote.

An attempt was therefore made to explain why voting behaviour varies from person to person. Reference was made to a number of alternative explanations for these differences based on earlier research work such as degree of integration into the community, perceptions of discrimination (which make people less likely to vote), and whether the prospective voter is a member of an immigrant association and knows that a fellow countryman/countrywoman is standing for election.

The compilers also carried out a study of election candidates born outside Sweden. This showed that – contrary to the case in previous elections – more candidates of non-European origin were selected, i.e. their names were placed on party lists, than candidates of European origin. The compilers also took the view that the connection noted after the 1998 election between the number of candidates in a particular immigrant group and turnout trends in that group was less marked after the 2002 election. However, the connection becomes apparent if the entire period from 1994 to 2002 is considered; the more foreign-born candidates there have been in a given municipality or ethnic group the less sharply voter turnout among non-Swedish citizens has fallen. The compilers concluded that there were significant efforts to mobilise ethnic communities in support of individual candidates in the 2002 local government election campaign. These efforts were more numerous and extensive than in the 1998 election.

In conclusion, the report recommends that the parliamentary parties should enter into more precisely defined, detailed agreements in order to ensure that resources are used for the purposes intended. The compilers also took the view that if this form of support during election campaigns is to continue, it is vital that the parliamentary parties are given sufficient time to plan. Assurances must be given to allay any suspicions that some parties may have received information about the measures earlier than others. The report further recommends that the practice of allocating funds in connection with election campaigns be discontinued and replaced with periodic supplementary allocations in order to facilitate more soundly-based strategies and networking with long-lasting effects, such as increased collaboration with immigrant associations.

Summary assessment

The findings of the above evaluation were discussed by the Government at a seminar held in December 2003, attended *inter alia* by the secretaries of the respective parliamentary parties. It was agreed that the parties should continue to discuss the issue of whether funding should be linked to election campaigns or form part of normal government funding for political parties.

In the Government's view, funds must be used for the purpose for which they were intended. This should be self-evident. The choice of method, however, should be left to the parties themselves. The Government also considers that sufficient planning time, is essential to the successful design of information measures. It should be made clear, however, that the parliamentary parties were informed in good time ahead of the 2002 election. To speed up the process, the Government and the parliamentary parties agreed, after due dialogue, on a proposal regarding the distribution of funds before the Riksdag had reached a decision on the matter.

2.3.5 Metropolitan policy

Since 1998, the Government has pursued a national metropolitan policy aimed at halting social, ethnic and discriminatory segregation in metropolitan areas and promoting equal living conditions for men and woman in Sweden's towns and cities. The so-called bottom-up, grass-roots approach has been held up as perhaps the most important means of achieving long-term, sustainable, successful development in this policy sphere. 'Bottom-up approach' is a generic concept; it presupposes local, grass-roots involvement and support, continuous dialogue on housing issues, putting users in the centre, etc.

Implementation of metropolitan policy is a long-term task. Efforts to date include inter-election measures and selective measures in the 2002 election aimed at encouraging a high voter turnout. Among these were cultural measures, including efforts to promote social networking. A follow-up study of voter turnout indicates that the downward trend has reversed in some metropolitan areas. As mentioned earlier, turnout in the 2002 election increased in 10 urban districts. The biggest changes were

recorded in two districts in the city of Göteborg: Hjällbo, where turnout rose by 4 percentage points, and Fornhöjden, with a 3 percentage-point rise. These results indicate that the bottom-up measures implemented between the two elections in the districts in question, combined with selective measures during the elections themselves, played a significant part in promoting higher voter turnouts.

2.3.6 Youth policy measures

In the run-up to the 2002 school election (*skolval*)¹⁶, the National Board for Youth Affairs (*Ungdomsstyrelsen*), supported by the Ministry of Justice and in cooperation with the National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*), the Election Authority and the Swedish Association of Student Councils (*Sveriges Elevråd, SVEA*) conducted a democracy campaign targeted at students and teachers. School elections were organised in all institutions of higher education and upper-secondary schools, in which over 250,000 young people took part. Turnout was almost 90 per cent, compared to 75 per cent in the 1998 school election.

2.3.7 A new date for elections to the European Parliament

Long-term efforts to promote higher election turnouts also embrace measures relating to elections to the European Parliament. In its democracy bill, the Government addresses the question of whether a setting a different date for elections to the European Parliament would promote higher voter turnout. A discussion on the election date had been in progress in the EU for some years. In 2002, it was resolved that the European Council could – by unanimous decision and after hearing the views of the European Parliament – decide that the elections could also be held in April. Under the present rules, the elections can be held in May and July, as well as in June. The proposed change also means that a Council decision to move the date must be taken at least one year before the end of the five-year election period. In November 2003, the Riksdag approved the government bill, Approval of Amendments to EC Rules on Elections to the European Parliament (*Godkännande av ändringar i EG:s regler om val till Europaparlamentet, prop. 2002/03:97*). Before the proposed changes to the EU election rules can take effect they must be ratified by all member states in accordance with their own constitutional provisions. The ratification process is not yet complete.

2.3.8 Conclusions: follow-up

It is clear from recent evaluations of efforts to boost voter turnout that several of the projects and measures implemented in the past few years have yielded favourable results in terms of improved, more accessible and more convenient voting procedures on the one hand and a wider

¹⁶ A 'shadow' election organised as an exercise in democracy for all institutions of higher education and upper-secondary schools. As in the real elections (taking place concurrently) students and pupils 'vote' for existing political parties.

knowledge of different approaches to the task of promoting democracy on the other. The introduction of postal voting has improved accessibility for voters abroad. The Election Authority's information campaigns have had a favourable impact on voters, who felt they had been adequately informed. The development project, Time for Democracy, provided valuable knowledge and experience of different approaches to the task of strengthening citizen involvement.

A key conclusion was that most of the measures aimed at boosting voter turnout must be seen in a long-term perspective. Despite signs of beneficial effects in the short term – such as the increased tendency of people who had taken part in local democracy projects to vote in general elections – the need for a long-term approach is clear from the evaluations and follow-up studies carried out. It is a question of constant networking and the kind of long-term work normally undertaken in connection with metropolitan policy projects. This in turn points to the importance of combining initiatives in inter-election periods with selective measures in the run-up to elections in order to encourage high voter turnout. It must be emphasised, however, that higher turnout cannot be achieved solely through government policy measures. Responsibility must be shared with other actors, especially the political parties.

2.4 Measures ahead of the 2004 elections to the European Parliament

2.4.1 Measures adopted by the Election Authority

The Election Authority had begun preparations for the elections to the European Parliament – held on the 13 June 2004 – in the previous year. Agreements had been reached on the production of election material such as ballot papers and voting cards. The Election Authority announced the information-related measures they intended to implement in the run-up to the elections in a report submitted to the Government in January 2004. The authority had planned a wide range of initiatives aimed at all registered voters, as well as information campaigns targeted specifically at young people and young adults, people from foreign backgrounds and the disabled. New measures for this election included the translation of information material into official minority languages.

As to advance voting, the Election Authority had reached an agreement with the Swedish Postal Service on postal voting. It had also drafted a communication to Sweden's municipal councils requesting their help in organising institutional voting.

2.4.2 Funding for parliamentary parties for information purposes

The Riksdag has approved the proposal set out in the 2004 budget bill on funding for parliamentary parties for dissemination of information in the run-up to the 2004 elections to the European Parliament (*prop.*

2003/04:1, utg.omr¹⁷. 1, bet. 2003/04:KU1, rskr. 2003/04:60). Of the SEK 20 million reserved for this purpose, SEK 19.5 million were shared among the parliamentary parties, and SEK 0.5 million were set aside for a follow-up study of the parties' information efforts. Preparatory work on the follow-up is now under way in the Government Offices.

Comparable amounts (SEK 30 million and SEK 20 million respectively) were allocated in the periods leading up to the elections to the European Parliament in 1995 and 1999. However, no evaluation of the effect of these allocations was made on either occasion.

2.4.3 Democracy-related measures ahead of the 2004 elections to the European Parliament

Basic considerations

In its democracy bill, the Government announced its intention to consider the design and organisation of future support for local democratic development in light of the findings of follow-up studies and evaluations of the development project, Time for Democracy. Having regard to the project's success and to progress in implementing metropolitan policy measures, and in view of the low turnout levels in previous elections to the European Parliament, the Government proposed in its 2004 budget bill that continued support be extended for democracy-related measures, specifically that SEK 10 million be appropriated for the implementation of measures aimed at encouraging a higher voter turnout in the 2004 elections to the European Parliament (*prop. 2003/04:1, utg.omr. 1, bet. 2003/04:KU1, rskr. 2003/04:60*).

Various studies of voter turnout in elections to the European Parliament show that certain population groups vote in fewer numbers than others. These include young people, people living in socially deprived neighbourhoods and people living in rural areas. The allocation was accordingly divided among the following activities: initiatives in metropolitan areas among low turnout groups; measures aimed at young people and young adults, including activities targeted at first-time voters aged 18–23; an evaluation of the outcome of the measures; and a study of voter turnout.

In addition, the government website on democracy issues, The Democracy Forum, will serve as a platform for dissemination of current information on these activities.

Democracy measures in local development agreements

As stated in section 2.3.5, the experience acquired in the course of implementing metropolitan policy measures has been of considerable value in efforts to promote higher voter turnout. The Government accordingly awarded grants to metropolitan municipalities that had reached local development agreements committing them to working for a high voter turnout in the 2004 elections to the European Parliament, namely Botkyrka, Göteborg, Haninge, Huddinge, Malmö, Stockholm and

¹⁷ Expenditure area.

Södertälje. The funds were to be used in metropolitan areas covered by local development agreements on support of measures aimed at groups associated with low voter turnout. Municipal councils were to make their own determinations on where and how the funds should be spent, based on their previous experience of democracy promotion activities. Several councils planned to use community informers to encourage residents to vote in the elections to the European Parliament. Councils are required to submit an account of how the funds were used to the Government Offices (Ministry of Justice) not later than 30 September 2004.

Democracy measures for young people and young adults

As part of the Government's youth initiative, the National Board for Youth Affairs and the National Agency for School Improvement (*Myndigheten för skolutveckling*) have been commissioned to organise special activities aimed at first-time voters aged 18–23 both in and outside upper-secondary school. The aim of these activities is twofold: to encourage first-time voters to vote in the elections to the European Parliament, and to enhance their interest in and knowledge of the various ways in which young EU citizens can take part in and influence the shaping and subsequent development of EU policies.

The National Board for Youth Affairs has been commissioned as part of this assignment to allocate special grants for activities aimed at first-time voters. These activities must involve young people both in and outside upper-secondary school while taking account of regional variations in voter turnout. Municipal councils, youth organisations and other voluntary sector stakeholders will be invited to apply for grants. The board will also be required to facilitate the implementation of centrally directed, selective measures aimed at mobilising prospective voters, such as hearings and forums for debate.

For its part, the National Agency for School Improvement will be responsible for producing educational material, including teaching guides, and for implementing measures to encourage more elected representatives holding political appointments at different decision-making levels to visit upper-secondary schools in order to promote debate and dialogue. In addition, the agency will be expected to conduct information and in-service training activities for teachers and produce support material for schools wishing to hold school elections to the European Parliament and/or Europe Days. Its assignment also includes establishing cooperation between schools and municipal councils interested in running pilot projects that can serve as useful examples to others. This activity must be undertaken in cooperation with the Swedish section of the European Network of Innovative Schools (ENIS), created by the agency and the regional coordinators established as part of the Government's IT initiative in schools (ITiS). These actors, together with all the agency's local offices, must ensure that all activities covered by the assignment reach young people and young adults living in rural as well as metropolitan areas. The agency will also be expected to work closely with the National Board for Youth Affairs, the Swedish EU 2004 Committee (*EU 2004-kommittén, dir. 2001:35, 2003:113*) and the Office of the European Parliament in Stockholm.

The National Board for Youth Affairs and the National Agency for School Improvement are required to submit an account of how the funds were used to the Government Offices (Ministry of Justice) not later than 30 September 2004. Skr. 2003/04:110

Evaluation and voter turnout study

An evaluation of the above measures and a study of voter turnout, both essential to the scope, content and direction of government efforts in connection with future elections, constitute the third main activity in this area.

2.5 Other ongoing projects and initiatives

2.5.1 The 2003 Parliamentary Committee on the Elections Act

In April 2003, the Government appointed a cross-party parliamentary committee to review the provisions of the Elections Act and submit proposals for a new law (*dir. 2003:37*) incorporating *inter alia* basic rules governing electoral procedures. Under the new act, the Government and the Election Authority should also be empowered to issue supplementary procedural instructions.

The background to the decision was *inter alia* the need to rectify the material shortcomings in the present act. One example is the current provisions governing the procedures for counting votes. The detailed structure of electoral procedures in some areas also need to be looked at. Moreover, many of the provisions are unnecessarily detailed and elaborate and difficult to understand.

The committee is required to:

- propose ways in which responsibility for institutional voting can be transferred to the municipal councils,
- consider whether the time has now come to place all local responsibility for organising elections in the hands of municipal councils,
- make a determination as to whether postal voting should continue to be an option and, if so, draft relevant provisions for inclusion in the new elections act, and
- consider to what extent electronic voting procedures should be introduced in polling stations.

The new elections act is to apply from the 2006 election. The committee's final report must be submitted to the Government not later than November 2004.

2.5.2 Electronic voting

The use of information technology (IT) in connection with general elections was dealt with in the Government's democracy bill. In it, the

Government declared that the basic concern must be to guarantee voting secrecy and legal rights, and thereby maintain public confidence in the integrity of the process. It also stated that more knowledge and experience would be needed before it was possible to predict the extent to which IT would be employed in future elections.

In the bill, the Government also announced its intention to appoint a working group on IT and democracy. The group, set up in February 2002, was instructed to follow and promote the development of democratic processes using information technology (Ju2002:E). Its specific tasks included tracking the capacity of IT to improve, simplify and develop electoral procedures and public participation in the electoral process. The members' views on electronic voting were set out in their report, *E-voting: an Anthology (E-röstning – en antologi)*, published in September 2002 (Other activities pursued by the group are discussed in Chapter 5).

Sweden is actively involved in international efforts in connection with the use of IT in elections. In the Council of Europe, work on drafting a recommendation on legal, operational and technical standards for electronic voting has been in progress since 2002. The work is part of an integrated project and a draft recommendation is planned for the end of 2004.

3. Goal 2: Elected political representatives

Summary: The second goal of the Government's long-term democracy policies is an increase in the number of citizens holding some form of political appointment or position at local government level and an increase in the number of people who have held such an appointment at some time in their lives. According to recent research findings, there has been an upswing in social representativity among elected representatives at local government level, with proportionately more women, young people/young adults and people born outside Sweden holding political appointments. However, the total number of elected representatives and people holding political appointments at municipal level has continued to fall since the previous inter-election period. Equivalent comparisons over time are not possible in the case of county councils. The fall in the number of political appointments at municipal level is particularly worrying as research indicates that a large number of such appointments can have a beneficial effect on social representativity. The declining proportion of elected representatives on municipal and county councils under 50 is also a cause for concern as it means this group is increasingly under-represented. Also worth noting is the fact that representativity for those sections of the population currently under-represented actually decreases as one moves up the political hierarchy.

Responsibility for achieving the goal of more elected representatives at local government level rests primarily with municipal and county councils and the political parties. Indeed, their efforts in this connection are of vital importance. For its part, the Government is responsible for continually reviewing conditions for elected representatives and for removing obstacles to greater representativity. It must also contribute to a better understanding of why certain sections of the population continue to be under-represented. The results of previous government initiatives point to the continued need for such measures.

3.1 Follow-up

3.1.1 Basic considerations

In its democracy bill, the Government stated that a higher proportion of citizens must hold some form of political appointment at local government level (for a definition see footnote 6 on page 7). An initial interim goal was 10,000 more elected representatives at municipal and county level by 2010. Special efforts must be made to counter under-representation in certain population groups. This applies particularly to young people and young adults, people from foreign backgrounds, the disabled and the unemployed. Special efforts must also be made to promote greater gender equality. An increase in the number of elected representatives should also lead indirectly to a rise in the number of citizens who have held a political appointment at some time in their lives.

In May 2003, the Government, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the Federation of Swedish County Councils jointly commissioned SCB to conduct a comprehensive survey of elected representatives in Sweden's municipal and county councils. In October of the same year, Uppsala University was commissioned to analyse the resulting data in collaboration with SCB. Their findings were published in February 2004 in the report, *Elected Political Representatives in the 21st Century: A Survey of Political Representatives and Representativity in Municipal and County Councils in 2003*. The report is used as a basis for the following description of development in connection with the second goal, an increase in the number of elected representatives and greater representativity. However its analysis of social representativity does not include a breakdown by gender of young people/young adults, people from foreign backgrounds, etc. Nor is there any data on elected representatives with disabilities. As data on elected representatives in county councils were not included in earlier studies, there was limited scope in the report for comparisons over time for this group. For this reason such comparisons are also absent from the following account. As regards the second part of the goal – an increase in the number of people who have held a political appointment at some time in their lives – it is still too early to carry out follow-up studies.

With regard to the Government's ambition to see more people from different backgrounds elected to municipal and county councils, it is worth trying to explain why social representativity is greater in some municipalities and political parties than in others. The report makes some attempts to explain disparities in social representativity, and these analyses are reproduced here. The present section also examines the findings of other studies of citizens' views of elected representatives and their willingness to undertake political appointments and assignments.

3.1.2 Number of elected representatives and appointments

Since the 1950s, Sweden has witnessed a drastic decline in the number of elected local government representatives and in the number of political appointments. The main explanations for this trend include municipal amalgamations and changes in the local government committee system. The increasingly important part played by municipal and county council departments in local government have led to an increase in the number of administrative officers at the expense of elected representatives.

The total *number of elected local government representatives* has continued to fall since the previous inter-election period. In Sweden's municipalities the number now stands at approximately 42,200, a drop of 2,300 since 1999. Representatives at county level number 4,600.

There has also been a decline in the number of *political appointments* in local government. Over the same period, the total number of appointments in municipalities fell by almost 2,000, a drop from 68,500 in 1999 to 66,600 in 2003. Thus the trend reported in previous studies of fewer committees and a corresponding decline in the number of political appointments continued into the last inter-election period. The number of

political appointments in Sweden's county councils in 2003 was approximately 7,000.

As the number of elected representatives is smaller than the number of political appointments, some people must inevitably hold more than one appointment. This is often referred to as *task concentration*. Increasing task concentration can pose a problem as the more political appointments or assignments a person has the more difficult it is to be politically involved on a voluntary, free-time basis. In its democracy bill, the Government also emphasised that every citizen should ideally take on a political appointment or task alongside her/his work, studies, family commitments, etc.

In 2003, a majority (57 per cent) of elected representatives at municipal level still only had one political appointment. A relatively large proportion (31 per cent) had two and some 12 percent had three or more. The degree of task concentration at county council level was roughly comparable. The figures for municipal councils reflect a rise in concentration since 1999. According to the compilers of the report, however, it is not clear whether this is part of a long-term upward trend.

It is also interesting to note in this connection that 60 per cent of all elected representatives at county level also have a political appointment at municipal level, a sign of significant overlapping of political activity between the two tiers of local government. A possible explanation, according the compilers, is that municipal councils have an interest in keeping watch on developments in the county councils.

By measuring the *number of inhabitants per elected representative*, some indication can be obtained of the size of the contact interface between voters and representatives. Among the reasons cited in the democracy bill for substantially increasing the number of representatives at local government level was the greatly enhanced scope for dialogue thus afforded. This in turn would enable representatives to gain a better idea of voter needs, wishes and intentions. The Uppsala University report stated that the number of inhabitants per elected representative was greater in bigger municipalities than in smaller ones. This would suggest that contact interfaces between electors and the elected are less extensive in large municipalities and more extensive in small ones. Regarding county councils, the number of inhabitants per elected representative is considerably higher in Stockholm county than in any other county.

3.1.3 Representativity

As mentioned earlier, the Government emphasised in its democracy bill that special efforts should be made to reduce under-representativity among specific groups of elected representatives. Of particular concern were young people/young adults, people from foreign backgrounds, people with disabilities and the unemployed. Special efforts should also be made to further increase gender equality. The following account of the level of social representativity in 2003 is based on the Uppsala University report. The report's compilers examine a number of hypotheses in an attempt to explain disparities in social representativity at municipal level. In the section entitled Who gets the chair? they turn to

individual cases and consider the impact of attributes such as gender, age and ethnic background on the likelihood of being elected to the chair of a local government committee.

Representativity over time

In 2003, women, young people/young adults, elderly people, non-Swedish and foreign-born citizens, the lower-qualified, low-wage earners and private-sector employees were still under-represented among politically elected local government representatives. In the foreign-born citizen category, people born in Europe but outside the EU were especially under-represented. Unemployed people, on the other hand, were well represented. On the whole, men, middle-aged citizens, highly qualified people, high-income earners and public-sector employees continued to be over-represented.

A similar pattern obtains in the county councils although women are not as under-represented here as they are at municipal level. The average county councillor is also more highly qualified and better paid than her/his municipal counterpart. Unemployed people, on the other hand, are somewhat under-represented. (For more information concerning social representativity among elected representatives see Chapter 5).

There are, however, encouraging signs that change may be on the way. The last 20 years have seen an increase in women's representation on municipal and county councils. The percentage of foreign-born citizens has increased more rapidly over the last two general elections than in the past, suggesting a break in the trend for this group. Representativity has increased above all among people born outside the Nordic region. A long-term comparison shows that the percentage of foreign born municipal councillors rose from just under 4 per cent in 1982 to just over 6 per cent in 2002. The corresponding figures for foreign-born county councillors were just over 3 per cent and just under 7 per cent. However, the figures must be seen in relation to general population trends. Given that the proportion of foreign-born citizens in the population as a whole has grown over the same period, overall representativity for this group has not significantly improved.

Representativity among people aged 65 and over has also shown some improvement over time, although this group is still heavily under-represented. Representativity for the youngest age-group (18–29 years) on Sweden's county councils has also grown – from 1 to 5 per cent. However, this continues to be the worst represented age group at county council level.

In general, however, the percentage of municipal and county councillors aged 50 and over continues to rise, although the majority of the electable population are under 50. Their representation on municipal councils has grown by 10 percentage points over the last two elections, from 48 to 58 per cent, and from 55 to 64 per cent on county councils.

Variations in representativity in Sweden's political parties

The report also contains information on social representativity in the political parties. Women, young people/young adults, people from

foreign backgrounds, low-qualified people, low-wage earners and private sector employees are under-represented among elected representatives in all parties. However, the parties differ to a certain extent. Women, young people/young adults and foreign-born citizens are somewhat better represented in the Green Party (*Miljöpartiet de gröna*) and the Left Party (*Vänsterpartiet*) than in other parliamentary parties, while the Centre Party (*Centerpartiet*) and the Social Democratic Party are somewhat more representative than other parties in the Riksdag as regards education, and the Green Party is the most representative with respect to income. Women and other groups are less well represented in parties outside the Riksdag than in their parliamentary counterparts. Conversely, people over 60, who are under-represented in the parliamentary parties, are over-represented in parties outside the Riksdag.

Variation in representativity in municipal councils

Municipal councils vary widely as regards representativity in terms of gender, nationality, education and income. In one council, for example, only 29 per cent of the elected representatives are women, compared to 52 per cent in another. Turning to education, the proportion of low-qualified representatives ranges from 9 per cent in one council to 30 per cent in another. The report finds that the percentage of women representatives co-varies with that of young people/young adults and foreign-born citizens in municipal assemblies, on committees, etc., an indication that representativity in some councils is low in a number of respects.

Why do municipal councils differ?

Several possible explanations for the wide variation between municipal councils in terms of representativity for women and foreign-born citizens have been examined in the report. One hypothesis, advanced in previous research, has gained a measure of support. This concerns the council's political culture and whether this is informed by a traditional or modern attitude to women's issues. The compilers found, on the basis of their indicators, that councils with a more traditional culture have fewer women political representatives.¹⁸ They also found that municipalities where the Social Democratic, Left and Green parties were strongly represented had a larger proportion of women politicians. This, according to the compilers, may indicate that social representativity is a more important goal for some parties than for others. Findings also indicate that to a certain extent women's representation is higher in municipal councils where there are a large number of political appointments. As an under-represented group, women would therefore benefit from the fact

¹⁸ Several researchers have suggested that gender representativity in a political system is a product of the culture of that system. The enterprise structure in a municipality may provide an indication whether a council's political culture is informed by a modern or traditional attitude to women's issues. The hypothesis advanced in the present report is that women are better represented in municipalities where there are few employees in agriculture or manufacturing and many in the service sector. The fact that a large service sector appears to favour women's representation lends some support to this proposition. However, this need not be a cultural matter at all; the effect could also be explained by other mechanisms.

that there were more appointments to go round. This would seem to suggest that women's representation would benefit if the total number of appointments were to increase.

It should be emphasised here that the compilers have only succeeded – on the basis of their hypotheses – in explaining a few of the differences between municipal councils in terms of women's representation among elected representatives. The compilers consider that they have tested the most common propositions advanced in the relevant literature, and conclude that further research will be needed to explain these disparities.

As regards disparities between councils in terms of representation of foreign-born citizens on municipal (political) bodies, the latter may simply be a function of the number of foreign-born people residing in a given municipality. The larger the percentage of municipal residents born abroad, the larger the number of foreign-born elected representatives there is likely to be. According to the compilers, co-variance in this area could indicate that the parties are themselves seeking to establish high social representativity. However, it could also be a sign that the parties regard the immigrant community as a voter group capable of affecting the outcome of an election in a municipality, and that by nominating more immigrants they will get more votes.

Horizontal and vertical representativity

The report presents the results of a number of analyses designed to verify the existence of a pattern of representativity based on different types of political appointment. One finding was that women in municipal and county councils are well represented on committees responsible for health care, social services and welfare issues, but less well represented on committees responsible for public works, environmental health, road traffic and economic affairs. This would seem to indicate horizontal gender segregation, an assumption supported by previous studies of gender division of labour among the Riksdag's standing committees.

Earlier studies also point to the existence of vertical divisions of labour, in which currently under-represented groups such as women, young people/young adults and people born outside Sweden, become even more under-represented as they move up the political hierarchy. In 2003, the situation in municipal and county councils was the same as it is today, above all with respect to young and foreign-born citizens. For example, municipal committees were chaired by women in only 30 per cent of cases. The corresponding figures for young people/young adults and foreign-born citizens were 1 and 3 per cent respectively. However, under-representation of women in this area is less at county council than municipal level (44 per cent).

Who gets the chair?

While the above discussion has focused on levels of representativity among certain population groups, the compilers also looked at some of the personal attributes that might affect an individual's prospects of being elected to chair a local government committee. They found, for example, that the under-representation of women in leading positions

could not be wholly accounted for by differences between them and men in terms of age, income, country of birth, education or employment sector. They did note, however, that gender, age and country of birth were contributing factors. However, further research will be needed to obtain a more detailed picture of the mechanisms that govern the appointment of elected representatives to committee chairships.

The need for further research

In their conclusion, the compilers emphasised the need for further research in order to gain a deeper understanding of why certain groups are less well represented than others. To answer these questions it will be necessary, in their view, to examine individual attitudes and take a closer look at why some people are prepared to take on a political appointment while others are not. They also advocate a study of the political parties and their motives for recruiting and nominating certain individuals as opposed to others.

Attitudes to elected representatives

Citizens' attitudes to elected political representatives are also of interest in connection with the goal of increasing the number of elected political representatives. SCB's report, Political Resources and Activities in 1991–2001 (*Politiska resurser och aktiviteter 1992–2001, rapport 102*) contains data on citizens' attitudes to local government politicians and the way in which they carry out their tasks. The report detected no appreciable change in the views of people between the ages of 16 and 84 since the beginning of the 1990s. With regard to the way in which elected local government representatives discharged their duties, around a quarter of the respondents had no opinion, just over a quarter were critical, while nearly half were favourably disposed. However, a closer study by age group shows that changes had taken place. A higher proportion (43–44 per cent in 2002, an increase of 8 percentage points since the start of the 1990s) of people aged 16–24 stated that they had no opinion on the way in which representatives performed their duties. The proportion of those with no opinion among people aged 25–34 had also risen sharply (by 12 percentage points to 37 per cent) – as it had among non-Swedish citizens. According to a study carried out in Göteborg and Västra Götaland by the Institute for Society, Opinion and Mass Media (*Institutet för Samhälle Opinion och Massmedia, SOM, rapport nr 31, 2003*), the great majority of elected local government representatives are unknown to the electorate.

Willingness to serve

The degree to which citizens are prepared to accept political appointments or take on political tasks is of course vital to the achievement of Goal 2. Being entrusted with a political appointment is a multi-stage process in which the citizen's willingness to become involved is a vital element. A long-term comparison (*SOM-rapport nr 31*) shows no indication of a decline in willingness. However a shorter-

term comparison reveals a less favourable development. The proportion of respondents who declared themselves ready to take on political assignments or appointments at local government level fell from 24 to 18 per cent between 1997 and 2001.¹⁹ On the other hand, those who had, or had had, appointments were more disposed to continue. Allowing for the relatively small sample used in the study, there were signs that willingness among women to take on new appointments had tended to decrease between 1998 and 2001, while readiness among men had increased over the same period.

Studies aimed at explaining disparities between different groups in this respect found that a general interest in politics was the biggest single influence on the willingness to take on political appointments or tasks. This applied particularly to younger citizens. Interest in local government politics was a somewhat less significant factor. The studies also showed that people who were satisfied with the standards of democracy in their municipality or county, or were confident they could bring influence to bear on the political process, were somewhat more inclined to undertake political appointments than those less satisfied or less confident.

3.1.4 Conclusions: follow-up

A comparison over time shows that the number of elected representatives and the number of political appointments in municipal councils has continued to decline since the last inter-election period. This has been accompanied by a small rise in task concentration, a development which could lead to problems later on by making it more difficult for citizens to take on tasks in their free time. Similarly, a reduction in the number of elected representatives could make it harder for citizens to stay in touch with their local political representatives. It has not been possible to make comparisons over time for county councils.

As regards social representativity, women, young people/young adults, the elderly, non-Swedish citizens, foreign born citizens, the low-qualified, low-wage earners and private sector employees are still under-represented among elected representatives at municipal and county council level. However, there are signs of improvement in some areas, including representation among women, young people/young adults and foreign-born citizens.

The declining number of political appointments noted at local government level, however, is especially worrying in the light of recent research indicating that a large number of appointments and assignments could have a favourable impact on social representativity. The Government is also concerned about growing under-representation among elected municipal and county council representatives under the age of 50. It may also be noted that all under-represented population groups at municipal and county council level become even less well represented the further up they move in the political hierarchy.

It is also important to note in this connection that a growing number of young people/young adults and a large percentage of foreign citizens

¹⁹ The survey does not include breakdowns by gender, age, etc.

have no opinion on the way in which elected representatives perform their tasks. This and the fact that the diminishing willingness to undertake political appointments should be followed up in the years ahead.

3.2 Follow-up of implementation

3.2.1 Basic considerations

In its democracy bill, the Government emphasised that responsibility for promoting an increase in the number of elected representatives lies largely with the municipal and county councils themselves in their capacity as self-governing bodies. It also pointed out that the political parties also bear a major responsibility in this respect given their key role in the continued existence of the political system. For its part, the Government is responsible for continually reviewing conditions for elected representatives and for removing any obstacles to increased representativity. Other responsibilities include bringing about a better understanding of why certain individuals remain under-represented. The democracy bill accordingly included proposals aimed *inter alia* at improving conditions for representatives. The Government is currently evaluating some of the resulting amendments, which came into force on 1 July 2002. Its findings are presented below. It has also adopted several additional, long-term measures in connection with Goal 2. These include in-service training for elected representatives and support measures for representatives who have been exposed to threats or violence.

3.2.2 Compensation

Basic considerations

In its democracy bill, the Government proposed extending the right of elected representatives who do not engage in political activity on a full-time basis or on an extended part-time basis to compensation for their services. The Government's contention was that no one should incur financial loss in the course of discharging a political appointment in a municipal or county council. The compensation system must be designed to enable all groups to take up such appointments.

The bill stated that a regulation to this effect should only apply to situations where the elected representative had incurred actual financial loss or certain specific costs. As municipal and county councils are self-governing bodies, however, there should be no harmonising of voluntary compensation for elected representatives. The Government further stated that the task of setting adequate rates of compensation at local level should continue to be a municipal and county council responsibility. The new provisions were thus designed as framework legislation; detailed formulation of the regulations governing compensation levels, etc. was left to the municipal and county councils.

In its democracy bill, the Government proposed the introduction of a right to adequate compensation for the loss of earned income or other

financial benefits incurred while discharging a political appointment. Another proposal recommended that elected representatives with functional disabilities be given the right to adequate compensation for travelling expenses incurred in the course of their political duties. In addition, representatives with children in need of care should have the right to compensation for reasonable costs incurred in the course of their political duties for such care. These proposals were passed into law and incorporated into Chapter 4, Sections 12, 13 and 14 and two new Sections, 12a and 12b, of the Local Government Act. They came into force on 1 July 2002.

In the bill, the Government also addressed the question of terms of protection for income qualifying for sickness benefit. It maintained that where compensation from a municipal or county council was lower than the earned income it was intended to replace, the elected representative's income qualifying for sickness benefit would be less. This in turn would affect her/his parental and other statutory benefits. However, the Government considered that the issue of terms of protection for income qualifying for sickness benefit should be viewed in a wider perspective.

An inquiry was subsequently commissioned and tasked *inter alia* with considering possible approaches to the question of income qualifying for sickness benefit in the case of elected representatives (*dir. 2001:04*). In the report, Income Qualifying for Sickness Benefit: Protection and Adaptation (*Sjukpenninggrundande inkomst – skydd och anpassning, SOU 2003:50*), the inquiry chair proposed that no extension be made to existing terms of protection for income qualifying for sickness benefit. Instead the inquiry chair proposed that a new inquiry be commissioned to examine the feasibility of a new insurance structure incorporating *inter alia* suitable terms of protection for income qualifying for sickness benefit.

Evaluation of implementation

The Right of Elected Representatives to Compensation under the Local Government Act: An Evaluation of Implementation, a report by a researcher commissioned by the Ministry of Justice to evaluate the application of the new provisions on compensation in the Local Government Act was submitted to the Government in March 2004.

The evaluation mainly took the form of analyses of the regulations governing compensation for elected representatives, conducted in 26 municipalities and 2 counties selected on the basis of size, geographical location, etc. The regulations reflect the way in which the provisions of the Local Government Act have been implemented. Their actual application has not been studied. In cases of uncertainty as to their interpretation, the municipal councils have been contacted directly for further information. The evaluation's main findings are set out below.

Regulations sometimes lack clarity

The evaluation found that the great majority of the councils studied not only compensate elected political representatives for loss of earned income but also for reduced unemployment and parental benefit. In a

number of cases, however, the regulations governing compensation for loss of benefits are unclear. When questioned, some councils have stated that they place the right to compensation for reduced unemployment or parental benefit on a par with the right to compensation for loss of earned income. Thus, although the regulations may be unclear, the right to compensation for such losses is recognised in principle and in practice.

Ceiling on compensation for loss of income

Some councils link the right to compensation to the elected representative's sickness benefit qualifying income. This means that compensation is restricted to a maximum amount, equivalent to 7.5 price base amounts, or an annual income of SEK 294,700 in 2004. This is equivalent to approximately SEK 24,000 per month. Thus, some elected representatives are not fully compensated. According to the evaluator's assessment, this compensation level fails to meet the requirement in the Local Government Act that adequate compensation be given to elected representatives earning more than SEK 24,500 per month. In the evaluator's view, this is contrary to the purpose of the new provisions on compensation, as the aim was to remove financial obstacles tending to prevent or hinder citizens from undertaking political appointments. Most councils, however, have opted for other solutions; in some cases they compensate the representative's loss of income in full, while in others, the ceiling is simply set at a higher level.

No compensation for loss of income

One of the councils evaluated had no rules governing compensation for loss of income. Another used a fee system to cover loss of income. In the latter instance, an elected representative whose loss of income was greater than her/his fee could simply apply to the council for additional compensation. In the evaluator's view, both these practices are in breach of the provisions of the Local Government Act, according to which compensation for loss of income by elected political representatives is an incontestable right.

Compensation for childcare costs

Some councils have linked compensation for childcare costs to the pay of a person employed in the municipal childcare system. The evaluator considers that the resulting compensation level is reasonable and that the requirement regarding adequate compensation has been met. On the other hand, many councils have set a ceiling on compensation for childcare costs; in some cases the maximum amount is relatively small, between SEK 20 and SEK 80 per hour. However, childcare costs incurred in connection with the fulfillment of an elected representative's political assignment(s) should not cause her/him to suffer loss of income. In the evaluator's view, it is clear that such low compensation amounts are scarcely sufficient to engage a child-minder for the representative's child(ren). Virtually all councils set an upper age limit for children for whose care compensation is paid. This varies between 8 and 12 years, the

latter being the most common. The evaluator is doubtful whether all 8-year old children can be safely left on their own and considers that such age limits could prevent an elected representative from fulfilling her/his political tasks.

Political appointments and qualifying income for sickness benefit

The evaluator was also instructed to investigate whether compensation in connection with a political appointment could adversely affect an elected representative's income qualifying for sickness benefit. In the evaluator's view, this problem will probably never arise in practice, not at any rate through any flaw in existing social insurance legislation or appertaining regulations. As mentioned above, a person's income qualifying for sickness benefit may not exceed a level equivalent to 7.5 price base amounts, i.e. SEK 294,700 per year. Under existing social insurance legislation, additional amounts earned do not affect benefit levels. Compensation for loss of income can only adversely affect a person's sickness benefit qualifying income if it is under the maximum permitted amount. In the evaluator's view, such a level would be unlikely to meet the requirement in the Local Government Act regarding reasonable compensation for loss of income. The evaluator's assessment is thus that the provisions in this section of the act do not adversely affect income qualifying for sickness benefit provided compensation received does not fall below the maximum permitted amount. Where this does occur, it is because the council has set the ceiling too low and is thereby probably in breach of the Local Government Act.

Compensation for loss of pension benefits

In contacts with the Ministry of Finance, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities has communicated its views on the tax aspects of compensation to elected representatives for loss of pension benefits. Briefly, the association considers that the treatment of such compensation for tax purposes should correspond more closely to the treatment of pension benefits. At present, this form of compensation is treated as income, to the disadvantage in tax terms of the elected representative. However, this is a fiscal issue which falls outside the scope of the evaluation.

Conclusions

The evaluator found that the regulations governing financial compensation had been implemented and that the provisions of the Local Government Act had had the desired effect. Most of the municipal and county councils studied paid compensation not only for loss of earned income but also for loss or diminution of unemployment and parental benefit. The majority of councils also apply special rules on compensation for childcare costs and expenses incurred by the disabled. The evaluator accordingly concluded that conditions for elected representatives had improved, i.e. that it had become easier from a practical and financial standpoint to undertake a political appointment.

The problems encountered were only applicable to a small number of councils. The evaluator considered that the most effective way of dealing with the problems of low compensation for loss of income and childcare costs was to tighten up the relevant provisions in the Local Government Act. Uncertainty over interpretation of the local regulations was best remedied by information measures.

Summary assessment

According to the evaluation, the majority of municipal and county councils studied apply the rules governing financial compensation, an indication that conditions for elected representatives have improved in this respect. With regard to compensation for loss of earned income, some elected representatives may lose out financially when undertaking a political appointment if compensation levels are linked to the sickness insurance benefit ceiling. The Government further notes that some councils have set low levels of compensation for childcare costs. It is doubtful whether these levels can be said to accord with the intentions behind the recent amendments to the Local Government Act. The Government is also dissatisfied with the reported failure of some councils to apply the provisions governing compensation for loss of earned income. It intends to continue to monitor the application of existing provisions by municipal and county councils. As regards the treatment for tax purposes of compensation for diminution of pension benefits, the matter is currently under review in the Ministry of Finance.

3.2.3 Education and training

In September 2002, the Ministry of Justice, working in cooperation with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Votia Empowerment AB, began work on the design of a pilot in-service training scheme for elected representatives. Its primary purpose was to improve the ability of representatives to deal with new and changing conditions in an age of ever more intensive media coverage, new technology and increasingly well-informed, independent, critical citizens.

The training course was designed in cooperation with Norrbotten County Council (*Norrbottens läns landsting*). Plans to include a municipal council could not be realised for a number of reasons. The course extends over four training days, three of which have already taken place. All Norrbotten's county councillors are reported to have taken part on the first three days. The course, based on practical and interactive exercises, addresses a range of issues. These include carrying on an active dialogue with citizens, formulating and communicating one's message to different target groups, handling media effectively, developing leadership roles, gaining a better understanding of the contrasting roles of council politicians and administrative officers, handling transparency in the decision-making process more effectively and influencing and changing party work.

According to a follow-up study of the first three training days, the participants' response to the course was favourable. A final evaluation of the scheme will be carried out in the spring of 2004.

3.2.4 Threats and violence against elected representatives

Working group

The democracy bill referred to the growing incidence of violence and threats perpetrated against elected representatives in central and local government as a serious threat to democracy. By then, a new working group, Threats against Political Representatives (*Hot mot politiker*) – comprising representatives of the Government, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, the Federation of Swedish County Councils, the Office of the Prosecutor-General, the National Police Board, the Swedish Security Service and the National Council for Crime Prevention, as well as a number of political representatives with experience of threats – had already been appointed. The Government emphasised the vital importance of enhanced awareness and improved preparedness in connection with this type of crime at municipal and county council level.

The working group met for a year, during which it acted as a forum for exchanges of knowledge and experience in that area. At its meetings, discussions were held on a range of issues, including security procedures, relevant legislation, the need for instruction and information material, ways of improving the attitudes and approaches of elected representatives and the general public to the existence of threats and violence, and what can be done to ensure that such incidents are not made light of but reported to the police.

The working group's main task was the preparation of a handbook – subsequently entitled *A Threat to Democracy (Ett hot mot demokratin)* – containing the findings of investigations carried out by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities in the autumn of 2002 into threats aimed at elected local government representatives.

The handbook, which has been distributed to municipal and county councils, also includes definitions of threats and violence, information on how to report incidents to the police, advice on what to do when threatened and a list of the relevant bodies and their functions.

The working group also produced a brochure entitled *Threats and Violence against Political Representatives (Hot och våld mot politiker)*. Aimed primarily at newly elected representatives, the brochure provides brief information about threats, the forms in which they occur and advice on how to prevent threats and violence. It was sent out to all concerned parties in every municipality and county in Sweden, as well as to all county administrative boards and members of the Riksdag. In its annual policy statement before the 2003–2004 Riksdag session, the Government noted that efforts to combat threats and violence against elected representatives should be followed up (see section 10.3).

Mention should be made of the responsibilities of the police in this connection, namely to prevent and expose threats to the internal safety and security of the realm. These include the unlawful use of threats, violence or undue force to attempt to change Sweden's political

constitution or form of government, induce political bodies or authorities to take decisions of a particular kind, or prevent individual citizens from exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms. These duties come under the heading of protection of the constitution and form part of the responsibility of the Swedish Security Service.

3.2.5 Conclusions: follow-up

Responsibility for achieving the goal of more elected representatives at local government level rests primarily with the country's municipal and county councils and the political parties. Indeed, their efforts in this connection are of vital importance. For its part, the Government is responsible for continually reviewing conditions for politically elected representatives and for removing obstacles to greater representativity. It must also contribute to a better understanding of why certain sections of the population continue to be under-represented.

The government measures evaluated were concerned with financial compensation, education and training, and threats and violence against elected representatives. The findings point to a continuing need to regularly assess and improve conditions for elected representatives. As mentioned earlier, several sections of the population are still under-represented on political bodies at local government level, which points to the need for more knowledge about parties' nominating procedures and the obstacles encountered by certain population groups. There is also a need for measures to remove these obstacles.

3.3 Ongoing and planned measures and initiatives

3.3.1 Elected representatives with disabilities

Taking Part for Real: Democratic Development in Municipal and County Councils (*Att vara med på riktigt – demokratiutveckling i kommuner och landsting, SOU 2001:48*), a series of studies carried out by the Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Democracy (*Kommundemokratikommittén*) revealed that meetings were sometimes held even though aids that disabled representatives normally need to take part in the proceedings were not working or lacking altogether. In its democracy bill, the Government accordingly proposed the introduction of a new provision in the Local Government Act requiring municipal and county councils to seek to ensure that elected representatives with disabilities can take part in handling items of business on the same terms as other representatives. In December 2003, the Government decided to commission a review of the current status of sign language (*dir. 2003:169*). An inquiry has been appointed to follow up the application of the new amendments to the Local Government Act and, in particular, determine to what extent material conditions have improved for deaf, deaf-blind, adult deaf and hearing-impaired people to take part in handling items of business on the same terms as other representatives. The inquiry is to present its findings by July 2005.

3.3.2 Recruitment of elected representatives

Skr. 2003/04:110

A recently appointed inquiry has been assigned to look into the recruitment of politically elected auditors (*dir. 2003:97*). The inquiry is to assess the situation and propose measures to broaden the recruitment of elected auditors to include more women, young people/young adults and people from foreign backgrounds. It is to proceed on the assumption that auditors must be nominated by the political parties. The inquiry is to present its findings by October 2005.

In its 2004 annual policy statement, the Government announced its intention to increase financial support for political parties with a view to improving their ability to finance the schooling of newly elected representatives in the parties' youth organisations. The Government therefore intends to return to the Riksdag on the question of financing for this measure when it presents its 2004 spring fiscal policy bill. It may be mentioned in this connection that the Minister for Democratic Issues held a meeting in December 2003 with representatives of the parliamentary parties, at which the issue of recruitment of new elected representatives was discussed in the light of the latest research.

3.3.3 Efforts by other actors

The special Unit for Democracy and Self-Government (*Demokrati- och självstyrelseenheten*) set up by Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the Federation of Swedish County Councils runs Internet-based, interactive, introductory courses for elected representatives wishing to acquire a basic knowledge of the democratic system. The two associations also offer leadership training aimed at chairs and vice-chairs of municipal and county council assemblies.

Regarding threats and violence against elected representatives, the associations have announced that they will shortly be following up an earlier threat survey and that the new study will include threats against county council representatives. There are also plans to conduct in-depth analyses of conditions for representatives, etc. in 2005, in cooperation with a number of municipal and county councils.

4. Goal 3: Participation between elections

Summary: The third goal of the Government's long-term democracy promotion efforts is the creation of more and better opportunities for citizens to participate in and influence the political process, and an increase in the overall number of citizens taking part. Municipal and county councils implement a range of measures in an attempt to promote citizen participation between elections. For example, a citizens' proposals procedure has already been introduced in a large number of municipal councils. Moreover, many councils are seeking to establish *channels of influence*, that is platforms, forums and other structures through which individuals, who would otherwise have difficulty being heard, can bring influence to bear on the political process. Efforts at national and EU level to develop such channels are also in progress. However, it is difficult at this stage to determine whether opportunities for participation have increased in overall terms.

Various studies have indicated that the desire to influence the political process and government as a whole is strong and widespread, despite declining participation in party-political activities. The fastest-growing forms of citizen-initiated participation are those which can be organised without official assistance. Finding ways to harness this involvement in community concerns without recourse to the traditional structures constitutes a major challenge and a vital future task for central and local government, political parties and the voluntary sector²⁰ generally.

There is also a need to learn more about the opportunities available for citizens to exercise their influence between elections, how appropriate these channels are and how many citizens know of their existence.

4.1 Follow-up

4.1.1 Basic considerations

The Government's third goal is the creation of more and better opportunities for citizens to participate in and influence the political process, and an increase in the overall number of citizens taking part. In its democracy bill, the Government stated that the way must be open for citizens to influence the political and decision-making process. Channels must be created – primarily at local level and from the bottom up – as conditions for democratic dialogue vary from place to place. Citizen involvement and participation can also change over time. As a particular form or channel of participation can quickly become obsolete, continuous discussions on how best to pick up and transmit citizens'

²⁰ The voluntary sector, whose organised community-based activities influence virtually all aspects of society from social justice, human rights, the environment, health, arts and culture, international development, sports and recreation, comprises non-profit, non-governmental organisations, including grass-roots organisations, advocacy groups, special-interest groups, voluntary associations and societies of all kinds, etc.

views are essential. The Government concluded that the need for a wide range of channels is most applicable at local level, but that consultation procedures should also be developed at national and European level. Citizens must be able to take part in and bring influence to bear on decision-making as well as policy-making and implementation.

The Government stated in the bill that its primary task is to promote conditions conducive to development by creating the appropriate legal instruments. However, it is also responsible for initiating, encouraging and evaluating different forms of participation, whether acting on its own or in cooperation with other actors. Moreover, central and local government are required to extend different types of financial support to facilitate organised community activities. In the Government's view, the basis of a democratic society is a strong, flourishing voluntary sector that provides citizens with opportunities to influence and take part in the political process.

In the following sections, two questions are raised concerning participation between elections. The first is: What channels of influence exist at present, and have they grown in number? The second is: How many people make use of them?

The background data used in the answer to the first question was taken from the database on municipal and county council revitalisation projects created by the Agency for Administrative Development. The database was subsequently updated by SCB at the Government's request and discussed in the report *Local Democracy: Development and Functioning*. The report also cites the number of municipal and county councils offering citizens a specific channel of influence. As there are currently few such indicators of the way in which citizens' influence is exercised at national and international level, only a small number of examples of channels at this level can be presented.

The answer to the second question is mainly based on data from SCB's regular surveys of living conditions. Data on political participation was taken from the report, *Political Resources and Activities 1992–2001 (Politiska resurser och aktiviteter 1992–2001, rapport 102)*, and information on participation in organised community activities was taken from the report, *Organised Community Activity in Sweden: Welfare, Social Capital and Training in Democracy*. The focus in this section is on different forms of participation and overall citizen involvement in these forms. Data on participation by gender, age, etc. are provided in Chapter 5 under Goal 4, which is concerned with greater equality of participation.

4.1.2 Channels of influence at local level

Examples

Citizens can seek to influence the political and decision-making process by taking part in party-political activities, contacting administrative officials or elected representatives directly, writing 'letters to the editor' or articles in the press, signing petitions, taking part in demonstrations, etc. Channels of influence can also be created at the initiative of central and local government.

The database on municipal and county council revitalisation projects updated by SCB contains data from three questionnaire-based surveys carried out in 1999, 2001 and 2003. The 2003 survey included a number of examples of channels of influence. While some are well organised and established, and others are more temporary in character, they were all created by municipal or county councils. It is possible, with the help of the database, to get some indication of which of these channels are most frequently used in municipalities and counties today. Scope for comparisons over time, however, is limited as only some of the questions used in the 2003 questionnaire also appeared in the earlier studies. This also makes it difficult to say anything useful about trends. At about the same time as SCB carried out its survey, researchers at Göteborg University conducted a similar study on democracy development efforts by municipal councils, *Demokratiutveckling i svenska kommuner, 2003*. A comparison of the two shows that similar questions sometimes elicited different answers. The figures in both studies should therefore be interpreted with a degree of caution.

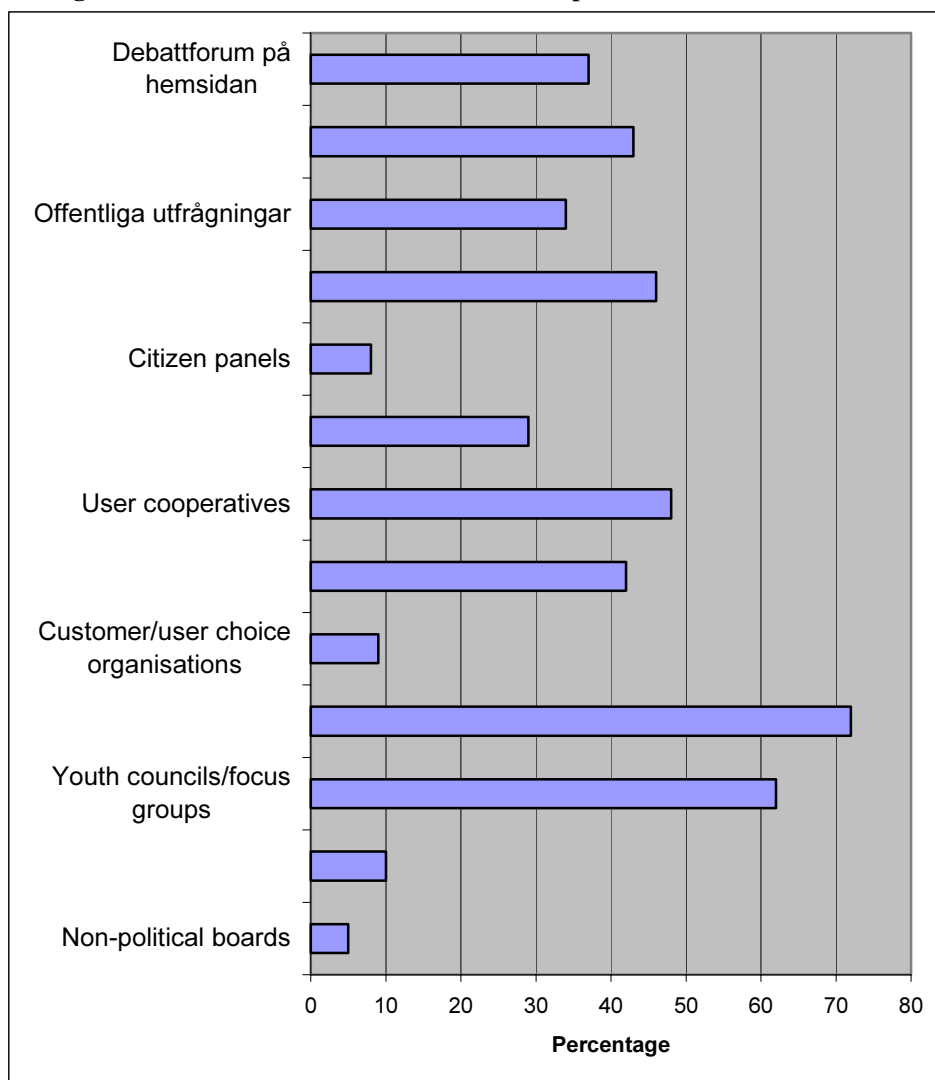
As shown in Diagram 6, there are currently many different channels of influence in the country's *municipalities*. Of these, councils or focus groups aimed at a specific target group²¹ – such as people with disabilities or young people/young adults – are clearly the most common. They are followed by user cooperatives and systems with user representation, e.g. local school boards where parents constitute a majority, delegation by municipal committees of responsibility for certain areas or delegation to self-regulating bodies. Also worth mentioning in this connection is the fact that the Göteborg University study found that almost all municipal councils (97 per cent) had a pensioners' council.

Regarding the activities of municipal residents in general, the most common are meetings in the form of discussion evenings, public hearings or question sessions. These are followed by citizen or user surveys aimed either at municipal residents generally or at specific users. As for citizen panels, which were highlighted in the democracy bill as a channel for citizen participation, the SCB database showed that 8 per cent of municipalities maintained some form of panel for surveys or consultation.

²¹ The questionnaire also asked whether the municipal/county council had any special advisory councils/consultation bodies for immigrants. The level of non-response to the question was so high, however, the answers are not included here.

Diagram 6. Channels of influence in municipalities, 2002–2003.

Skr. 2003/04:110



Source: Statistics Sweden.

(Terms not translated in Diagram 6 and 7)

Website debate forums

Citizen/user surveys

Public hearings

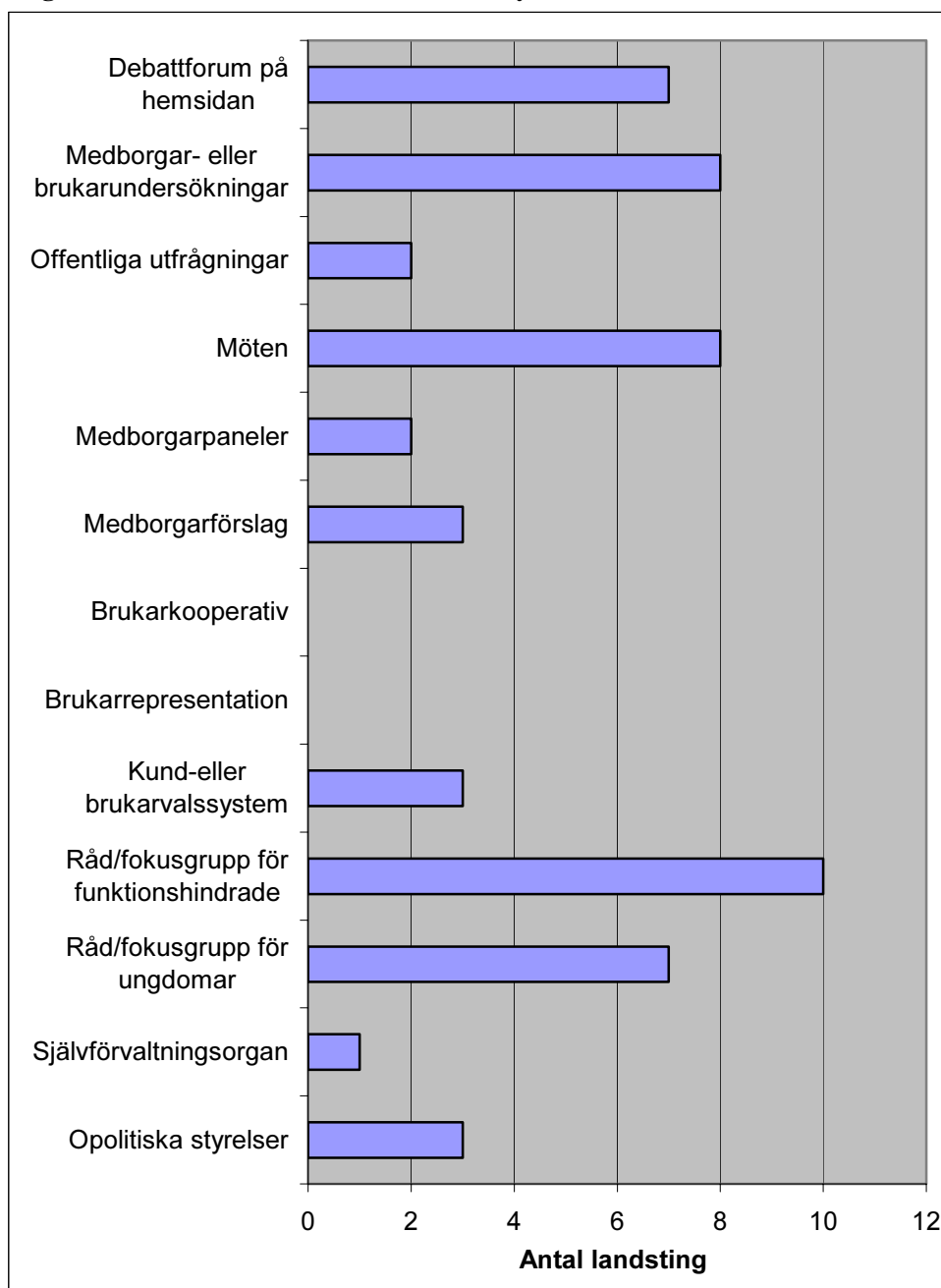
Meetings

To the extent that comparisons over time are possible, these indicate that the more organised forms of participation, e.g. non-political boards²², self-regulating bodies and user cooperatives, have become less common. The percentage of municipal councils that conduct citizen or user surveys has also fallen. On the other hand, public hearings have become considerably more widespread since 1998. According to the database, the percentage of municipal councils that hold public hearings rose by 8 percentage points, from 26 per cent to 34 per cent in 2002. A new channel of influence, citizens' proposals, based on government proposals in the democracy bill, has also been introduced in numerous municipalities. According to the findings of a follow-up study conducted by Örebro University (see section 4.2.3), the number of municipal

²² A board whose members are elected on grounds other than political affiliation.

councils to adopt this procedure is rising. However, some councils had already introduced a form of citizens' proposals before the act was amended in 2002. Skr. 2003/04:110

Diagram 7. Channels of influence in county councils, 2002–2003.



Source: Statistics Sweden.

As Diagram 7 shows, councils or focus groups for the disabled were the most common channel of influence in *county councils*. Other studies found that several counties also had pensioners' councils. As regards the activities of county residents generally, meetings and website forum debates were equally common, unlike the case in municipalities. Two county councils stated they had also held citizen panels in 2002.

A comparison over time showed that, unlike the case in the municipalities, non-political boards seemed to have become more common in counties where the number of county councils had grown from two to three. Such small changes should be interpreted with

caution, however. The number of county councils with self-regulating bodies remained unchanged.

It may also be noted in this connection that in metropolitan districts covered by metropolitan policy local development agreements, measures and methods had been devised to enable residents to take part in local long-term development efforts. In Södertälje municipality, for example, a residents' council was set up in 2002 as part of the municipality's democratic organisation. The council's main concern has been to influence the way in which metropolitan policy appropriations are used in the development of metropolitan districts. The Hjällbo forum in Göteborg is another example of a form of resident participation. Much metropolitan policy development work at local level has also been aimed at pre-schools and the compulsory comprehensive school system. A number of channels of influence for parents and pupils have been developed in this area in an effort to make school a natural meeting place for children and adults.

There are other local channels of influence that do not come under municipal or county council responsibility. Under the Higher Education Act (*Högskolelagen, 1992:1434*), for example, students are entitled to a say in the direction, quality and structure of university education. Student participation is further safeguarded by *inter alia* the right of students to be represented in all decision-making and deliberating bodies relating to their education and situation.

Facilitating citizen participation

In addition to creating forms for participation and channels of influence, central and local government can also implement measures aimed at facilitating and encouraging citizen initiatives and participation. For example, elected representatives and administrative officials can make themselves more available in a number of ways to citizens wishing to contact them directly. According to the SCB database, just over half of all municipal councils in 2003 and the majority of county councils have posted councillors' e-mail addresses on their websites.

Measures to facilitate public access to the decision-making process can also be adopted. (Measures taken to facilitate access to administrative departments at local government level are discussed in section 7.5). According to the database, the majority of municipal council websites also publish the minutes of council assembly meetings and timetables of upcoming meetings on their websites. Some 40 per cent of municipal councils declared that all assembly meetings were covered by TV or radio broadcasts and a corresponding proportion stated that committee meetings open to the public had been held. The last two measures have also become more frequent since 1998.

The majority of county councils also posted the minutes of their assembly meetings and timetables of upcoming meetings on their websites. Open committee meetings are held in 7 county councils.

Factors influencing the credibility of a municipal council

As this section is concerned with channels of influence, it may be of interest to summarise an analysis (*SOM-rapport nr 27, 2002*) of the factors likely to affect a municipal council's credibility in the eyes of its citizens. The relevant study, based on answers from a sample of 6,000 respondents aged 15–80 in Västra Götaland and Kungsbacka, cites four major factors: residents' satisfaction with municipal services; satisfaction with the way in which municipal finances are managed; confidence in the rule of law; and, of particular interest here, residents' confidence in their ability to influence policy decisions taken in the municipality.

4.1.3 Channels of influence at national level

As mentioned at the start of this section, there is limited scope for follow-up studies of channels of influence at national level. However, a number of examples of government initiatives aimed at improving opportunities for citizens to influence policy-making and implementation at national level are set out below.

Forums for dialogue as part of the Government's policy on organised community activity

In the democracy bill, the Government announced its intention of initiating regular forums for dialogue with representatives of voluntary associations, advocacy groups and other citizens' organisations.

In the autumn of 2002, work began on the first forum. A working committee, composed of representatives of community-based organisations, the Government Offices and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, was set up to plan the forum's structure and content. This arrangement gave the community organisations a substantial measure of influence over the forum's content. As to its format, the forum comprised three thematic seminars organised in the spring of 2003, and a two-day conference held in the autumn of the same year. The seminars and conference were attended by representatives of community organisations, government and its administrative agencies, municipal and county councils, and the research community.

The aim of the three seminars held in the spring of 2003 was to identify and focus attention on issues and problems of pressing concern for non-governmental, community-based organisations in general and to highlight the vital importance of these bodies to our society's democratic infrastructure. The seminars, which addressed the over-arching issues: democracy, participation and influence, funding and financing, and legal conditions, were specifically concerned with identifying factors which encourage – or hinder – organisation into community groups, voluntary associations, etc. The conference itself was marked by deeper discussions of these issues and the problems identified at the thematic seminars.

Working group and reference group on consumer policies

One of the Government's consumer policy aims is to ensure that community-based organisations are increasingly able to take an active

part in policy-making. In the spring of 2002, a *working group* for consumer organisations was set up with a view to giving community organisations greater influence in the framing of consumer policies, in accordance with the government bill, Action Plan for Consumer Policy, 2001–2005 (*Handlingsplan för konsumentpolitik 2001–2005, prop. 2000/01:135*). The group – composed of representatives of Sweden’s two consumer organisations, the Swedish Consumers’ Association (*Sveriges Konsumentråd*) and the Swedish Consumer Coalition (*Sveriges Konsumenter i Samverkan*), and the Ministry of Agriculture – meets about four times a year to discuss relevant consumer policy issues.

Community organisations with an interest in consumer policy have also been involved at an early stage in ongoing efforts in the Government Offices to draw up a new consumer policy strategy. A *reference group* composed of representatives from a wide range of community organisations with consumer policy interests has been set up. Other participants include relevant business and trade organisations, authorities and ministries, and researchers in the field. The group met for the first time in January 2004 at an ‘ideas seminar’ in the form of an interactive meeting. It will have a regular opportunity to present its views on the shape and direction of the new strategy in the virtual dialogue with the Ministry of Agriculture, which will be held periodically until the summer of 2004. It will also be able to submit final comments on the working group’s proposals for a new consumer policy strategy due in September 2004.

Special website for youth policies

During the evaluation period (1999–2003) citizens were able to put their views on the Government’s youth policy directly on the Ministry of Education and Science website (www.utbildning.regeringen.se/ung). A series of postcards and posters informing citizens of this opportunity was produced and distributed to upper-secondary schools, youth councils, youth organisations, institutions of higher education and other relevant bodies throughout the country. One of the postcards, prepaid and pre-addressed to the Ministry of Education, was designed to be used to convey citizens’ views and comments directly to the Government. These then served as a basis for the youth policy bill which the Government plans to submit to the Riksdag later in the spring.

Reference group for Minister for Children and Families

The Minister for Children and Families’ Reference Group was set up in 2001 as part of a series of measures aimed at broadening and deepening ministerial contact with children and young people. It comprises some 40 children and young people aged 13–18 from different backgrounds and different parts of Sweden.

The purpose of the group was to provide the minister with a forum for raising and discussing selected, specific issues relating to children and young people. To date, it has met three times in Stockholm and provided background material *inter alia* for the Government’s progress report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child submitted in the autumn of

2002, and contributed to efforts in connection with the theme, Exercising Influence – Obstacles and Opportunities (*Hinder och möjligheter för att utöva inflytande*) in 2003.

Housing dialogue as part of metropolitan policy

In the context of the Government's metropolitan policy, participation and involvement are both end and means. Dialogue with people involved in implementation projects at local level is a policy priority, and a 'dialogue tour' has been organised each year. In the first two years, all 24 metropolitan districts forming part of the metropolitan policy project were visited. Apart from municipal and district representatives, the visits were attended by representatives of residents' and other community associations. In 2002, special meetings involving locally active groups and authorities were also held in the municipalities. In addition, five national 'community dialogue conferences' have been held in an effort to create a network of municipal residents who play an active part in local development work. These have been attended by the minister responsible for the policy and the Chair of the Commission on Metropolitan Areas.

Web-based questionnaire on the promotion of sustainable development

In March 2002, the Government presented a national strategy for sustainable development (*skr. 2001/02:172*). The strategy was developed in the course of meetings and dialogues with community groups. Their purpose was to identify issues regarded as important by members of the community. The work of revising the existing strategy was begun in 2003. Various activities were undertaken in an effort to elicit views and ideas on ways of updating the strategy. Among other initiatives, a postcard asking recipients to record their views on a web-based questionnaire was sent to approximately 3,500 people in municipal councils, government authorities and voluntary organisations. More than 240 people contributed over 1,000 views and proposals between December 2003 and January 2004.

Special advisory councils as part of government policy on minorities

One of the goals of Sweden's policy on minorities is to enable national minorities to bring more influence to bear on the policy- and decision-making process. Special dialogue forms may be necessary where minorities have not been given sufficient space in the political dialogue. One example is the council on Roma issues, composed of representatives of all the major Roma groups, set up in the Government Offices in 2002.

4.1.4 Channels of influence at EU level

Although scope for follow-up studies at EU level is limited at present, examples of citizen participation in work *inter alia* on the Convention on the Future of Europe are presented below.

At the intergovernmental conference during the meeting of the European Council in Nice in 2000, it was resolved that a new intergovernmental conference would be convened in 2004. At Nice, and again at Laeken in 2001, the European Council stated that the Union must become more democratic, open and efficient if it was to bring its institutions closer to the citizens of its member states. In preparation for the intergovernmental conference, the Council agreed to convene a convention to draft discussion documents for the conference. The aim of the convention, which met between February 2002 and June 2003, was to draw up a proposal for a new EU treaty. The work was divided into three stages: compilation of ideas and proposals, analysis in working groups, and decision. To ensure the most open and broadest possible debate, a special *website* (<http://european-convention.eu.int>) was set up to allow EU citizens to follow the work of the convention. The website also featured a special forum open to civil society organisations. The organisations received regular updates on the convention's deliberations and were able to contribute their views for as long as the convention continued to function. EU citizens were able to discuss issues related to the convention's work on the debate forum *Futurum*, the EU Commission's own website, launched in 2001. Its aim was to enable all interested parties – elected representatives, institutions, organisations, media and EU citizens – to take part in debates on the future of the EU, and thereby contribute to bringing the EU closer to its citizens.

The *plenary meeting* of the convention, held on 24 and 25 June 2002, was devoted to civil society. Representatives of civil society were able to comment and put their view to members of the convention. EU citizens were able to follow the debates in the auditoriums of the European Parliament building or on live broadcasts, and read full accounts of the plenary meeting on the EU Parliament website. In July 2002, a special *youth convention* was held at which young people from the countries represented at the main convention discussed issues relating to the future of the EU.

The convention presented a draft treaty to the EU Summit Meeting in Thessalonica in June 2003. It was resolved at the summit that the intergovernmental conference should be convened as early as October 2003. As a further contribution to the debate, and to prepare Sweden's participation in the intergovernmental conference, a ministerial memorandum, *The European Convention on the Future of Europe: Results and Basic Considerations ahead of the Next Intergovernmental Conference (Europeiska konventet om EU:s framtid – Resultat och utgångspunkter inför nästa regeringskonferens, Ds 2003:36)* was drawn up in the summer of 2003. A broad selection of *referral bodies*²³ were offered an opportunity to comment. On 2 October, the Government communicated the convention's proposals, the comments of the referral bodies consulted and its own policy views to the Riksdag. In the autumn of 2003, a separate, detailed compilation of the referral bodies' comments (*Ds 2003:58*). was drawn up (see also section 7.6.2 on the work of the convention on the new constitutional treaty).

²³ See footnote 29.

4.1.5 Levels of public involvement and participation in political activities Skr. 2003/04:110

Introduction

The second part of the Government's goal of greater participation between elections is an increase in the percentage of citizens taking part. Although data on the proportion of citizens who make use of the channels of influence referred to in the previous section are not available, SCB's regular surveys of living conditions provide some information on other forms of participation. The survey normally seeks to answer questions like what proportion of the population aged 16–84 takes part in party-political activities, contacts officials or elected representatives directly, writes 'letters to the editor' or articles in the press, signs petitions, takes part in demonstrations or participates in political discussions (for an examination of voter turnout see Chapter 2). An account of these forms of participation and the proportion of citizens taking part in them is set out below. It should be noted that no information on citizens under 16 or over 85 years of age is provided in the surveys.

Party-political activities

The democracy bill emphasised that the country's political parties will continue to function as primary instruments in the exercise of power and as embodiments of the will of the people. However, party membership figures continue to fall. At the start of the 1980s, close to 14 per cent of the adult population were members of a political party, compared to 7 per cent today.

The proportion of the population active in party-political activities has also fallen since the start of the 1980s, from almost 4 per cent to just under 2 per cent. A comparison of elected representatives and people actively involved in parties in other ways shows that it is the latter who are leaving. The percentage of party members holding political appointments or discharging political assignments remains unchanged. (*SCB, rapport 98*).

A survey of political party youth organisations presents a different picture. Data from the National Board for Youth Affairs shows that membership rose by 18 per cent between 2002 and 2003.

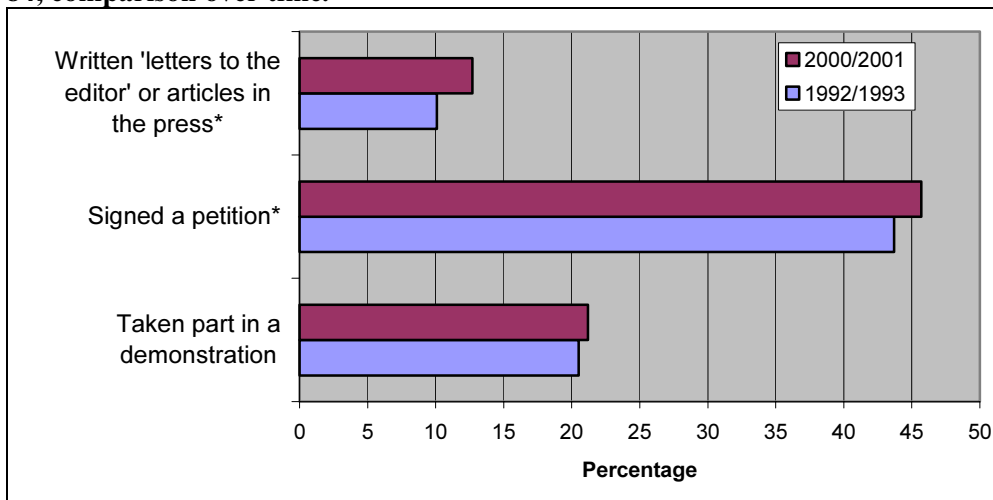
Regarding the ability of parties to induce people other than members to take part in political discussions, this can be partly measured by counting the number attending party meetings and rallies. SCB's report on political activities, etc. includes the number of people aged 16–84 who state that they have taken part in at least one political meeting in the last year. The resulting figures show a marked decline in attendance at party meetings – from 9 to 4 per cent – between the mid-1980s and the beginning of the 21st century.

Other forms of participation

SCB also measures less traditional channels of influence. Among the political activities shown in Diagram 8, signing petitions is the most

common. Almost half the adult population aged 16–84 stated that they had signed a petition at some time in their lives. The second most popular activity is taking part in demonstrations, while the least common is writing ‘letters to the editor’ or articles in the press. A comparison over time shows that signing petitions and writing ‘letters to the editor’ or articles in the press have become more frequent since the beginning of the 1990s. However, there is no appreciable change in the number of people who stated that they had taken part in a demonstration at some time in their lives.

Diagram 8. Verbal or written expressions of opinion among people aged 16–84, comparison over time.



Source: Statistics Sweden.

*indicates significant changes over time.

Taking part in political discussions is another form of participation. The studies show that the number of people who have done so has risen since the early 1980s. Compared to the beginning of the 1990s, however, the percentage has fallen somewhat.

Another way of monitoring development in terms of participation is to examine SCB's data on people categorised as politically active outside the party-political arena²⁴ versus those classified as politically uninvolved²⁵. A comparison over time reveals a rise in the percentage of people in the first category since the early 1990s; at the turn of the present century they accounted for 25 per cent of the population aged 16–84. The second category is relatively small, comprising about 100,000 people or approximately 1.5 per cent of the population aged 16–84. However, the proportion of politically uninvolved citizens has risen.

It is interesting to note that the ability of ordinary citizens to draft a formal communication to – or appeal against a decision by – an authority has improved since the beginning of the 1990s and that 70 per cent of the

²⁴ Defined here as a person who is not a member of a political party and has not attended a political meeting, but has given public expression to her/his political opinion on at least two occasions, i.e. contacted an elected municipal representative or administrative official directly, written a ‘letter to the editor’ or an article in the press, gone on a demonstration or signed a petition.

²⁵ Defined here as a person who states that she/he is not involved in any political activity, that she/he never normally bothers to listen when people start talking politics, and that she/he did not vote in the last election.

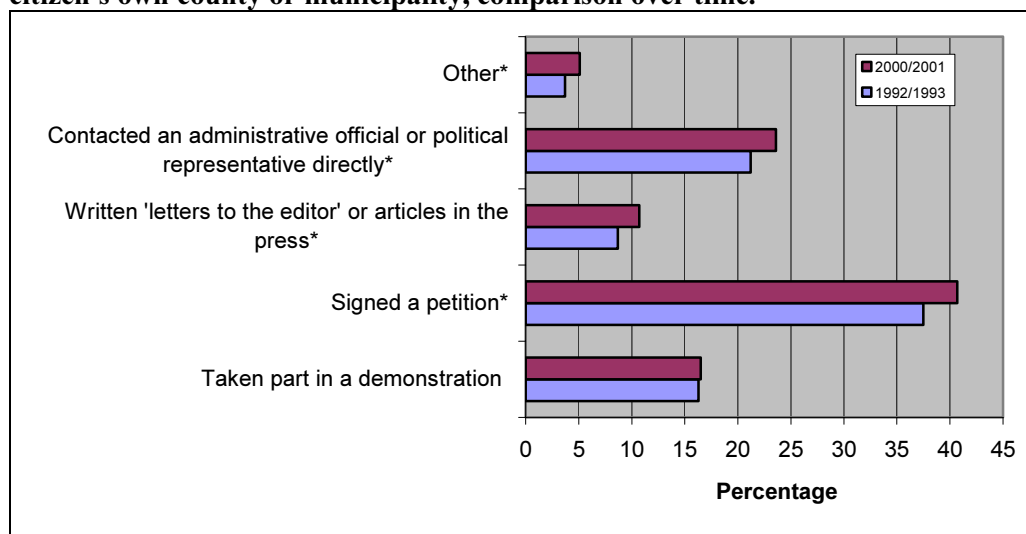
population aged 16–84 declare that they are able to do so. Thus the proportion of people stating that they are able to write a communication, etc. has risen by 12 percentage points since the start of the 1980s and by close to 3 percentage points since the start of the 1990s. The report, *Citizen Participation in Local Politics 2003 (Medborgarinflytande i kommunalpolitiken, 2003)*, published by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities points to a clear link between the ability to appeal against an authority's decision, as stated by respondents, and the propensity to take part in political discussions.

Also worth noting is the extent to which people's interest in politics has changed over time; degree of interest is of course directly related to level of participation. Since the mid-1980s, the Institute for Society, Opinion and Mass Media has included data on levels of political interest in its annual surveys. The proportion of individuals attesting to a strong or moderate interest in politics has varied between 46 and 58 percent over the period. Interest appears to have risen in the run-up to last four elections, which may indicate that interest is partly tied to the electoral cycle, i.e. builds up during elections and slackens off in the intervening periods (*SOM-rapport nr 33, 2003*).

Participation at local level

The SCB surveys also include data on the use of non-traditional forms of participation to influence to bear on *local issues*. Here too, as Diagram 9 shows, signing petitions is the most common activity, practised by about two-fifths of the population aged 16–84. This is followed by contacting a local administrative official or elected representative directly in order to remedy a perceived shortcoming or deficiency in the citizen's own municipality. Signing petitions has also grown the most in popularity since the early 1990s. Contacting officials or politicians directly and writing 'letters to the editor' have become slightly more common.

Diagram 9. Verbal or written expressions of opinion among people aged 16-84 regarding the need to remedy a perceived shortcoming or deficiency in the citizen's own county or municipality, comparison over time.



Source: Statistics Sweden.

*indicates significant changes over time.

In all, just over half the population aged 16–84 (54 per cent) have attempted to do something about a perceived shortcoming or deficiency in their county or municipality, an increase of 3 percentage points on the early 1990s.

A questionnaire-based survey, Citizen Participation in Local Politics 2003, carried out in 40 municipalities, showed that by far the most common form of participation was signing petitions (just over a third of the respondents). The second most common form was contributing financially to an organisation or activity (approx. a quarter of the respondents). This was followed by contacting an official an administrative official or elected representative and taking part in a boycott (just over 15 per cent of respondents).

4.1.6 Participation in the activities of community-based organisations

Many people seek to influence the political process through associations and similar organisations. Thus something should also be said here about people's involvement in associations aside from party-political activities. The importance of citizens' groups and organisations was also emphasised in the democracy bill. Such groups can be a mobilising force in the community and give citizens a further chance of being heard.

The SCB report, Organised Community Activity in Sweden: Welfare, Social Capital and Training in Democracy, stated that approximately 90 per cent of Sweden's adult population in 2000 belonged to an association of some kind; a sizable proportion of these – approximately 4 million people – were members of a trade union. There has, however, been a general decline in membership numbers in almost all types of association, with some variation according to type.

SCB has classified the associations in its study by main type of activity in an effort to identify model types of associations with similar relationships to the population. The categories are: political associations, stakeholder organisations, solidarity groups, religious societies and lifestyle associations. The last category embraces a broad range of activities including leisure and recreational interests of different kinds such as sport, culture, open-air activities, hobbies and social activities.

It may be of particular interest in this connection to shed some light on the development of the political associations, which, in addition to political parties, also include environmental organisations and local action groups. Membership of environmental organisations has halved in the period 1992–2000, from 570,000 to 290,000. No other type of organisation has recorded losses on this scale. However, it is chiefly among passive members that the decline has taken place. The core of active members remains unchanged. On the other hand, membership of local action groups – mainly consisting of stakeholder or action groups concerned with local issues – has risen sharply. In 2000, these groups had a total of 140,000 members aged 16–84, 60,000 more than at the start of the 1900s.

Thus it is interesting to note that unlike political parties and environmental organisations, local action groups have shown favourable development in terms of membership growth. This accords with the general trend observed by SCB, namely that the decline in membership levels is greatest in the associations belonging to the traditional organised community activity sphere.

Also emerging from the SCB report is clear evidence of a link between political capital and involvement. Political capital is defined here as the ability or readiness to appeal against an official decision, discuss political issues, speak at meetings, act collectively, vote, trust politicians, react individually, etc., namely pursue the activities discussed earlier in this Chapter. SCB is also attempting to identify factors that could affect the growth of political capital, i.e. what causes people to become more active when it comes to writing ‘letters to the editor’, demonstrating, etc. There is evidence to suggest that disparities in terms of the ‘amount’ of political capital held by individuals is mainly a function of their socio-economic status. However, their analysis also shows that involvement in organised community activities generates political capital.

4.1.7 Perceived scope for exercising influence and knowledge of existing channels

Discussions of the various opportunities for taking part in and influencing the political process should also include citizens’ own perceptions of these opportunities, as well as their knowledge of existing channels of influence. It would be interesting to have more information on the latter, mainly to establish how much individuals who take a less active part in political activities know about the different opportunities for participation. However, statistics in this area are limited at present.

Perspectives on Western Sweden (*Perspektiv på Västsverige, SOM-rapport nr 31, 2003*), a report by the Institute for Society, Opinion and

Mass Media, includes a certain amount of information about citizens' views on some of the ways of influencing the political decision-making process. The report divides forms of participation into two categories. The first includes petitions, demonstrations and passive resistance. The second takes in militant action, damage to property and threats against administrative officials. Researchers find that citizens are in general favourably disposed to the idea of exercising influence via the channels in the first category, while a clear majority are against using the means in the second category. Passive resistance, however, occupies an intermediate position; citizens are not as strongly supportive of this form of participation. The same pattern was discernible in the nationally representative 2001 report by the Institute for Society, Opinion and Mass Media.

As regards influencing actual policy implementation, this is done by citizens in their capacity as parents, patients, relatives, students or unemployed. However, no up-to-date information on this aspect of participation is available. The last systematic survey of citizens' views and attitudes in this regard dates from 1997.

4.1.8 Conclusions: follow-up

Citizens have traditionally made use of a variety of forms of participation in an effort to influence the policy- and decision-making process. The Government and municipal and county councils also implement a wide range of measures aimed at facilitating the exercise of political influence. It is difficult to determine whether the total number of opportunities for participation and influence has increased. At present, data is limited, as is scope for comparisons over time. In its democracy bill, the Government cited self-regulating bodies, youth councils, citizens' proposals, citizen panels, etc. as examples of channels of influence capable of attracting participation between elections. To a greater or lesser extent, these may be found in municipalities and counties throughout the country.

On the whole, it is clear that municipal and county councils implement a wide range of measures aimed at promoting greater participation between elections. For example, many councils have already introduced citizens' proposals and more plan to do so. It may also be noted that councils are concerned to create opportunities for participation and channels of influence for individuals, such as young people/young adults and the disabled who would otherwise have difficulty being heard. Efforts to develop different channels of influence are also being made at national and EU level. The essential thing is that there should be a broad range of opportunities for people who want to have a say in and change policies and decisions, and that real influence can be brought to bear.

SCB's report indicates that there is a genuine interest in and desire to influence the political process and society as a whole, despite declining participation in party-political activity. The fastest-growing forms of citizen-initiated participation are those which can be organised without official assistance. Finding ways to harness this involvement in community concerns without recourse to the old structures constitutes a

major challenge and a vital future task for central and local government, political parties and the non-governmental sector generally. Skr. 2003/04:110

4.2 Channels of influence

In the democracy bill, the Government emphasised the need to promote greater knowledge and understanding of the preconditions for democracy and how it functions. It proposed various measures including exchanges of experience, and follow-up and evaluation of ongoing efforts.

The following section looks at some recent findings in two areas: local channels of influence, and participation at national level. The local channels chosen here are popular referendums – including those initiated through so-called popular initiatives²⁶ (*folkinitiativ*) – citizens' proposals and local boards. The national form of participation chosen is the first so-called Popular Movement Forum²⁷ (*folkrörelseforum*). Also examined are the results of two initiatives involving the Internet as a medium for transmitting citizens' views and what has so far been learned from the Minister for Children and Families' Reference Group.

4.2.1 Local government referendums

Survey

Chapter 5, Section 34 of the Local Government Act states:

The assembly may decide that, as part of the preparation of a matter to be discussed by the assembly, viewpoints shall be obtained from members of the municipal or county council. This may be done by means of a consultative referendum.

In what is termed a 'popular initiative', registered voters resident in a county or municipality can raise the matter of a referendum on a specific issue in a municipal or county council assembly if the request is supported by at least 5 per cent of the voting population. The 'popular initiative' provisions were incorporated into the Local Government Act in 1994.

In the democracy bill, the Government declared its intention to return to the question of how to strengthen popular initiatives. A ministerial memorandum, Consultation Process following a Popular Initiative, including Proposals on the Design of Popular Initiatives (*Samråd efter folkinitiativ med förslag om hur ett sådant folkinitiativ kan utformas, Ds 2004:4*) has now been drawn up. These proposals are discussed at greater length in Chapter 11. The results of a survey of local government referendums carried out by the Ministry of Justice in 2003 as part of preparatory work in connection with popular initiatives are set out below.²⁸

²⁶ Also known as citizens initiated referendums.

²⁷ The official translation is misleading; the 'popular movements' referred to are the same voluntary, non-governmental organisations listed elsewhere in the text and in footnote 18.

²⁸ The survey does not include breakdowns by gender, age, etc.

Referendums at local government level have had legal sanction since 1977. A survey aimed at establishing how often the local government referendum procedure has been applied since its introduction shows that recourse to the procedure has been relatively infrequent. A total of 68 referendums had been held in the country's counties and municipalities, five of which were undertaken as a result of popular initiatives.

A majority of the referendums held – some 30 – have been concerned with boundary issues, mainly municipal demarcation proposals. Other issues have included congestion charges (12 referendums), road traffic matters and bridge-building (7 referendums each).

Of the 5 referendums held as a result of popular initiatives, three were called to decide whether the municipal council in question should request the Government to choose it as a trial municipality for the proposed municipal compensatory child care benefit scheme.²⁹ They were held in Uppvidinge and Karlstad in 2002 and in Örkelljunga in 2003. A referendum also took place in 2002 following a popular initiative in Haparanda on cross-boundary cooperation with Torneå, and in Uddevalla in 1998 on whether to allow the development of a green area.

Judging from the data gathered by the Ministry of Justice from municipalities where referendums have been held, the councils concerned have, with one or two exceptions, abided by the referendum results in their subsequent handling of the matter in question. The data also show that more than half the referendum initiatives from members of the municipal assembly (councillors) or the policy and resources committee were raised by the opposition parties with the support of a section of the controlling majority.

Rejection of referendum request

Municipal councils have rejected a total of 164 requests for referendums since 1977. Of these requests, 98 were at the instigation of councillors or members of policy and resources committees and 75 were the result of popular initiatives. An examination of the percentage of referendum requests considered by municipal councils revealed that the largest number of rejections were in connection with matters concerning building construction, the sale and siting of buildings, public service housing companies and municipal facilities. Requests for referendums on the siting of major roads, bridge building, issues relating to the exploitation of natural resources and planning matters have frequently been turned down as well.

A special scrutiny of the 75 disallowed popular initiatives showed that these were on roughly the same pattern as the other 89 rejections. However, a certain discrepancy was noted with regard to school-related issues, where as many as 8 popular initiatives were rejected, as opposed to only 4 referendum requests from municipal councillors. The reasons stated for rejecting popular initiatives varied considerably: the issue had been raised at the wrong time; the matter was outside the councils' jurisdiction; the issue was unsuitable for a referendum as distinct

²⁹ Childcare benefit for parents who opt out of municipal or publicly funded childcare.

alternatives were difficult to formulate; and a referendum would be expensive. Councils also objected that too few citizens were affected, or that the issue was too insignificant to be the subject of a referendum. Finally, several councils also pointed out that referendums sideline and ultimately weaken the system of representative democracy.

How referendum results were used

In recent years, councils have tended increasingly to agree to abide by referendum results. The growing prevalence of ‘binding’ referendums means that more municipal councils are renouncing responsibility for establishing whether voter turnout was low or high, and whether the alternatives received almost as many votes as the winning proposal or whether the latter was clearly predominant. Faced with criticism over this trend, councils have pointed to their highly restrictive stance on requests for referendums. Thus, the municipal referendum procedure has now become an “exceptional solution” on the one hand, and a binding commitment for the municipal council when applied, on the other.

4.2.2 Local school boards

Existing legislation

Municipal and county councils are empowered to establish so-called self-regulating bodies in all areas of local government except where otherwise indicated by law or other statutory instrument (Chapter 7, Sections 18–22 of the Local Government Act). Under the provisional ordinances governing trial projects involving the establishment of local boards in the comprehensive school system and compulsory special schools (*tidsbegränsade förordningarna om försöksverksamhet med lokala styrelser inom grundskolan och den obligatoriska särskolan, 1996:605*), and in upper secondary schools and municipal adult education institutions (*gymnasieskolan och den kommunala vuxenutbildningen, 1997:642*), self-regulating bodies in the school sector have been vested with powers not fully in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act. These include certain decision-making powers, otherwise exercised by the school principal or the responsible municipal committee. The trial projects are scheduled to continue until the end of June 2007.

Observations

According to the National Education Agency’s register, some 230 (out of 4,600) compulsory comprehensive schools have set up local boards on which parents form a majority, and 40 (out of 500) upper-secondary schools have set up boards on which pupils form a majority. However, there is evidence that not all municipal councils have reported the creation of such boards to the National Agency for Education.

The Agency for Administrative Development was commissioned by the Government to follow up results achieved to date with respect to trial projects involving local boards, etc. Its findings were presented in the

report, *Local Boards and Other User-Led Bodies, 2002 (Lokala styrelser och andra brukarorgan, 2002)*³⁰. According to the agency, local boards are more common in bigger municipalities than in smaller ones. Most municipalities that have no local boards have set up some other channel of influence for stakeholders.

The extent to which municipal councils have actively disseminated information to people who might be affected by the introduction of local boards provides some indication of their attitudes to the trial projects. School principals form the most common target group for information. Many councils regard it as the principal's responsibility to inform users. However, a small number have themselves informed residents directly.

Municipal councils have different motives for setting up local boards. Some are seeking to fulfil policy goals involving the creation of some form of stakeholder body, *inter alia* as a way of encouraging greater involvement in the democratic process. Most councils are favourably disposed towards user participation in general and consider that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. Some councils actively encourage the creation of local boards, e.g. by requiring that these must be set up in all schools in the municipality. Others deliberately take up a passive stance on the grounds that the issue is a school responsibility. According to the Agency for Administrative Development, if councils show that they consider user participation of this kind to be useful, they can promote the longer-term survival of local boards, as their establishment is not solely based on the interest and involvement at a given point in time.

An often decisive obstacle to the creation of local boards is lack of interest and personal commitment among stakeholders. A possible explanation is the tendency to give priority to issues related to one's own, or one's children's, schooling or recreational interests. It is also claimed that there is a tendency to regard active users as more knowledgeable. This can have a deterrent effect on other users, making them reluctant to become involved alongside the former.

Future efforts to promote participation in schools

In 2003, the Ministry of Education and Science appointed an internal working group to consider ways of increasing child, pupil and parent participation in pre-schools, schools and adult education. The working group presented its proposals in the ministerial memorandum, *Every-Day-Influence (Var-dags-inflytande, Ds 2003:46)*. These are currently being processed in the Government Offices. The working group considers that opportunities for children, pupils and parents to bring their influence to bear within the school system must be more strongly emphasised and more clearly defined. Opportunities for effective participation help strengthen and develop activities in pre-schools, schools and municipally run adult education centres. Every pre-school and school should therefore set up an 'influence council' in which all groups can have a say and where important principles can be discussed. In the working group's view, trial projects involving local boards should be extended to other types of school and made permanent. All influence

³⁰ The report does not include breakdowns by gender, age, etc.

begins with information and knowledge about the operations of the body or organisation concerned. This principle is fundamental to the ability of children, young people and parents to exercise influence. The discussion of the issue of collective influence in schools is now largely concerned with the forms this should take. On the basis of the various evaluations made, the working group concluded that discussions should focus more on content, the question of what issues should be raised and what different groups think should be addressed collectively.

4.2.3 Citizens' proposals

Evaluation

Since 1 July 2002, municipal assemblies have been free to introduce so-called citizens' proposals schemes, i.e. the right of residents registered in a municipality or county municipality to raise matters in the municipal assembly (Chapter 5, Sections 23, 33 and 64 of the Local Government Act). The amendment is one of the reforms proposed in the democracy bill.

In December 2003, the Government commissioned Örebro University to evaluate the outcome of the reform. The ensuing report, *Concrete Politics in Everyday Life: Follow-up of Citizens' Proposals in Municipal and County Council Assemblies* was submitted in 2004. The evaluation did not include various citizens' proposals schemes introduced by some councils before the amendment came into force on 1 July 2002.

Number of councils operating citizens' proposals

With the help of SCB, figures published in the municipal journal *KommunAktuellt* plus survey data of his own, the evaluator compiled a list of municipal councils accepting citizens' proposals and established the number of actual proposals raised. The evaluation showed that between 1 July 2002 and December 2003, 125 municipal councils had introduced or had decided to introduce a citizens' proposal scheme. In addition, the matter was being considered or had arisen in just under 100 municipalities. Although just two county councils, Dalarna and Jämtland, had introduced citizens' proposals, the matter was under review in other councils. Many had introduced citizens' proposals schemes on a trial basis.

Number of proposals

A total of 981 citizens' proposals were tabled in the municipal and county councils covered by the study between 1 July 2002 and 31 December 2003.

Information channels

Municipal and county councils make use of a number channels to disseminate information on the right to submit citizen's proposals. These include their own websites, advertisements in the local press and direct

mail shots to households and schools. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the largest number of proposals were submitted in councils that maintained a wide range of information channels. The Internet is the most commonly used channel overall.

Areas of concern

The subject matter of proposals raised varied widely. Many were concerned with technical issues in the wider sense, e.g. matters related to communications and physical access, including traffic and transport. It is worth noting that proposal content has been the same in the local district councils in the municipalities of Stockholm and Göteborg, where a form of citizens' proposals has been in operation for some time now. Health care, schools and social services have also been the subject of many proposals. The majority are thus more or less concerned with service-related issues. They often reflect the specific needs or requirements of a particular group or geographical area. Explicit expressions of distrust of politicians or xenophobia are rare. Proposals sometimes fall outside the council's jurisdiction. According to the evaluator, this may be due to a lack of knowledge regarding division of powers and responsibilities in the public sector, or the desire to draw attention to a particular issue.

Proposers

In some municipalities, most of the proposers are men; in others, women make up the majority. In councils where men outweigh women, however, their preponderance is greater than in councils where women proposers predominate. Although the proportion of young people/young adults and people from foreign backgrounds has been difficult to determine accurately, a preliminary estimate suggests that – with the exception of a few municipal councils where a large number of proposals had been tabled by young people – both groups are under-represented. The fact that some councils were holding 'young people's assemblies' in that year, or that citizens' proposals were being taught in civics classes in local schools may account for exceptions.

The advent of citizens' proposals has given alternate members of municipal and county councils an added opportunity to put motions to the assembly; they can now do so not only when acting for the member but also in their capacity as ordinary citizens. However, the evaluator notes that this opportunity has not been utilised to any great extent.

In some councils, large numbers of proposals have been submitted by just a few proposers. In one case, the procedure was used by a political party not represented in the municipal assembly, as an alternative means of influencing policy. In general, it is relatively common for associations, advisory councils and similar organisations to submit proposals.

Handling citizens' proposals

Citizens' proposals are subject to certain restrictions – which vary from council to council – as regards content, number of proposals permitted per year per person, number of times the same proposal may be put in a

given period and how long and/or often proposers may speak before the assembly while the matter is being dealt with.

The evaluation showed that citizens' proposals were handled in the same way as ordinary motions and did not entail appreciably heavier workloads in most cases. However, councils receiving large numbers of proposals did experience increased workloads. One way of trying to prevent minor matters from taking up undue amounts of processing time was to use the council website to advise proposers on how to distinguish between simple and more extensive proposals.

Some 10 per cent of the 296 proposals handled by council assemblies have been approved. Many of them were highly specific. A second category, accounting for approximately a quarter of the total, comprised proposals that were not deemed to come within the scope of the assembly's decision-making powers and were therefore rejected. The third category, accounting for some two thirds of the total, contained proposals which were neither approved nor rejected.

Problems in connection with representative democracy

The evaluation found little to indicate that the right to submit citizens' proposals was prejudicial to representative democracy. The number of proposals brought before municipal assemblies has in many cases been small and had little impact on the wider picture. On the contrary, some councils have declared that the system has helped to invigorate their assemblies. A sign of this is that debates on citizens' proposals often go on for longer than debates on ordinary motions. Some people also appear to believe that citizens' proposals have diminished the role of political parties. However, most proposals are not regarded as party-politically relevant. One way of involving the parties (adopted by Dalarna County Council) was to register incoming proposals and then allow the party groups to decide whether to draft a motion.

The evaluator's conclusions

The evaluation's concluding analysis looks at the often highly specific, down-to-earth character of citizens' proposals and considers whether they accord with the intentions of the Local Government Act, namely that local government assemblies should only deal with broad matters of principle. In the evaluator's view, there is a danger that these specific issues will take up a disproportionate amount of space and upset the balance between matters of this kind and the issues of principle that municipal assemblies were intended to address. In other words, it is questionable, according to the evaluator, whether municipal assemblies are the right place for citizens' proposals.

The evaluation also asks why the proposals are predominantly service-related and seldom address issues of a more ideological and/or political character. One explanation offered is that municipal councils are seen primarily as welfare providers, with citizens as their customers. If, on the other hand, citizens' proposals are to be regarded as a means of ensuring the widest possible participation in the general debate on how to handle our common concerns, the proposals should be classified into major and

minor issues. If this is in fact the purpose, the evaluation also calls for a clearer indication of the proposals' function as a medium for dialogue between elector and elected. Even specific, detailed issues could then provide valuable initial impetus to ongoing dialogue, discussion and debate on overall policy priorities.

Summary assessment

The evaluation indicates, in the Government's view, that the right of citizens to table proposals in municipal assemblies is perceived as a favourable democratic reform. However, more time will be needed to properly assess its effects. The findings set out in the Örebro University report can serve as a guide for municipal and county councils that have only recently introduced citizens' proposals or may be planning to do so. It must, however, be emphasised in this connection that attempts to regulate the number of proposals per year per citizen, or declarations to the effect that a proposal cannot be dealt with if presented again in two years' time have no sanction in local government law. If a council decides to allow a proposer to take part in debates on proposals – as it is fully entitled to do – it may not then impose time-limits when the proposer speaks before the assembly.

4.2.4 Some observations at national level

Forums for dialogue as part of the Government's policy on organised community activity

In a previously mentioned follow-up study of the first forum for dialogue with voluntary associations, advocacy groups and other citizens' organisations, representatives of these bodies referred to the urgent need for this type of dialogue. In their view, the forums filled an important function and should be continued. Representatives of large, small, new and old associations with a wide diversity of aims and activities took part, shared and exchanged experience and know-how, both with one another and with central and local government representatives. The broad participation at forum meetings also testifies to the very considerable interest in and concern about the role of and conditions for organised community activity in society as a whole.

Web-based questionnaire on the promotion of sustainable development

As mentioned earlier, a web-based questionnaire was conducted in connection with the updating of the strategy for sustainable development. Although the survey had not been advertised extensively beforehand, the number of replies (240) was relatively high. These came from representatives of the enterprise sector, municipal and county councils, county administrative boards, associations, etc., and private individuals. Fears that a web-based questionnaire might attract frivolous or inappropriate comments proved unfounded. Most were very specific and contained useful suggestions for future action. They were also

instructive, identifying issues regarded as important and likely to involve people. The comments will be used as supporting data for continued work on the strategy.

Special website for youth policies

Since the website for youth policies was created just over 4 months ago, it has received some 300 contributions with views and comments on the Government's youth policies and the conditions affecting young people's lives. Of the postcards sent out to inform people of the opportunity to air their views on the website – and which could also be used to convey their comments on government policy – just over 200 were returned. On the whole, the results of this extended opinion survey have been good, and the comments received will provide a valuable complement to those generated by the normal consultation process in the drafting of the upcoming youth policy bill.

Minister for Children and Families' reference group

On the whole, the Minister for Children and Families' reference group, created in an effort to broaden and deepen the minister's contact with children and young people, is thought to have worked well as a forum for dialogue. The meetings have afforded opportunities for in-depth discussions of important issues and provided a useful insight into the way children and young people view their own situation.

4.2.5 Support for exchanges of information and experience

Government measures

In an effort to enhance knowledge and awareness of democratic development at local level and encourage broader exchanges of experience, the Government has produced two brochures: *Eight Good Examples (Åtta goda exempel)*, and *Between Elections: Concepts, Questions and Ideas on Citizen Participation in Municipal and County Councils (Mellan valen – begrepp, frågor och idéer om medborgerligt deltagande i kommuner och landsting)*. The first was produced in conjunction with the Government's long-term development project, *Time for Democracy*, in the spring of 2002. Its aim was to disseminate information and experience and spur new democracy initiatives. The examples presented are a representative sample, selected from the 142 democracy development projects funded through *Time for Democracy*. The brochure was distributed to all parties in the Riksdag, including ancillary organisations, municipal and county councils, universities, adult education associations and many non-governmental organisations.

The purpose of the second brochure was partly to encourage more intensive exchange of experience among people engaged in democracy development work in municipal and county councils, and partly to provide a certain amount of basic information on citizen participation. It was distributed to all councils in January 2003. Both brochures are also available on the Government's democracy website, *Democracy Forum*.

As part of its efforts to promote greater knowledge and awareness, the Government has also approved funding for conferences and seminars on democracy-related issues. Examples include a Democracy Week in Sundsvall (*Demokrativeckan i Sundsvall*) and Democracy Days in Örebro (*Demokratidagarna i Örebro*). A special seminar attended by groups awarded grants under the development project Time for Democracy and aimed at encouraging exchanges of experience was also held in 2003. The seminar also formed part of the evaluation of the development project (see section 2.3.3).

The Government's democracy website serves as a forum for debate and discussion and as a channel for the dissemination of information about democracy-related issues. Visitors can access a database of the projects which have been granted funding under the Time for Democracy project. The main purpose of the database is to facilitate exchanges of experience and inspire people in their continued efforts to promote and develop democracy. Also accessible on the website are all the Swedish Democracy Commission's reports, material produced in connection with Time for Democracy, and other data. Since the September 2002 election the website has been accessed by around 7,000 visitors a month, and its newsletter has some 1,750 subscribers.

Action by the municipal and county council federations

The special Unit for Democracy and Self-Government set up by Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the Federation of Swedish County Councils maintains *inter alia* an 'ideas-bank' containing information about local initiatives aimed at developing and deepening democracy. The associations also organise conferences, seminars, etc. as a means of promoting debate, improving understanding and awareness and encouraging exchange of experience in connection with local democratic development. They have also produced a certain amount of printed material on the subject.

The associations are also currently running a project entitled Democracy at Work (*Hur fungerar demokratin?*). Aimed at enhancing knowledge about citizens' influence between elections, the project will include studies on the subject by some 25 municipal and county councils. Among the questions they will be asking are: How and in relation with what issues do citizens exercise influence over local government policies? How interested and willing are they when it comes to assuming responsibility for common community concerns and to bring influence to bear on decisions affecting the county or municipality? Which citizen groups are able and want to influence the decision-making process, and which feel powerless and excluded? Later in the project, the councils will examine the public area and the degree of influence exercised by elected representatives. The project is scheduled for completion in 2006.

4.2.6 General observations on local government efforts to develop local democracy Skr. 2003/04:110

A number of earlier sections in the present report contain accounts of various initiatives taken by municipal and county councils with a view to helping and encouraging more citizens to take part in and influence policy-making. Information about the resources set aside for democracy development in general may provide a further indication of the degree of commitment to these efforts.

The SCB database on revitalisation work in municipal and county councils shows that about a fifth of all municipal councils had set aside special funds for democracy development in 2003. Just over two-fifths had a specially appointed person, unit or drafting committee responsible for democracy issues. This means the situation has not changed appreciably since before the democracy bill was laid before the Riksdag.

On the other hand, there has been an increase in the number of county councils allocating resources for democracy development since the introduction of the democracy bill. Between 2001 and 2003, a further 8–12 county councils had set aside funds for efforts to develop democracy and a further 15–17 had a special person, unit or drafting committee for democracy issues.

Democracy audits are conducted by some councils in an attempt to measure the state of democracy in their counties/municipalities. Data on the number of councils that perform audits provide a further indication of where democracy development work comes on the political agenda. SCB's database reveals that 32 municipal councils and 4 county councils planned to carry out democracy audits in 2003.

4.2.7 Conclusions: an evaluation of some channels of influence

The results of the follow-ups and evaluations presented in this part of the communication point *inter alia* to the importance of disseminating information about existing channels of influence. Long-term democratic development is also predicated on political support for efforts to promote citizen participation between elections. Similarly, it is essential that political parties be involved in democracy work. Finally, it is important to consider who participates, how representative these groups are, etc. More generally, it is vital that initiatives are followed up in order to continually verify the appropriateness of channels of influence established by central and local government, and to extend existing knowledge about the preconditions for and functioning of representative democracy. It is also important to turn observations and findings made in various areas to good account. The same applies to the results of the Government's long-term development project, Time for Democracy, the experience gained from implementing the Government's metropolitan policy, and the lessons learned from local Agenda 21 work. It is vitally important to build on this accumulated body of knowledge and experience when creating or developing channels of influence.

4.3.1 Review of the referral process

In the democracy bill, the Government announced its intention to examine the Swedish referral process³¹ in the context of EU-related issues. A survey involving a wider range of issues in connection with the referral process, will begin in 2004.

The referral process is a central element in the constitutionally regulated preparation of government matters. The government bill, Sweden's Membership of the European Union (*Sveriges medlemskap i den Europeiska unionen, prop. 1994/95:19*), made it clear that the Swedish consultation system will retain a key role in the preparation of government matters, including EU-related matters. The Commission White Paper on European Governance has also emphasised the importance of the broadest possible participation when preparing EU-related matters. The Riksdag has also brought its structures and procedures for preparing EU matters up to date and approved proposals on the handling of EU-related matters submitted by the Riksdag Review Commission (*förs.*³² 2000/01:RS1, kapitel³³ 6, bet. 2000/01:KU23).

4.3.2 Greater transparency in financing of political party and preference vote campaigns

The democracy bill emphasised that public access to methods used by political parties to finance their activities should be enhanced. The same applied to election candidates running their own preference vote campaigns. Among the reasons cited by the Government was that improved access would be likely to enhance the legitimacy of the political system and prevent corruption. The resulting information would also provide voters with additional criteria in the run-up to elections and encourage debate on ethical issues and motives in politics.

In 2002, the Government accordingly appointed an inquiry to propose suitable ways of improving access to the methods used by political parties and candidates to finance their activities. In its final report, Public Access to the Revenues of Political Parties and Election Candidates (*Allmänhetens insyn i partiets och valkandidatens intäkter, SOU 2004:22*) the inquiry proposed a system of statutory accountability as the most effective way of ensuring public access. The report is currently being processed by the Government Offices.

4.3.3 Public meeting places

If democracy is to develop and grow stronger, people must be given suitable opportunities to come together in local associations and groups.

³¹ A consultative procedure involving the referral of inquiry reports, draft legislative proposals, etc. to relevant bodies in the public and voluntary sectors for comment before final drafting and government approval.

³² Proposal (*förslag*).

³³ Chapter.

An important element of government policy in this sphere is to help ensure that appropriate public meeting venues are available to the public for throughout the country. As it is likely that the role of public meeting venues in the community has changed as a result of the expanded range of commercially-based recreational options available, the Government appointed a committee of inquiry in 2002 to examine and comment on issues arising in connection with public meeting places. Its report, *Public Meeting Venues: Democracy, Culture, Development (Allmänna samlingslokaler – demokrati, kultur, utveckling, SOU 2003:118)* was submitted to the Government in December 2003. The report, which concludes that meeting venues are vital both to the local community and local democracy, has been circulated for comment. The Government has promised to report back to the Riksdag on this matter.

4.3.4 Review of policy on organised community activity

2001 saw the establishment of organised community activity³⁴ as a policy area in its own right with a separate post in the central government budget, and with sports policy as a sub-programme. The overall purpose here was to afford citizens the greatest possible scope to build, initiate and take part in voluntary associations, advocacy groups and other non-governmental organisations. Another aim was to ensure more coherent, integrated approaches and action on the part of the Government with regard to conditions and opportunities for organised community activity.

As mentioned earlier, SCB proposed in its report, *Organised Community Activity in Sweden: Welfare, Social Capital and Training in Democracy*, that a general review of government policy in this area be undertaken, with special emphasis on its past and future development. A number of authorities and associations were invited to comment on the report, and some 30 bodies have submitted their views. Most agreed with SCB's proposal that government policy on organised community activities should be reviewed.

The Government's general policy on organised community activity functions as a complement to numerous other policy areas concerned with specific issues relating to different types of non-governmental organisation in a wide range of sectors. Since the conditions and criteria governing their operation are mainly addressed within their respective policy areas, there is no collected, centrally available body of knowledge about these factors. Thus there are grounds for appointing an inquiry to review government policy on organised community activity, a measure also proposed in the 2004 budget bill.

Two basic concerns in connection with the review should be citizens' involvement at national and EU level in issues important to them, and ways of further encouraging this involvement. Another concern should be to identify factors likely to facilitate – or hinder – their organisation into associations and other non-governmental organisations. The review, which will begin during the Government's present term of office, should

³⁴ For a general definition of this term see footnote 18 and page 9.

also consider the appropriateness of overall policy goals in this area and the fulfillment of these goals, both sectoral and general. Skr. 2003/04:110

4.3.5 New organisations

The Government recently appointed a committee of inquiry to review government funding for women's organisations (*dir. 2003:56*). This is because many women have switched from traditional forms of association to new organisations, such as networks, which are not eligible for support under the current ordinance regulating government grants for women's organisation's core activities (*Förordningen om statsbidrag till kvinnoorganisationernas centrala verksamhet, 1982:865*). Under its terms of reference, the committee is required to look at how women choose to organise today, the activities carried out by their chosen organisations, and how these organisations can be supported.

The Government notes that there is no common body of knowledge on the new organisations and forms of action in which modern citizens' socio-political concerns are finding expression at national and EU level. As announced in the 2004 budget bill, the Government therefore aims to acquire this knowledge while examining the possibility of promoting and supporting alternative organisational modes with a view to satisfying common interests and needs. The Government accordingly intends to commission a university or institution of higher education to conduct a survey of new community-based organisations and other forms of action in the voluntary sector.

4.3.6 Follow-up of voluntary efforts

As stated in the 2004 budget bill, the Ministry of Justice plans to commission a survey of voluntary work in and outside non-governmental organisations and an examination of informal social networks. The principal aim of the inquiry will be to study changes in voluntary work over time and to analyse patterns of change in this area. To enable comparisons over time, the issues to be investigated must correspond as closely as possible to those addressed by Ersta Sköndal University College in its 1992 and 1998 population studies. The new inquiries, however, must also address the following questions: how do interviewers assess the significance of the voluntary efforts being undertaken? and have gender patterns in connection with these efforts changed over time?

4.3.7 The need for more data

There is a general need for more information on available channels and opportunities for citizens to exercise influence between elections, on how well suited to their purpose these channels are and on the extent to which citizens are aware of them. In particular there is a lack of systematised knowledge about influence at national and EU level. The proposed committees of inquiry referred to earlier will furnish some of the answers to the questions concerning new forms of involvement. The Swedish

Association of Local Authorities' and the Federation of Swedish County Councils' questionnaire-based surveys on participation between elections – also referred to earlier – may provide additional data. Ongoing research on the mechanisms of democracy, obstacles to involvement and participation, etc. will also add to the existing stock of knowledge. Moreover, enhanced knowledge will help to develop and improve the effectiveness of central and local government efforts to facilitate and support citizen participation between elections. A major task for the political parties in this context is to turn existing involvement and participation to account.

Skr. 2003/04:110

5. Goal 4: More equal participation

Summary: The fourth goal of the Government's long-term policies for democracy is to ensure that citizens have the opportunity to participate in and influence the political process on a more equal basis. There are a number of indications that progress is being made in terms of political equality. For example, the gap between women and men in terms of active involvement in politics has narrowed. This is due partly to the fact that women are participating in political life to a greater degree than men and partly to the fact that their involvement in politics has declined to a lesser extent than that of men. The proportion of women, young adults and people from foreign backgrounds in elected assemblies has increased, although these groups are still under-represented. Political participation in non-traditional channels of influence continues to rise among all groups, whereas participation in traditional channels continues to fall in the population as a whole. The decline observed in active involvement among young people is particularly worrying.

Thus there is a continuing need for active measures aimed at giving citizens more opportunities to participate in and influence the political process on an equal footing. Strengthening the participation of under-represented groups between elections and as political representatives is a particularly important aim. The work under way is at various stages of development. In the case of children, young people, people with disabilities and the elderly, concrete action needs to be taken to eliminate obstacles to participation. To strengthen the efforts currently under way to reduce under-representation in the political process among women and people from foreign backgrounds, a closer analysis of what obstacles exclude them from political life is needed.

5.1 Follow-up

5.1.1 Basic considerations

The fourth and final goal is to ensure that the opportunities available to citizens for influencing the political process are more equal than at present. Encouraging the involvement of young people, the unemployed and people from foreign backgrounds in this process is a particularly important task.

The Government noted in its democracy bill that a feature of political participation today is the marked difference between voter categories. Men, the middle-aged, high-wage earners, the highly qualified, senior officials and native Swedes participate to a greater extent than other groups. Many individuals feel that existing political parties and traditional politics are not for them. Some even feel that they are prevented from taking part in public life and in the decision-making process as a result of discrimination.

In the bill, the Government emphasised the dangers both of failure to bring under-represented groups into the political process and of failure on the part of their representatives to attend to their needs. In the Government's view, the sense of powerlessness and alienation they may feel as a consequence is a problem not for the individual alone but for democratic society as a whole. To ensure that all who wish to are given the opportunity to take part, everyone, not just the Government, must be involved in the efforts to achieve this goal. It is a matter of eliminating obstacles that stand in the way of citizens' own initiatives, commitment and readiness to take responsibility. It is also a matter of tackling the attitudes, values and approaches of those in power.

The extent to which different groups of citizens are represented in different channels of influence (at elections, as elected representatives and between elections) is described below. This data are more detailed than those presented in previous sections, which dealt specifically with goals in connection with participation in elections and elected representatives. No data have previously been presented on the participation of various citizen groups in the different channels of influence between elections. To the extent that such data are gender-specific, they are presented in that form. The following section, however, opens with a general description of participation by gender.

When discussing each respective citizen group, an account is provided of some of the initiatives which the Government has taken with a view to improving opportunities for different individuals to take part in the political process. Some of these have been discussed earlier under the previous three goals, and are therefore dealt with only briefly here.

The data in this section largely derives from Statistics Sweden's election figures from the country's general elections, from the Uppsala University report, *Elected Political Representatives in the 21st Century: a Survey of Political Representatives and Representativity in Municipal and County Councils in 2003*, and from the SCB report, *Political Resources and Activities in 1991–2001*. Unless otherwise stated, the information presented here is taken from these sources. It should be noted that the SCB report on political activity covers only a selection of the population, aged 16–84. Thus the report has no information concerning people younger than 16 or older than 84.

5.2 Women and men

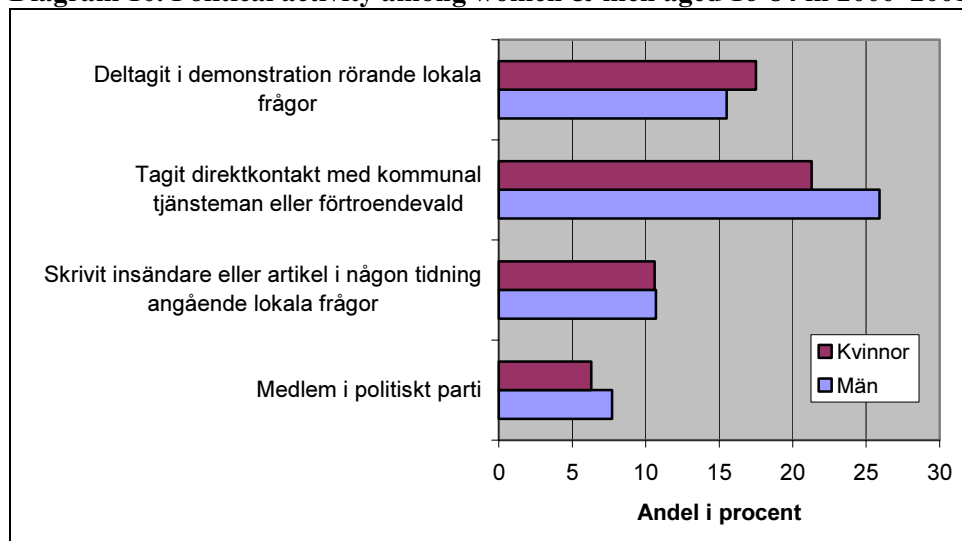
5.2.1 Participation in different channels of influence

At the parliamentary elections of 2002, voter turnout was in principle evenly divided between women and men. This represents a closer balance than at the 1998 election, when turnout for women was one percentage point higher than that of men.

After the parliamentary elections of 2002, women held 45 per cent of the seats in the Riksdag, an increase of two percentage points on the 1982 election result. Among elected representatives in municipal assemblies, the proportion of women is 42 per cent, an increase of 12 percentage points on 1982. Among elected representatives in county

council assemblies, the proportion of women is 47 per cent. Here, too, the proportion of women has steadily increased at every election since 1982, with the exception of the 2002 poll, when women's representation declined marginally. A comparison of male and female representation in different bodies at different municipal levels shows that women are more under-represented the further up they move in the hierarchy. Only 36 per cent of councillors on the country's municipal executive committees, for instance, are women. Approximately 30 per cent of municipal committees are chaired by women. At county council level, women are under-represented to a lesser degree than at municipal level. There they hold 47 per cent of the seats on policy and resources committees, and 44 per cent of the seats on county council committees in general.

In the case of non-traditional channels of influence, such as writing 'letters to the editor' or press articles, signing petitions or taking part in demonstrations, the participation gap between the sexes is relatively small. In the case of other activities, however, such as discussing politics and contacting administrative officials or elected representatives, men tend to be slightly more active than women. Overall, though, the general trend is towards greater political equality between women and men as the difference between their involvement has evened out to some extent in a number of areas. This is due partly to the fact that women's involvement in political life has increased more than that of men and partly to the fact that their involvement has declined to a lesser extent than that of men. The gap between the sexes has, for instance, narrowed considerably over the past two decades as regards membership of a political party. Similarly, women's civic skills have improved in that a growing number now feel capable of appealing against an official decision. Some differences between the sexes still persist, however, even if they have diminished over time.

Diagram 10. Political activity among women & men aged 16-84 in 2000–2001.

Source: Statistics Sweden

Terms not translated in the Diagram:

- 1) Taken part in a demonstration concerning local issues
 - 2) Contacted administrative officials or elected representatives directly
 - 3) Written 'letters to the editor' or articles in the press concerning local issue
 - 4) Member of a political party
- (Percentage)

The diagram shows that women take part in demonstrations concerning local issues to a greater extent than men. Men, however, are more likely than women to contact administrative officials or elected representatives directly. As regards activities such as writing 'letters to the editor' or press articles concerning local issues, women and men tend to be equally active.

5.2.2 Implemented measures and ongoing efforts

Elected representatives

The Government took the view that several of the proposals in the democracy bill would help bring about greater equality between women and men. It felt that two factors in particular – the greater scope allowed elected representatives for taking time off from work and the newly granted right to appoint others besides those already elected to office to municipal or county council drafting committees – promised to boost political participation at local level. This in turn was likely to reduce under-representation among women. The effects of such legislative changes have yet to be assessed, however.

The new rule whereby compensation may be granted for childcare costs could make it easier for parents of both sexes, especially single parents, to take on political appointments in a municipal or county council. In addition, more citizens may be prepared to take on such

assignments now that compensation for loss of unemployment and parental benefit is more widely available. Evaluation of the regulations governing financial compensation shows that these have been duly implemented and that the provisions of the Local Government Act have had the desired effect. The majority of the municipal and county councils reviewed in this connection pay compensation not only for loss of earned income but also for loss of unemployment benefit or parental benefit. Most municipal councils have special regulations governing both compensation for childcare costs and compensation payable to elected representatives with functional disabilities (see 3.2.2 for details of the evaluation).

As mentioned earlier, the report, *Elected Political Representatives in the 21st Century: a Survey of Political Representatives and Representativity in Municipal and County Councils in 2003*, makes separate analyses of women's representation in different types of municipalities, in the political parties and in various decision-making bodies. These analyses have provided the Government with important background material for its continuing efforts to empower women and strengthen their position in the political decision-making process.

Participation between elections

The Government stated in its democracy bill that the ability of citizens to search for and find information, to acquire knowledge and to engage in dialogue on the Internet would significantly affect their participation in the political process. Studies show, however, that not all individuals in society enjoy equal access to the Internet or have the same ability to absorb the information found there. To a certain extent, this also includes women. The Working Group on IT and Democracy in Sweden notes in its Draft Strategy for Reducing Digital Gaps in Sweden (*Förslag till strategi för att minska de digitala klyftorna*) that the difference between the sexes regarding Internet use in the home can to a great extent be attributed to gender inequality, i.e. women assume a greater share of responsibility for the home than men and therefore have less time to spend on the Internet. The working group has consequently proposed that further measures be introduced to promote greater equality between women and men in the day-to-day running of the home. It also proposes bringing to the attention of the computer industry the fact that studies by the ITC Commission and others show that women tend to feel that the benefits of the Internet are usually presented from a male perspective.

At the request of the Government, SCB has compiled certain statistics on the participation of women and men between elections. There is still, however, a lack of statistics on the extent to which women and men respectively hold leading positions in society. Analyses of a more qualitative nature concerning the power and influence of women and men respectively are also needed.

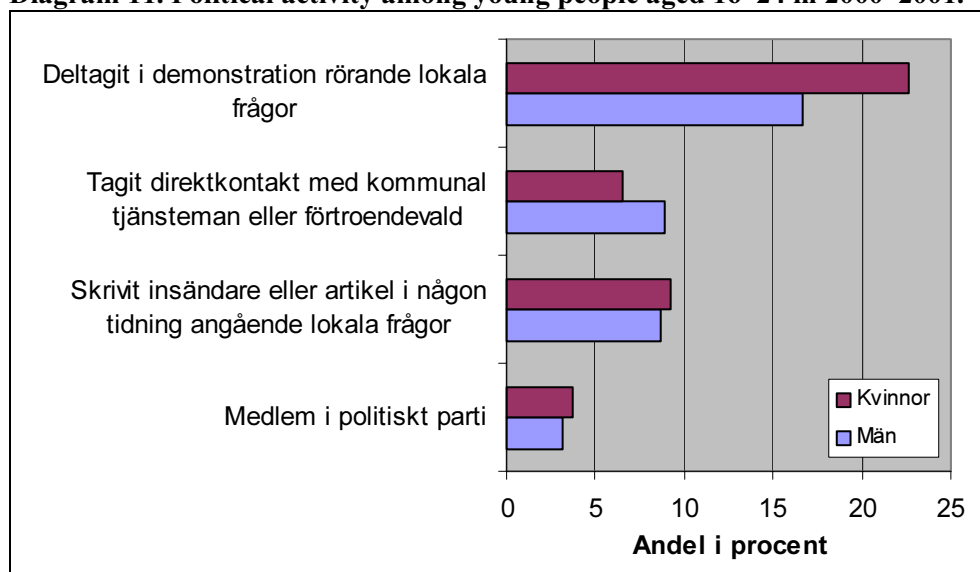
5.3.1 Voter turnout among young people and their participation as elected representatives

Young registered voters in the 18–22 age group made up just over 5 per cent of the electorate in the parliamentary elections of 2002. Just over 70 per cent of first-time voters in this age group took part in the elections, a decline of about four percentage points from the previous elections in 1998. This decline was greater than the overall decline in voter turnout of just over one percentage point at the 2002 elections.

Young adults aged 18–29 made up some 18 per cent of the eligible candidates at the municipal council elections of 2002. Among the elected representatives in both municipal and county councils, young adults in this age group comprised only five per cent, which is considerably less than the proportion of eligible candidates of the same age. Over time, the proportion of young adults elected to municipal assemblies has remained unchanged since 1982. In county council assemblies, however, the proportion of elected representatives in this age group has increased from one to five per cent over the same period.

As in the case of the population at large, a declining proportion of young people/young adults are actively involved in traditional channels of influence. At the same time, a growing number are taking part in non-traditional channels such as writing ‘letters to the editor’, contacting an elected representative or taking part in a demonstration. Analysis of the political participation of different individuals between elections shows that young people/young adults are under-represented in comparison with other groups. This is nothing new in itself, but the fact that active involvement among young people, particularly young men, in a political party or organised community activity has continued to decline over the past decade gives grounds for concern. Among the politically inactive, for instance, young people/young adults and old-age pensioners represent the two largest groups.³⁵ A further cause for concern is that the civic skills of young people in the 16–24 age group appear to have declined in that a dwindling number feel able to appeal against an official decision on their own. Among other groups there has if anything been an increase in civic skills in this respect. The growing lack of interest in political discussion is also greatest in this young age group. Among those who choose to take part in demonstrations, however, young women make up the largest group.

³⁵ SCB defines politically inactive persons as those who take no part either in local or general political activities or in any political party activities. Nor have they ever addressed a meeting of any association or organisation or contacted anyone in a position of responsibility in an association, movement, community or the like.

Diagram 11. Political activity among young people aged 16–24 in 2000–2001.

Source: Statistics Sweden

Terms not translated in the Diagram:

- 1) Taken part in a demonstration concerning local issues
 - 2) Contacted administrative officials or elected representatives directly
 - 3) Written ‘letters to the editor’ or articles in the press concerning local issue
 - 4) Member of a political party
- (Percentage)

The above diagram shows that young women take part in demonstrations to a much greater extent than young men. Moreover, more young women than young men write ‘letters to the editor’ or press articles about local issues. Young men, however, are more likely than young women to contact an administrative official or an elected representative. There is little difference between the sexes as regards party membership.

According to opinion surveys by the National Board for Youth Affairs, many young people describe themselves as uninterested in politics but interested in taking part in and influencing the development of society. This, however, is precisely what ‘being interested in politics’ really means. Questionnaire-based surveys that ask young people about their interest in specific political issues also tend to generate a more favourable response than questions about their general interest in politics. This suggests that while young people are largely interested both in taking part in community life and in specific issues, they are wary of the channels for political discussion presently available and sceptical of their chances of taking part in this debate.

5.3.2 Participation and influence among children and young people under 18

Sweden’s just over 1.9 million children and young people under the age of 18 account for a fifth of the population. These people are crucial to

democracy policy not only because they will one day form part of the electorate, but also because despite not having the vote they are entitled to influence and participation in matters affecting them under the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The convention applies to all persons under the age of 18. The issue has two dimensions – the right of the individual child to be heard and respected in matters directly concerning her or him, and the collective right of children and young people to influence policy- and decision-making.

Studies show that children and young people want to exercise influence. A statistical study carried out in 2002 by the Office of the Children's Ombudsman (*Barnombudsmannen*) in Sweden, encompassing 2,000 individuals aged 8–15, showed that almost 70 per cent felt that being able to influence matters was important. The same study showed that children and young people felt they could express their views freely at school to a relatively large extent. They did not, however, feel they had a say in school decision-making to the same extent. Older children also felt they had less influence than younger children. Further development efforts are needed before the right of children and young people in Sweden to exercise influence and participate in the decision-making process can be said to be fully implemented.

5.3.3 Other channels of influence for children and young people/young adults

The Government stated in its democracy bill that special youth councils could help strengthen participation and influence among young people, noting that a youth perspective in municipal affairs was essential. Since 1997, the number of municipal and district councils with various types of 'participation forums' for local youth, in the form of youth councils or the like, has more than doubled. According to the National Board for Youth Affairs, there were 211 such forums in place that year in 157 municipalities. Of the participants, 88 per cent were aged 13–18, and of these, 56 per cent were girls. There are considerable differences between the various participation forums in terms of size, form and length of existence. Most, however, pursue their own specific issues, act in an advisory capacity *vis-à-vis* political representatives and deliver opinions on given matters to officials. A quarter of the forums act as 'referral bodies' for the consideration of issues affecting local youth. Section 4.2 includes information about additional channels of influence for children and young adults, such as citizens' proposals and local boards.

The Government has actively promoted participation among young people in international partnership forums. For example, the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (*Landsrådet för Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationer, LSU*) has been represented at meetings of the UN General Assembly for some years. Swedish youth representatives also discuss youth policy issues in EU contexts and in connection with Nordic cooperation and Barents and Baltic Sea cooperation.

5.3.4 Recent and ongoing efforts to boost voter turnout and strengthen young adults' participation in their capacity of elected representatives

Skr. 2003/04:110

Voter turnout

As described earlier, both the Government and other actors took numerous steps prior to the 2002 elections to boost participation among young voters and provide information about voting procedure, etc. Efforts included the 2002 School Elections initiative and a democracy magazine, *Votes*, targeting the country's upper secondary students (see also sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.6).

As also mentioned previously, the National Board for Youth Affairs and the National Agency for School Improvement were jointly allocated funding under the Government's democracy programme in the run-up to the 2004 elections to the European Parliament. The funds were to be used for special activities targeting first-time voters aged 18–23 (in and outside upper secondary school), one of the aims being to encourage them to vote in the elections (for further information about this programme, see section 2.4.3).

Elected representatives

The Statement of Government Policy delivered to the 2003–2004 session of the Riksdag included, as noted earlier, a pledge that financial support for political parties would be increased to enable them to provide better training to newly elected representatives in the various political youth associations. The Government will report back to the Riksdag on the financing question when presenting its spring fiscal policy bill for 2004.

5.3.5 Recent and current efforts to strengthen participation among children and young people between elections

Development of the national strategy for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

In January 2004, the Government presented the Riksdag with a written communication, *Development of the National Strategy for the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Utveckling av den nationella strategin för att förverkliga FN:s konvention om barnets rättigheter, Skr. 2003/04:47)*. This document contained specific proposals relating to the Government's continuing strategic efforts to implement the Child Convention in Sweden.

A key element in this strategic endeavour is the participation and influence of children and young people. The Government announced a series of measures in this respect, either planned or already under way. A number of them are discussed below.

Tracking children's and young people's opportunities for taking part and exercising influence is an important aspect of this work. The Government plans to invite the Children's Ombudsman and the National Board for Youth Affairs to join the Swedish Association of Local Authorities in discussing ways in which the influence and participation

of children and young people in municipal activities may be further strengthened. Why, for instance, are some youth councils or participation forums for children and young people so successful while others are having difficulty finding their way? What are the success factors?

The National Board of Building, Planning and Housing (*Boverket*) – together with the National Road Administration (*Vägverket*), the Children’s Ombudsman, the National Board for Youth Affairs and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities – has been given the task of developing appropriate forms of participation in community planning for children and young people. In light of the recommendations made by the latter body in its mission report, the Government now intends to consult all of the above organisations except the National Road Administration on the prospects of launching a trial programme at local level. These discussions will also include the question of whether an advisory manual is needed, targeting municipal planners and others.

A good understanding of all levels of society

The democracy bill also stressed that schools should provide young people with a proper understanding of how society works at all levels and that this goal should be clearly stated in compulsory school syllabuses. One of the reasons for underlining this aim was that social science syllabuses at both compulsory schools and upper secondary schools had been found to lack explicit goals for student proficiency regarding how the democratic system functions at the local and regional level. In March 2003, an internal working group was set up at the Ministry of Education and Science, as described in section 4.2.2 above, to consider ways of increasing child, pupil and parent participation in pre-schools, leisure centres, schools and adult education. One of the proposals presented by the group in its ministerial memorandum, *Everyday-influence*, was to give the National Agency for Education the task of reviewing the prospects for altering syllabuses for social science-related subjects in all institutional forms of education where such syllabuses apply. The importance of equipping students with a better understanding of local democracy should in future be emphasised. Information in this field should relate to democracy at school and municipal level. In addition, teaching should focus on rules and processes and on how students and citizens can play an active part themselves. The working group’s proposals are currently being processed in the Government Offices and some of them will be incorporated into the new education bill due to be presented to the Riksdag in the summer of 2005.

The role of political parties and political youth organisations in Sweden’s schools

The democracy bill emphasised the importance of encouraging political activity and debate in schools and of providing pupils with regular opportunities for meeting and engaging in discussions with representatives of the political parties and their youth associations. In 2002 the National Agency for Education was accordingly instructed by the Government to examine the question of what opportunities political

parties, their youth associations and other socially and politically active organisations have of making their voices heard in schools and participating in school activities. The agency found in its report that many schools and municipal authorities were unsure about how the school's cooperation with outside actors should be organised and how the school was to deal with anti-democratic organisations and currents of opinion. To support schools and municipal authorities in this regard, the Government instructed the National Agency for School Improvement in 2003 to draw up guidelines on ways in which schools can cooperate with political parties, their youth associations and other socially and politically active organisations on the basis of the fundamental democratic values that must inform all school work. The agency is to present its report to the Government in the spring of 2004.

In this connection, it may be noted that sponsorship projects, such as the Haninge Youth Council (*Ungdomsrådet i Haninge kommun*) in Stockholm, were granted funding as part of the Time for Democracy development project. The aim of this project was to develop a forum in which political representatives and young people could meet via a form of sponsorship. Its aims included teaching young people how the democratic system and politics work and enabling elected representatives to better understand the needs of young people. Project evaluation showed that each had acquired greater trust in the other and a better understanding of the other's roles and capabilities.

Involvement in organised community activities

Regarding the involvement of young people in organised community activity, a total of SEK 30 million has been allocated by the Swedish Inheritance Fund (*Allmänna arvsfonden*) during the period 2001–2004 to support efforts to develop youth organisations. The funds are distributed by the National Board for Youth Affairs to projects organised and run by young people's own organisations. Of the total, SEK 6 million has been earmarked for the further development of efforts by political youth associations to promote democracy in schools.

Influence in the EU and the rest of Europe

In September 2000, the Government placed SEK 4 million from the Swedish Inheritance Fund at the disposal of the National Board for Youth Affairs. The funds were intended to support initiatives in this area with a view to strengthening the influence and involvement of young people in European affairs. The agency submitted its final report on the programme in April 2002. In all, 33 projects received funds totalling SEK 3.6 million. The agency's evaluation of the programme noted considerable interest among young people and youth organisations in local and regional projects focusing on Europe, and widespread demand for such projects. Funds earmarked for the development of regional support centres had proved particularly valuable. In the course of the programme, the National Board for Youth Affairs noted the difficulty in finding proper financing for local and regional information efforts relating to international affairs, an area of activity that many associations

consider important. The agency has also identified three areas in which the promotion of youth organisation activities is deemed of particular relevance. These are the international dimension as a tool, the influence and participation of young people in European affairs, and young people's right to learn about the EU.

Efforts are also under way at EU level to strengthen the involvement and influence of young people in Europe. The European Commission 2002 White Paper, *A New Impetus for European Youth* proposed *inter alia* establishing a better structure for consultation with young people at European level and bringing young people into the debate on the future of the EU. As part of the Swedish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers (*Nordiska ministerrådet*), a major Nordic conference (www.involvera.nu) was organised in 2003 to foster discussion on ways and means of strengthening both the influence of young people and their integration into society.

The need for more knowledge and information concerning influence and participation

Finally, it is worth noting that demand on the part of municipal and county councils for information about young people's opportunities for bringing influence to bear has increased in recent years. In response to this, and to facilitate comparisons, the National Board for Youth Affairs has developed questionnaires and a results database as part of the Local Follow-up (*Lokal uppföljning, LUPP*) programme, focusing on local levels of influence.

5.4 People from foreign backgrounds

5.4.1 Participation in different channels of influence

Foreign-born citizens made up 11 per cent of all registered voters at the 2002 parliamentary elections. Voter turnout in this group was 67 per cent, a decline of three percentage points on the 1998 elections.

Non-Swedish citizens make up 4 per cent of the electorate in Sweden.³⁶ Of these, 35 per cent used their vote in the 1998 and 2002 local government elections. In contrast to overall voter turnout in the 2002 elections, there was no decline among non-Swedish citizens.

In 2002, foreign-born citizens held almost 7 per cent of all municipal council seats in Sweden, an increase of just under three percentage points compared over 1982. Over the same period, however, the proportion of foreign-born citizens in the electorate³⁷ rose from just under 9 per cent to just over 13 per cent, which means their level of representation on municipal councils rose only marginally. Among county councillors, too, the proportion of foreign-born citizens has risen over the past two decades, particularly at the two most recent elections.

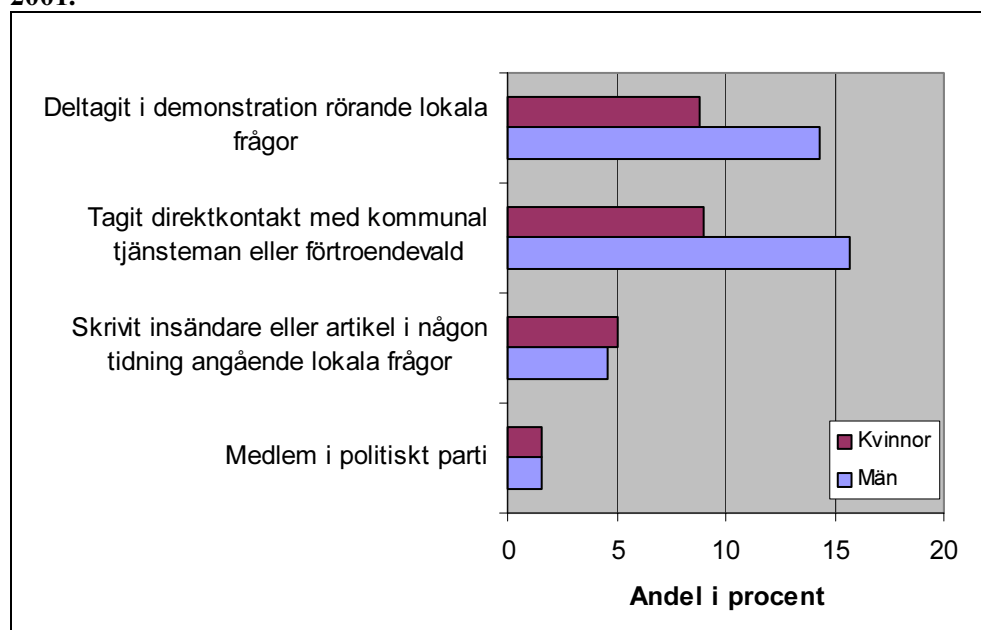
³⁶ Proportion of non-Swedish citizens eligible to vote in local government elections in 2002.

³⁷ Proportion of foreign-born citizens eligible to vote in local government elections in 2002

In 2003, non-Swedish citizens occupied just 1 per cent of the country's municipal council seats but comprised 4 per cent of the electorate. The ratio was the same at county council level.

The general pattern of political participation between elections is one in which native Swedes have a significantly higher level of participation than foreign-born Swedish citizens, who in turn are more politically active than non-Swedish citizens. As in the population as a whole, political participation has declined among people from foreign backgrounds. The proportion of naturalised immigrants³⁸ belonging to a political party, for instance, has declined. In the voluntary sector, the pattern is the same for people from foreign backgrounds as for the population as a whole, i.e. the proportion of active participants is declining. As regards non-traditional forms of participation, a certain increase is evident on the part of both groups. There are major differences between the sexes, however. For example, a growing number of men from foreign backgrounds, now contact administrative officials or elected representatives directly. A growing number of men with foreign citizenship also take part in political discussions. Civic skills have also improved, with a substantial increase over the past decade in the proportion of non-Swedish citizens prepared to appeal against an official decision themselves. There are, however, gender differences in this group as well, as the proportion of women who say they are wholly incapable of appealing against official decisions without assistance is significantly higher than that of men.

Diagram 12. Political activity among non-Swedish citizens aged 16-84 in 2000-2001.



Source: Statistics Sweden

³⁸ Foreign-born Swedish citizens with at least one parent who holds or has held non-Swedish citizenship.

Terms not translated in the Diagram:

- 1) Taken part in a demonstration concerning local issues
- 2) Contacted administrative officials or elected representatives directly
- 3) Written 'letters to the editor' or articles in the press concerning local issue
- 4) Member of a political party
(Percentage)

The above diagram shows that among foreign citizens resident in Sweden, men contact municipal officials or elected representatives to a greater extent than women. The proportion of men who take part in demonstrations is also larger. On the other hand, women write 'letters to the editor' or press articles about local issues to a slightly greater extent than men. There is no difference between the sexes in terms of party membership.

5.4.2 Implemented measures and ongoing efforts

Voter turnout

As previously mentioned, the parliamentary parties received special funding for the task of disseminating information to people from foreign backgrounds prior to the 2002 elections, as they had previously done in both 1994 and 1998. The aim was to mobilise voters in the immigrant community, as turnout among people from foreign backgrounds had continued to decline at the latest elections. The evaluation shows that these information efforts were successful in the sense that the groups normally associated with low voter turnout were over-represented among those receiving a relatively large volume of targeted information. The evaluator's report, however, stated that the measures had no apparent effect – in the short term – on people's propensity to vote (see also section 2.3.4).

Several of the projects granted support as part of the Time for Democracy programme focused on integration and diversity. These included a project conducted by the Workers' Educational Association, ABF (*Arbetarnas bildningsförbund*), in Malmö. Through a special training programme for 'democracy ambassadors', ABF Malmö sought to create new networks and promote exchanges of experience between its various affiliated organisations. On completion of their training, these ambassadors acted as election information officers and election motivators among immigrant groups in the run-up to the 2002 elections. The evaluation shows that the project yielded a number of valuable synergies, and also that voter turnout increased in the housing areas targeted. However, it is impossible to say precisely what impact this particular initiative had as it was only one of many that took place in the same period. Moreover, more people from foreign backgrounds stood as candidates, which probably had a favourable effect on voter turnout. Projects specifically targeting women included one for which the Somali Women's Association in Sweden (*Somaliska kvinnors riksförbund*) received financial assistance. The project aimed to encourage and boost voter turnout and participation in political decision-making among

Somali women. In addition, the association sought to awaken this group's interest in social issues and organised community activity in general, and to encourage gender equality. The project largely took the form of study circles, seminars, conferences and local TV broadcasts. One favourable outcome was that forums were created in which Somali women and girls were able exchange thoughts and ideas on the issue of influence and participation in community development.

As noted earlier, the seven municipal authorities that signed local development agreements with the government as part of efforts to implement the Government's metropolitan policy were allocated democracy promotion funds for the task of boosting voter turnout at the elections to the European Parliament. The funds were to be used in metropolitan areas where local development agreements were in force, for measures aimed at groups associated with low voter turnout (see section 2.4.3).

Participation between elections

The Government stated in its democracy bill that people granted residence permits should acquire a good basic understanding of how Swedish democracy works as quickly as possible so they can take part in the political process. The introduction programmes provided to new arrivals afforded an excellent opportunity for imparting that understanding.

In November 2001, the Government set up an inquiry to review refugee reception and introduction programmes. In its report, *Settling in Sweden (Etablering i Sverige, SOU 2003:75)*, the committee proposed ways in which newcomers might be given a better knowledge and understanding of basic norms in Swedish society and of Sweden's democratic system. One of the measures it proposed was the production by the Swedish Integration Board of printed community information specifically targeting new arrivals, to supplement the oral community information and tuition in community affairs already provided. As far as possible, the report added, oral community information should be provided in the newcomer's mother tongue, and preferably by teachers with dual language and cultural skills. The report also called on the voluntary sector to assume a greater share of responsibility, but noted that participation by NGOs would be contingent on their respective capabilities and situations. Active organisations and associations interested in contributing should be invited to join the planning process and help newcomers settle into the community. The report has been circulated for comment and the inquiry's recommendations are currently being processed in the Government Offices.

The democracy bill also emphasised the need to review Swedish language instruction for immigrants (SFI) as a channel for community information. In January 2003, the Government appointed an inquiry to look at ways of modernising and restructuring SFI as a form of education. Its terms of reference included reviewing the role of community information in basic SFI education. The inquiry report, *Broader Approaches and the Way Ahead (Vidare vägar och vägen vidare, SOU 2003:77)*, proposed that tuition focusing on community life

and working life be retained as a part of the SFI programme, but that content and teaching methods should be more closely defined, given greater priority and individualised. In line with the Government's proposals in the democracy bill, the report recommended that the National Agency for School Improvement be given the task of developing reference material and commentaries focusing on the goals, content and methodology of community and worklife tuition, in consultation with the relevant authorities. The report is currently being circulated for comment, and an inter-ministerial working group has been set up to develop the proposals further.

Regarding efforts to strengthen the participation of people from foreign backgrounds in organised community activity, a working group has been appointed by the Government to undertake a comprehensive review of all assistance provided to organisations established along ethnic lines. The group has reported its findings in a ministerial memorandum, A Coherent Funding Programme for Ethnic Organisations (*Ett sammanhållet bidragssystem för etniska organisationer, Ds 2003:10*). It proposes introducing a coordinated system of grants for organisations established along ethnic lines and engaged in activities aimed at preserving their language, culture and identity. The working group views this as an important area of activity, enabling people with roots in other countries and cultures to preserve and develop their ethnic identity while instilling a sense of affiliation with Swedish society and encouraging participation. The proposals in the memorandum have been circulated for comment and are currently being processed in the Government Offices.

In an effort to eliminate obstacles that people from foreign backgrounds may encounter when seeking to exercise power and influence, the Government has also initiated a number of inquiries into the distribution of power and influence among various ethnic groups. The Government Commission of Inquiry on the Political Integration of Immigrants (*Integrationspolitiska maktutredningen, dir. 2000:57*) was set up to survey and analyse the distribution of power and influence in various sections of Swedish society from an integration policy perspective. Four reports are to be completed by early 2004 as part of the inquiry, after which the commission will be disbanded. The findings of a research programme also launched within the inquiry framework will be presented in 2004 in the form of independent research reports in the Government's official reports series. The reports due for publication will discuss such questions as whether the way people from foreign backgrounds are described and defined in the media and political debate means that foreign-born citizens and native Swedes do not enjoy the same opportunities to exercise power and influence in society. Other issues under review include the effect on participation of institutional factors, such as government strategies for boosting voter turnout among people from foreign backgrounds and structural conditions affecting the prospects of immigrants becoming involved in party politics.

In October 2003, the Government set up the Committee of Inquiry into Structural Discrimination on Ethnic or Religious Grounds (*Utredningen om strukturell diskriminering på grund av etnisk eller religiös tillhörighet, dir. 2003:18*). Its brief included gathering available data about structural discrimination in Sweden, providing relevant

information about gender discrimination and measures to prevent it both in Sweden and abroad, proposing ways and means of countering structural discrimination, and recommending ways of making the presence of structural discrimination more widely known. A final report is scheduled for 31 March 2005.

The Government also intends to adopt directives for a new inquiry into discrimination, power and influence in the spring of 2004.

5.5 People with disabilities

5.5.1 Participation in different channels of influence

As only a limited number of studies on the political power and influence of people with disabilities are available, information collected by the Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Democracy for its report, *Taking Part for Real: Democratic Development in Municipal and County Councils* is set out below.

The above committee stated in its report that data concerning the number of people in Sweden with disabilities tended to vary from study to study. To a great extent, this uncertainty may be due to the difficulty of accurately delimiting and defining people with disabilities as a group. It is clear, however, that disabilities occur widely in the population and that people of all ages have disabilities. According to the National Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen 1999*), an estimated 10 per cent of the population have disabilities of one kind or another, and of varying degrees and complexity. Other studies, such as SCB's Labour Force Surveys (*Arbetskraftsundersökningar, AKU*), suggest that the proportion of people in Sweden with disabilities may be even larger. According to the National Board of Health and Welfare, the most common disabilities are impaired mobility, impaired hearing, impaired vision, speech impediments and writing difficulties.

According to estimates in 2000 by the Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Democracy, the proportion of elected representatives with significantly impaired mobility, vision or hearing was just under one per cent, which indicates substantial under-representation.

Studies show that people with disabilities have an above-average interest in politics. The proportion of people in this group who are politically active, however, is lower than in the population as a whole. This suggests that people with disabilities are prevented from taking part in the political process more by external circumstance than by a lack of interest or willingness on their part (see for instance *SOU 2001:48* in section 3.3.1 above and the report, *Citizen Power [Medborgarnas makt, Pettersson, O. 1989, Stockholm: Carlsson]*).

5.5.2 Implemented measures and ongoing efforts

Voter turnout

The Election Act has been amended to lend added weight to the requirement that municipal authorities use polling stations which are

accessible to all. A principal aim is to make it easier for people with physical disabilities to vote. Determining the quantitative impact of this measure on turnout, however, is not possible. Nor does SCB compile any election statistics on people with disabilities.

As part of the Government's Time for Democracy programme, a number of steps have been taken to boost voter turnout among both those with physical disabilities and those with mental disabilities. Projects targeting people with disabilities included one entitled Universal Suffrage: Towards Greater Democracy for the Disabled (*Rösträtt för alla – Ett projekt om ökad demokrati för funktionshindrade*). This was a joint project involving the Hemse public library in Gotland, the Swedish Disability Federation (*Handikapprörelsen*), the National Federation of the Blind (*Synskadades riksförbund*), the Workers' Educational Association (ABF) in Gotland (*ABF Gotland*) and the Gotland municipal council. The aim of the project was to boost voter turnout among people with disabilities by disseminating information about the election and the various political party programmes, strengthening dialogue between political representatives and people with disabilities, and making polling stations more accessible. The project evaluation revealed that the target group had become more aware of the election and developed a better dialogue with political representatives. It also showed that political representatives had become more aware of the needs and situation of people with disabilities. The evaluation further showed that the project had had a favourable impact on voter turnout among people with disabilities in Gotland.

Elected representatives

Elected representatives with physical disabilities are often prevented from discharging their duties by physical obstructions. In many quarters, moreover, there is little awareness and understanding of this group's need of technical assistance to facilitate participation. The Government emphasised in the democracy bill that municipal premises intended for political activity must be made more accessible. Accordingly, it proposed introducing an amendment to the Local Government Act requiring municipal and county council authorities to ensure that elected representatives with disabilities were able to take part in the processing of local government business on the same terms as other elected representatives. It also proposed that elected representatives with disabilities be entitled to reasonable compensation for travel costs incurred in the course of their duties. These two amendments came into force on 1 July 2002. As noted in section 3.3.1, the first of these two is to be partially followed up in 2005. Regarding the second amendment, the recent evaluation commissioned by the Government showed, as noted earlier, that the provisions of the revised Local Government Act had had the desired effect. Most councils have now introduced special rules on compensation for travel costs incurred by elected representatives with disabilities in the course of their duties.

Participation between elections

In addition to the physical obstacles to participation, there are obstacles in the form of attitudes and behaviour that make it difficult for people with disabilities to exercise their rights and obligations and to take part in community life. Central and local government must take steps to ensure that the fundamental values of Swedish society concerning the equal worth of all citizens and the right of all to be treated with respect are reflected out in the field. In response to this need, the National Agency for Special Educational Support (*Statens institut för särskilt utbildningsstöd, Sisuus*) has drawn up a national programme for the development of professional skills throughout the public sector aimed at improving the way staff treat women and men with disabilities. The agency is also producing educational material for use by the government administration in its work on disability policy matters. In 2002, a law (2002:794) was introduced requiring the Agency to promote skills development relating to the treatment of people with disabilities in all areas of public-sector activity. The agency is also required to monitor developments in this area on an ongoing basis.

In addition, the Government has taken further steps to improve accessibility for all to public spaces. For example, the provisions of the Planning and Building Act (*Plan- och bygglagen, 1987:10*) have been amended to allow stricter requirements to be imposed when public places are constructed or altered. The amendment also means that easily eliminated obstructions will have to be removed both from existing premises to which the general public has access and from public places. The National Board of Building, Planning and Housing has drawn up rules setting out more specific requirements. The agency's appropriation directions for 2004 also require it to describe what efforts have been made to assist and inform various actors with a view to ensuring compliance with accessibility and usability specifications in planning and building work. In addition, the agency is to report what action has been taken to improve accessibility in the physical planning field.

To further the work of enhancing accessibility at national level, a National Accessibility Centre was set up in January 2001, based at the Office of the Disability Ombudsman. The centre is to act as an advisory body in matters relating to accessibility, and to focus particularly on building up expertise, consultation, development and cooperation.

As noted earlier, one of the tasks of the Government's working group on IT and democracy was to discuss how accessibility to IT in political contexts might be improved for people with disabilities, and to make appropriate recommendations in this area. The Draft Strategy for Reducing Digital Gaps in Sweden, recently presented to the minister responsible, includes a number of proposed steps for improving accessibility to information on the Internet among people with disabilities. One of the proposals is for a special grant to be made available to people with disabilities who are dependent on broadband for connecting to the Internet. The working group also called for compliance on the part of municipal and county councils in Sweden with the Web Accessibility Initiative, WAI, incorporating the international guidelines agreed on by the EU states concerning access to the Internet for people with disabilities. The working group further stressed the importance of ensuring that public websites contain easy-to-read material for those who

need information in such a form. The Government's strategy group on IT policy is planning to draw up a new working programme with the aim of promoting IT use among people with special needs. Skr. 2003/04:110

5.6 The elderly

5.6.1 Participation in different channels of influence

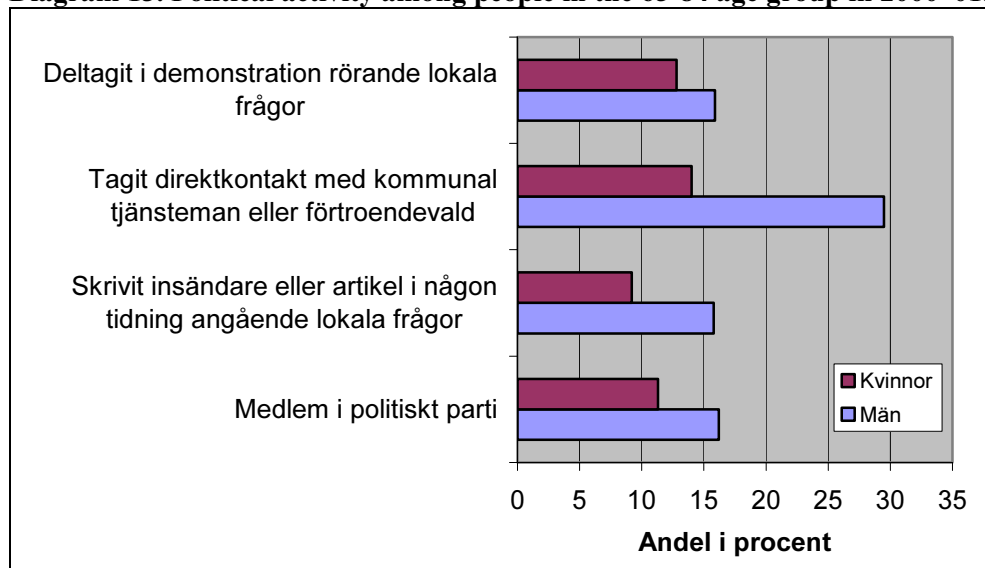
People aged 65 or over made up 23 per cent of the electorate at the parliamentary elections of 2002. On average, 89 per cent of registered voters in the 65–69 age group took part in the elections, and 88 per cent of those aged 70–74. The turnout for those aged 75 or over was 73 per cent. In contrast to all other age groups, except for those aged 22–24, men aged 70 or over voted to a greater extent than women in the same group. Among those aged 75 or over, as many as 83 per cent of male voters took part compared with 66 per cent of the women. Compared with the 1998 elections, the turnout for the over-70s rose by almost two percentage points.

Over a longer period, 1982–2002, representation of the elderly in municipal assemblies increased from 4 per cent to 9 per cent. The level of representation in county council assemblies has also increased among the elderly. The over-65s, however, are still significantly under-represented in relation to their share of the population.

Regarding other political activities, people aged 65 or older are far more disposed to watch TV news broadcasts and read the morning paper than other age groups. Also, the largest proportion of political party members is to be found in this age group, as well as the largest proportion of visitors to party meetings and the smallest proportion to cast blank votes (*SOU 2003:91*). Some 88 per cent of people aged 65–75 are members of an association or some other voluntary organisation. Of these, 40 per cent are active members. In the case of non-traditional forms of participation, the elderly have become more active in several respects, including contacting administrative officials or elected representatives directly, writing 'letters to the editor' or press articles, and signing petitions. Women aged 65 or over are among the politically inactive categories. Overall, however, the proportion of inactive people among the elderly in Sweden declined in the 1990s. Another favourable trend is a growth in civic skills among elderly women: the proportion of those prepared to compose a document and appeal against an official decision has increased significantly since the early 1990s. In this area, however, the civic skills of elderly men are still considerably greater than those of women in the same age group.

Diagram 13. Political activity among people in the 65-84 age group in 2000-01.

Skr. 2003/04:110



Source: Statistics Sweden

Terms not translated in the Diagram:

- 1) Taken part in a demonstration concerning local issues
 - 2) Contacted administrative officials or elected representatives directly
 - 3) Written 'letters to the editor' or articles in the press concerning local issue
 - 4) Member of a political party
- (Percentage)

As the above diagram shows, there are differences between the sexes in terms of level of involvement in political activity. Men aged 65-84 are far more inclined than women in the same age group to contact administrative officials or elected representatives directly. They are also more likely than elderly women to take part in demonstrations, write 'letters to the editor' or press articles, or join a political party.

5.6.2 Implemented measures and ongoing efforts

Elected representatives

It is important to turn the experience and knowledge of the elderly to account. The Government accordingly stated in its democracy bill that the elderly must also be encouraged to take part in the country's democratically elected assemblies. In December 1998, the Government appointed a parliamentary committee, SENIOR CITIZEN 2005 (*SENIOR 2005*), to lay the groundwork for the long-term development of policies for the elderly in Sweden. One of its tasks was to help realise national policy objectives in this field. These include ensuring that elderly people are able to lead active lives and to bring their influence to bear both on society in general and on their everyday situation. In its final report, Future Policy for the Elderly in Sweden (*Äldrepolitik för framtiden, SOU 2003:91*), the committee presented a number of proposals on how active involvement of elderly people in political decision-making might be

promoted and turned to account. According to studies commissioned by SENIOR CITIZEN 2005, people of all ages in Sweden are fairly reluctant to see elderly people occupying actual positions of power, e.g. as parliamentary members. In its report, the committee urged the political parties both to ensure that the revitalisation of democracy and civic roles under way in Sweden is not equated with the rejuvenation of participants, and to actively seek a change in attitude towards the role of the elderly in the political sphere. The report has been circulated for comment. The referral period will end on 30 September 2004.

Participation between elections

The SENIOR CITIZEN 25 parliamentary committee stated in its final report that the task of promoting influence and participation in society must apply to people of all ages. With this in mind, it proposed further development of the pensioners' councils currently in place at local and regional level so that they are better equipped to bring the knowledge and experience of elderly people into the political process. The presence of such councils, however, cannot compensate for the lack of elderly members in municipal and county council assemblies. Other forms of consultation and dialogue should also be tested, such as neighbourhood forums where groups of people of different ages can meet and discuss.

One of the tasks of the working group on IT and democracy mentioned earlier is to discuss ways of making information technology more accessible to the elderly, and to other sections of the population, and to make recommendations in this area. The Draft Strategy for Reducing Digital Gaps in Sweden includes a number of proposals for improving accessibility for the elderly and making it easier for them to use the Internet in the political process. One proposal is to offer people who have not learnt the basics of Internet usage at school or at the workplace some form of popularly-based training, such as an adult education course, a study circle or an introductory course at a public library or citizen's bureau as part of the Computer Training Initiative (*Datorlyft*).

5.7 Employed and unemployed

5.7.1 Participation in different channels of influence

Voter turnout among the unemployed at the 2002 parliamentary elections was 71 per cent, as against 85 per cent among employed people. The relationship between the two groups was largely unchanged from the 1998 elections. There were major gender differences in turnout between the two groups, however. Among the unemployed, the proportion of women who used their vote was nine percentage points higher than among unemployed men. In the employed group, the proportion of women who voted was five percentage points higher than that of men.

Among the employed, 77 per cent of blue-collar workers used their vote at the 2002 parliamentary elections compared with 91 per cent of white-collar workers. However, there were differences in turnout within these groups as well. In general, though, the pattern is the same throughout: the group with the highest educational qualifications has the

largest proportion of voters. Among both blue-collar and white-collar workers, more women use their vote than men, although the difference is greater among blue-collar workers (six percentage points compared with two percentage points).

Some 10 per cent of municipal councillors are unemployed, one percentage point higher than the proportion of unemployed registered voters. The proportion of unemployed among county councillors is 8 per cent. This means that in terms of social representativity the unemployed are well placed in decision-making bodies at local and regional level.

The low-qualified and low-wage earners are still under-represented among elected representatives at municipal level. Among municipal councillors, 15 per cent only attended compulsory school although this group comprises 30 per cent of the overall population. The pattern is the same in income terms. Approximately 40 per cent of the population are low-wage earners but only 16 per cent of the country's elected representatives are in this income category.

Where other forms of political activity are concerned – such as holding a position of trust in an association or other voluntary organisation, signing petitions or writing ‘letters to the editor’ – the pattern is the same as the above, i.e. senior white-collar workers participate to a greater extent than workers with no professional training, and those with post-secondary school qualifications participate to a greater extent than those with only a compulsory-school education. The difference between the various income groups, however, is not as significant, although high-wage earners tend to participate more than others.

5.7.2 Implemented measures and ongoing efforts

Voter turnout

As part of the Government's Time for Democracy development programme, a number of organisations have received financial support for projects aimed at boosting voter turnout among individuals who tend to vote less frequently than others. Several of these sponsored projects focused on ‘socially deprived’ housing areas, and a number of them targeted individuals who were disadvantaged in socio-economic terms.

In addition, as noted earlier, motivational initiatives have been taken in the run-up to elections to the European Parliament, and these have also had a bearing on the above-mentioned sections of the population (for further information, see section 2.4.3).

Elected representatives

The Government stated in the democracy bill that practical obstacles to the undertaking of political duties were to be eliminated as far as possible. People's readiness to accept a political appointment is contingent on such matters as the time available to them, their command of the language and their financial position. Accordingly, as noted earlier, the Government presented a number of draft amendments designed to improve the position of elected representatives. Under these proposals, unemployed people elected to office would be entitled to

reasonable compensation for the unemployment benefit they lost through discharging their duties, elected representatives with irregular working hours were to be allowed whatever time off work they needed, and elected representatives as a group were to be granted reasonable compensation for whatever loss of income and benefits they suffered as a result of their appointments. The proposals were adopted by the Riksdag and the new provisions came into force on 1 July 2002. As noted earlier, evaluation of the impact of these legislative changes showed that the provisions were having the desired effect.

Participation between elections

While preparing Sweden's National Action Plan for Employment 2003, which is a part of the EU's employment strategy, the Government entered into a dialogue with representatives of stakeholder groups and other grassroots organisations with a view to strengthening the involvement of relevant actors and making the employment strategy more effective.

5.8 The national minorities

Ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious minorities have special rights under international law. These aim first and foremost to protect minority languages and cultures but also relate to the right of minority peoples to play an effective part in public affairs. The various rights are enshrined in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, both of which Sweden has ratified. One of the goals of Swedish minorities policy is to give national minorities a greater say in public decision-making. From the viewpoint of democracy policy as well, it is important to ensure that national minorities play an effective part in the political process. Insofar as these minorities are not allowed enough scope in the country's political discourse, special forms of political dialogue may be needed. One example of such an alternative is the council on Roma issues set up at the Government Offices in 2002, with representatives of Roma groups and organisations in Sweden among its members (see section 4.1.3 for an account of different channels of influence at national level).

The Sami are one of Sweden's national minorities. However, they are also an indigenous people and therefore the subject of a separate Sami policy. Their right to have a say in political matters affecting them as a group is expressed through the Sami Parliament (*Sametinget*), founded in 1993. Its members are chosen by general election. In 2002, the Sami Committee presented a report entitled *The Role of the Sami Parliament in the Swedish Democratic System (Sametingets roll i det svenska folkstyret, SOU 2002:77)*. The report sets out proposals under which the organisation and working methods of the Sami Parliament are defined more closely. The committee's proposals on the transfer of official powers of authority and the organisation of the Sami Parliament are to be dealt with in a bill which the Government plans to put before the Riksdag

during its current term of office. In March this year, the Government presented a bill, Amendments to the Sami Parliament Act (1992:1433), Etc. (*Ändringar i Sametingslagen (1992:1433) m.m., prop. 2003/04:86*) dealing with electoral procedure in the Sami Parliament.

5.9 Conclusions: follow-up of implementation and goal achievement

There are a number of indications that progress is being made in the search for political equality in Sweden. The gaps between women and men in terms of political activity, for instance, are narrowing. This is due both to the fact that participation has increased at a faster rate among women than among men and to the fact that their participation has declined less than that of men. In the country's elected assemblies, the proportion of women, young adults and people from foreign backgrounds has increased. These three groups, people with disabilities and the elderly are still under-represented, however, among Sweden's elected representatives. One thing all under-represented groups have in common is that their representation diminishes the further up they move in the political hierarchy. Political participation in what are termed non-traditional channels of influence continues to rise. Conversely, involvement in traditional forms of participation continues to decline in the population as a whole. A particularly disturbing development in this respect is the apparent decline in participation among the young. Discrepancies in citizen participation due to structural discrimination are unacceptable; all citizens must have the right and opportunity to take part in the political process.

Thus there is still a need for active measures that enable citizens to take part in the political process on more equal terms. Enhancing the participation of under-represented groups between elections and strengthening them in their capacity as elected representatives are two principal aims. In the future, different types of action will be required, as the work currently under way to strengthen the power and influence of individual categories is at different stages of development. In the case of certain groups – such as children, young people, people with disabilities and the elderly – there is a need for practical measures to further improve their chances of exercising due political influence. In order to strengthen current efforts to reduce the under-representation of women and people from foreign backgrounds in the political process, further information is needed concerning the obstacles that exclude them from political life. Official sources such as the Government Commission of Inquiry on the Political Integration of Immigrants, currently in progress, and the inquiry set up to review structural discrimination due to ethnic or religious affiliation can provide additional information in this respect.

6. (Not translated)

7. (Not translated)

8. The future direction of democracy policy

The following is the second part of the communication (Chapters 8-12), concerning the future direction of the Swedish Government's democracy policies.

8.1 Human rights and democracy – a mutual dependence

The Government's assessment: Democracy is predicated on the realisation of human rights. Human rights, for their part, assume the presence of democratic governance and are best served by a democracy based on broad citizen participation. Democracy policy should therefore encompass efforts to bring about greater participation on more equal terms and efforts to promote human rights.

The Government's continuing work in the field of human rights will be described in a new plan of action which will be the subject of a separate communication.

Reasons for the Government's assessment: Human rights are an expression of the most fundamental values of our society. These values are internationally acknowledged and enshrined in binding international documents. In ratifying the various conventions on human rights, Sweden and the other countries of the international community have committed themselves to maintaining a system of democratic governance. Human rights also define some of the basic parameters for democratic governance. They presuppose regular, free and fair elections in full confidence, and the right of all to take part in the political process. Other civil and political rights, such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association, are also closely linked to democratic governance. Over the years, the international community has become increasingly convinced that human rights are indivisible. This means that economic, social and cultural rights are as important as civil and political rights, and that the various rights interact and are mutually supportive. People who are socially, economically or culturally marginalised are usually less able to claim their civil and political rights. Social and economic injustices lead to inequality in political participation

and to political alienation. Realisation of human rights is crucial to people's chances of assuming control of their own lives – to empowerment. Democracy is best served when human rights are protected and strengthened.

At the same time, broad citizen participation in an efficient democratic system is essential to the task of protecting and promoting human rights. Political participation offers people a means of exercising influence and bringing about change, whether in their own situation or in the situation of others. The labour movement, for example, has frequently shown how people in a weaker economic and social position can bring about social change by joining forces. People who participate and become politically active are also better placed to react should a fundamental right be called into question, threatened or violated. Moreover, democratic discourse is the best environment in which to weigh all the various – sometimes conflicting – human rights against one another.

The interdependence of human rights and political participation means that future democracy policy should embrace both efforts to facilitate and encourage participation and efforts to promote human rights. Government action in these areas will be based on the goals outlined in the democracy bill and in the communication, A National Plan of Action for Human Rights (*En nationell handlingsplan för de mänskliga rättigheterna*, skr. 2001/02:83). The human rights goals are set out in section 7.2.1. (*Not translated*) That section also includes a summarised account of some of the measures taken so far in the field of human rights. The Government's continuing work in this area will be described in a new plan of action which will be the subject of a separate communication.

8.2 Basic policy considerations and some priority issues

Summary: Future democracy policy in Sweden, in seeking to facilitate and encourage citizen participation, will have three fundamental aims: to strengthen the basic conditions for participation, to eliminate obstacles to participation, and to create opportunities for greater participation on more equal terms. In its continuing work in this area, the Government intends to place still greater emphasis on the importance of political participation between elections and the need to view citizen participation from a civil rights perspective. It will also seek to clarify the importance of the additional level of political influence that EU membership represents.

Future policy in pursuit of the participation goals

As noted in the introduction to the present communication, the Riksdag has, in accordance with the Government's proposals in the democracy bill, adopted four long-term goals for the achievement of greater and more equal participation. The second part of the communication (Chapters 8-12) sets out the future direction of government policy in pursuit of these goals.

The democracy bill lays down three policy premises. The first is the importance of *strengthening conditions* for participation. The second is the need to *eliminate obstacles* to participation and active citizen involvement. The third is the importance *measures that create opportunities* for participation in various forms. The account of the future direction of Swedish democracy policy set out in the following chapters will be based on these three points.

A number of policy positions adopted by the Government on the basis of conclusions reached in the first part of the present communication are presented below. There will also be a short description of relevant undertakings currently in progress and of some new initiatives. This is preceded by a discussion of three priority issues which in the Government's view require greater emphasis in future policies.

Participation between elections

Coordinated efforts to encourage citizen participation between elections launched during the Government's previous term of office should be given further priority. There must be more and qualitatively superior channels of influence and opportunities for citizens to make themselves heard. People must be able to feel there are channels through which they can exercise influence, and they must find it worthwhile to make use of them. The Government and the Riksdag can provide support by introducing legislative changes and incentives, but considerable responsibility in this area rests with municipal and county councils and the country's political parties. The ability of the latter to respond adequately to the demands and wishes of the people will be decisive. If people feel they can take part in and influence the political process between elections, they are more likely to use their vote on election day. Thus there is a clear link between the degree of citizen participation between elections and participation in the elections themselves. Voter turnout, therefore, may be seen as a useful gauge of the extent to which people feel they have access to power and are able to take an active part in the democratic process. Consequently, policy should consist of a combination of measures *between* elections and selected measures *in the run-up to* elections.

A rights perspective

Efforts to facilitate and encourage citizen participation must be informed by a rights perspective. This means that their starting point must be the individual citizen. Each individual is of equal worth and it is a problem if someone is excluded or otherwise prevented from taking part. It is particularly serious if someone is prevented from participating in political life or refrains from doing so for an undue length of time. To adopt a rights perspective is to declare that it is not the duty of central government alone to ensure that people are able to take part in elections and become elected representatives. Adoption of such a perspective also means that central government must to a certain extent take action to

encourage participation among individuals who are usually excluded or exclude themselves from political life.

A rights perspective further means that the Government must base its priorities on human rights when choosing between different courses of action in pursuit of greater participation. The human rights principle enjoins the state to combat segregation and marginalisation, to encourage the active political participation of all sections of the community, and in particular to safeguard the language, culture and political influence of national minorities. The powerlessness felt by many people today is a sign that their rights are not being adequately respected. When human rights are fully respected, people have a greater chance of assuming control of their own lives – of turning powerlessness into empowerment.

A rights perspective brings to the fore the important principle of equal treatment. This is central to the task of facilitating and boosting participation, emphasising as it does the equal right of all to take part and the duty of central government to ensure that this right is universally recognised and respected. It is important, therefore, to introduce measures that focus on people who are socially, economically and culturally disadvantaged, and to develop special instruments designed to provide these people with the means to participate. Thus in certain cases, equal rights may require people to be treated differently.

Political influence at different levels

Efforts to promote greater citizen participation should take into account the fact that present-day Sweden is a multi-layered democracy in which citizens have a number of different channels of political influence at their disposal – the local, regional, national and European arenas. This is emphasised in the democracy bill and becomes an increasingly important factor as cooperation in the EU broadens and deepens. The European level should be accorded as natural a role in Swedish democracy and in the political debate as the local, regional and national levels. The political decisions taken by the EU are ones that Sweden has been able to influence and to which Sweden, via its membership of the Union, has given its support. In addition, all citizens are able to exercise a direct political influence themselves, e.g. by using their vote in the elections to the European Parliament. Furthermore, the new draft treaty that member states are working on should, if adopted, give individual citizens a better chance of influencing EU policies. A fourth level is that of international cooperation outside the EU. This, however, differs in a number of respects from the other three political levels, particularly in that it lacks directly elected decision-making bodies.

9. Prospects for greater and more equal participation

Researchers in the social science field often use the term *political resources* to describe what people need to have a real prospect of taking part in the political process and influencing the decisions affecting their everyday lives. The political resources most commonly referred to are *physical capital*, that is available time, money and information technology, *human capital*, i.e. an understanding of how the political system works, and *social capital* – contacts and networks that may be used for political purposes.

Despite decades of income distribution policy and comprehensive reform in the welfare sector, access to political resources is still unequally distributed in the Swedish population, as can be seen from the first part of this communication. For example, highly qualified people, high-wage earners or people born in Sweden have more political resources at their disposal than individuals who are low-qualified, low-wage earners or came to Sweden as immigrants. The former also take a more active part in the political process, as a result of which their interests and needs have a greater impact. One of the principal tasks of democracy policy, therefore, is to seek a fairer distribution of political resources as a means of strengthening prospects for greater and more equal citizen participation.

The Government's assessment: Access to information, knowledge and expertise about the political system and how the community works is crucial to citizen empowerment, i.e. to the task of enabling citizens to gain control of their own everyday lives and circumstances. Schools, the media and adult education are important sources of knowledge and information in this respect. Language is a decisive factor in determining the extent to which people can acquire information and improve their knowledge. In communicating with the country's citizens, therefore, representatives of the political system and of the public authorities should pay due regard to the diversity of people's language environments and how this affects their prospects and capabilities.

Reasons for the Government's assessment

General considerations

Access to human capital in the form of information and knowledge about the political system is one of the foremost political resources available to a citizen. The ability of citizens, e.g. voters, to make informed choices is crucial to the legitimacy of the system as a whole. In recent decades, there has been an explosive increase in the flow of information in Swedish society. From a democratic viewpoint, the broad availability of information is largely a favourable development, as it enables individual citizens to search for the information they need in order to understand and adopt a position on what is taking place around them. The Internet is a source of knowledge that has revolutionised people's chances of acquiring information both about the political system in the country and about individual issues. Human capital is more than just access to information. In order to keep up with the flood of news and information that engulfs us, we must be able to evaluate and analyse it. This presupposes a grasp of the entire structure of democratic society – of both the political system and of other spheres of influence, such as the business world and the media.

Schools

Schools have a fundamental responsibility for disseminating knowledge and information about Sweden's democratic system, a task that is clearly defined and regulated in the policy documents adopted by the Government and the Riksdag. In their teaching, Swedish schools are required to familiarise pupils with their rights and obligations as citizens of a democratic society. The national curriculum for compulsory schools states that by the end of their ninth school year pupils must have acquired an understanding of the fundamental concepts and characteristics of a democratic society and be capable of applying democratic principles to everyday life situations.

As noted in the first part of the present communication, the Government has called for compulsory school syllabuses to be revised so as to better reflect the importance of understanding how society functions at different levels. One proposal currently being processed at the

Government Offices is that the National Agency for Education be instructed to review the prospects for altering syllabuses for social subjects at all educational levels where such syllabuses apply. The importance of providing pupils with a grasp of local democracy should in future be emphasised. This would include giving them a closer understanding of both rules and processes and of how they as pupils or citizens can take an active part in the practice of local democracy. In the promotion of knowledge and understanding of the democratic system among children and young people, study visits and other communications between schools and democratic institutions can play an important role.

Adult education

Another important forum for the acquisition and exchange of knowledge and information about the democratic system is adult education. In 2001, the Government set up a committee of inquiry to review the state of adult education in Sweden (*dir. 2001:74*). A final report is due in March 2004. In addition to appointing the committee, the Government commissioned the Swedish National Council of Adult Education (*Folkbildningsrådet*) to report on the views of the adult education sector regarding its future role and tasks. This report is also to be presented in March 2004.

To further extend the scope of inquiry, and to learn more about the ability of adult education institutions to cater for all individuals, especially younger citizens, the Government set up a second committee of inquiry in March 2003, to examine adult education from a non-participant viewpoint (*dir. 2003:6*). This committee, which is due to submit its report in May 2004, was instructed to determine which groups do not have recourse to adult education and the extent to which these groups have needs that adult education could meet.

The media

As noted in section 7.3, the media have an important role to play as channels of information and knowledge, not least in their educational capacity. Programming in public-service radio and TV is required to reflect educational ambitions. To strengthen this dimension in broadcasting, programming companies have been assigned to jointly develop a plan for closer cooperation on such issues. One of the tasks of the committee of inquiry into public-service radio and TV (*Utredningen om radio och TV i allmänhetens tjänst, Ku 2003:1, dir. 2003:119*) is to analyse how programming companies are to cope with and discharge their educational responsibilities. Local non-commercial cable TV and community radio, which operate independently of public-service radio and TV and the commercial media, are also important actors from a democratic standpoint. These radio and TV stations are run by immigrant associations, religious communities, student associations and others. Local programmes afford opportunities to present opinions, conduct debates and disseminate information about matters that are seldom dealt with in the major media. An analytical study focusing on the future

prospects of these media categories is currently under way at the Ministry of Culture. Skr. 2003/04:110

The importance of language

Language is crucial to the individual's chances of absorbing information and thus of taking part in and influencing the political process. In communicating with the country's citizens, therefore, those who represent the public authorities and the political system – both elected representatives and administrative officials – should pay due regard to the diversity of people's language environments and the way in which this affects their prospects and capabilities. Whether providing news bulletins or in-depth programmes, the media must also consider the variations in language skills among the general population, and the country's linguistic minorities. The committee assigned to review public-service radio and TV in Sweden has also been instructed to examine whether the demands currently imposed on programming companies are sufficient to meet the needs of linguistic and ethnic minorities in terms of accessibility. The committee is to make a particular point of analysing the way in which companies account for their efforts in this area.

In its democracy bill and elsewhere, the Government has previously underlined the importance of providing relevant community information to newly arrived immigrants. As noted earlier in the present communication, this issue was recently the subject of an inquiry by the Committee on Refugee Reception and Introduction (*Utredningen om flyktingmottagande och introduktion*) in the report, Settling in Sweden, and by the Committee on Swedish Language Tuition For Immigrants (*Utredningen om svenska för invandrare*) in the report Broader Opportunities and the Way Forward. The Government intends to submit a report to the Riksdag on this matter.

The government website

In the spring of 2004, a new version of the Swedish Government website is to be launched, both in Swedish at www.regeringen.se and in English at www.sweden.gov.se. The new website will include basic information about the democratic system in Sweden and a broader subject section on democracy and human rights. The principal target groups are the media, public authorities, other public institutions, schools and the general public.

9.2 Citizen involvement in community concerns

A robust democracy presupposes the desire and ability to influence not only the decisions affecting their everyday lives but also the development of society in general. A high level of citizen involvement in community concerns helps bring about a stronger and socially more cohesive society. The Government's active policy support for popular movements and community groups in recent years has been instrumental in facilitating

and promoting citizen involvement. There is a strong link in this respect between democracy policy and policy on organised community activity. Skr. 2003/04:110

9.2.1 Political parties and other community-based organisations

The Government's assessment: Political parties in Sweden bear a major responsibility for turning the desire of citizens to play an active part and exercise influence to good account, and for channelling this desire in the right direction. In a representative democracy, the legitimacy of the parties is based on their ability to respond adequately to citizen demands, wishes and expectations as regards the forms and substance of political activity. Other community-based organisations also represent an important participatory arena.

Reasons for the Government's assessment: Involvement in community concerns is channelled in different ways and finds different forms of expression. One of the most important forms is party political activity. Like many other non-governmental organisations in Sweden, political parties have experienced a decline both in membership and in the proportion of active members in recent years. This development has been described in some detail in the first part of this communication. This trend is causing concern as the representative system is based on the principle that political parties nominate those who are to stand as candidates at elections. The parties both *are* the citizens and are required to *represent* the citizens. In a representative democracy, therefore, the legitimacy of the parties is based on their ability to respond adequately to citizen demands, wishes and expectations as regards the forms and substance of political activity. The parties' methods and procedures must be such that all who wish to become politically active are able to do so and feel that their commitment is meaningful.

Another important task is to keep alive the current discussion on the role of party activists and elected representatives in relation to other citizens. As noted earlier, the Government met the secretaries of the various parliamentary parties in December 2003 at a small research seminar followed by a discussion at which one of the issues related to special funding for voter mobilisation purposes prior to elections. The Government welcomes further discussion with the parliamentary parties on issues relating to their role in democratic society.

Other community-based organisations, too, ranging over the entire spectrum of popular movements, NGOs and local associations, are an important means of channelling the desire of citizens to participate. Accordingly, as mentioned in section 4.3.4, an inquiry is to review government policy on organised community activity, beginning its work during the present term of office. One of its tasks will be to examine how policy in this field affects the way people organise – in grass-roots organisations, voluntary associations and, in particular, the sports movement, considered to be Sweden's largest single organised community activity, with over three million members. To strengthen activities for children and young people in the sports sector, the Government has initiated a programme entitled Handshake (*Handslaget*),

under which SEK 1,000 million is to be made available to the sports movement over a four-year period. This support is conditional upon the movement taking steps to develop its activities in such a way that they attract children and young people who do not currently take part in sports.

9.2.2 New organisations

The Government's assessment: Efforts to promote active citizen interest in community concerns should be based on an awareness that the ways people organise and channel their involvement tend to change as society changes. Further knowledge is needed about the new forms of community activism that have emerged in recent decades. One reason for acquiring this knowledge is to enable an assessment of whether present conditions and funding opportunities correspond to the way these new groups operate.

Reasons for the Government's assessment: As mentioned earlier, organised community activity in Sweden is generally on the decline in terms of membership. However, the trend is not wholly unequivocal. Local development groups show a rise in membership. There are also signs of an increase in individual efforts to exercise political influence. An example of this type of action is politically motivated consumption, i.e. making political or ethical choices when purchasing goods or services. This suggests that traditional forms of organised community activity are no longer as natural a channel for citizen involvement as they used to be, and that people are instead turning to other channels and other types of action.

Efforts to promote active citizen interest in community concerns should be based on an awareness that the ways people organise and channel their involvement tend to change as society changes. It is probable, for instance, that increased geographical mobility affects people's involvement. In the Government's view there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the new organisations and modes of action in which modern citizens' community concerns are finding expression. Further data is required, partly because the Government must assess whether present conditions and funding opportunities correspond to the way these new movements operate. As mentioned in the first part of this communication, the Government intends to commission an institution of higher education to conduct a survey of new community-based organisations and other forms of action in the voluntary sector. In addition, the Ministry of Justice plans to commission a survey of voluntary work in and outside non-governmental organisations. The principal aim of this inquiry will be to study shifts in voluntary activity over time and to analyse patterns of change in this area.

9.2.3 Public meeting places and other public spaces

The Government's assessment: The existence of public spaces for meetings, discussion and debate is conducive to citizen involvement in community concerns. The importance of public meeting places for local democracy was recently the subject of an inquiry, and the Government intends to report back to the Riksdag on the matter.

An in-depth analysis is needed, however, to determine both the role of other public spaces in democratic society and how fundamental democratic values can best be upheld in an increasingly commercialised public environment. The messages disseminated in public spaces should be marked by respect for these values to avoid violating people's rights or integrity.

The Government views the growing sexualisation of public space as a very serious matter and is currently considering ways and means of countering this trend.

Reasons for the Government's assessment: A society emphasising broad citizen participation on equal terms must offer physical public places and arenas where people can converse, discuss and debate. These represent the infrastructure of democratic society, and thus of the freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom to demonstrate. In practical terms, it is a question of popular access to open streets, squares and other forums, public cultural institutions and public meeting places. The growing commercialisation and privatisation of buildings and other property in the 1990s has reduced the availability of such communal space. This development has previously been discussed in a government communication, *Architecture and Design in Sweden (Arkitektur, form och design, skr. 2002/03:129)*. In many parts of the country, natural forums for political meetings and debates have been replaced by built-in gallerias and shopping centres controlled by entrepreneurs or other private players. Potentially, this may weaken the democratic infrastructure by reducing opportunities for citizens to meet and exercise their power and influence.

In view of this, the importance of public meeting places needs to be elucidated. Such places are vital to a democracy as they are open to all, free from commercial interests and tend to be run by stakeholders who have no profit motives. As noted in section 4.3.3, the Government is currently preparing proposals based on the report of a committee of inquiry set up to examine and comment on issues arising in connection with public meeting places (*SOU 2003:118*). The report is currently being circulated for comment and the Government intends to report back to the Riksdag on the matter.

The exposure of citizens to commercial messages is another aspect of the role of public space in a democracy. Today's information society offers virtually unlimited opportunities for various actors to present and disseminate messages targeting citizens. One result of this development is that our public space has increasingly come to be dominated by various forms of marketing and advertising. In the Government's view,

this is a crucial issue that ultimately concerns democracy. It concerns the question of what role public space plays in democratic society and how to strike a balance between, on the one hand, the principles of press freedom and freedom of expression enshrined in the Constitution, and, on the other, the right of citizens to escape exposure to commercial pressures in certain environments. The messages disseminated in public space should be marked by respect for fundamental democratic values in order to avoid violating people's rights or integrity. Issues relating to the importance of public space for democracy are currently a subject of in-depth analysis in the Government Offices, *inter alia* by a working group on architecture and design.

One aspect the Government is particularly keen to draw attention to is the growing sexualisation of public space, a development it views with considerable concern. The subordination of women is intensifying and women are being sexualised in the media and in advertising. This not only constitutes abuse in itself but also to a great extent perpetuates discrimination. The Government is currently considering what corrective action to take in this area.

The Government's assessment: Statutes and other regulations provide the framework governing the conditions for citizen empowerment, public access and accountability. To adapt to the changes taking place in society, this framework should be continuously reviewed and elaborated to ensure that empowerment, public access and accountability remain attainable goals.

Reasons for the Government's assessment: One of the prime arguments in favour of representative democracy is that it gives citizens the right to demand accountability. The representatives that voters elect can be held responsible at the next elections for their actions while in power, and either be returned to office or forced to step down. This confers legitimacy on the democratic form of governance.

If citizens are to keep track of how their elected representatives perform, and are thus genuinely able to call them to account, there must be a high degree of transparency. In other words, citizens must be allowed insight into the dealings of public authorities and public institutions. The Government's democracy bill emphasises the importance of ensuring satisfactory public access.

Statutes and other regulations provide the legislative and regulatory framework governing the conditions for citizen empowerment, public access and accountability. The statutes set out the democratic ground rules. National and EU audits, etc., enable citizens to check whether the authorities are acting in accordance with the decisions reached. At local level, elected auditors scrutinise the activities of municipal and county councils.

As economic, demographic and technological changes take place in society, changes are also required in the aforementioned legislative and regulatory framework. At the same time, people's needs and patterns of behaviour alter, which may lead to new demands and expectations vis-à-vis political institutions.

In light of the above, the framework should be continuously reviewed and elaborated to ensure that the goals of empowerment, public access and accountability continue to be attainable.

Sweden's present Instrument of Government was adopted in 1974. In light of the new challenges facing democracy as a result of rapid and far-reaching changes in society, the Prime Minister announced in his Statement of Government Policy to the 2003–2004 Riksdag session that this key constitutional document was to be reviewed. The Government plans to hold discussions with the parliamentary parties on the question of what issues such a review should encompass.

As noted in previous chapters, Sweden has taken part via its government and parliamentary representatives in the work of drafting a new constitutional treaty for the EU. In the Government's view, presented in greater detail in section 7.6.2, the draft convention encourages citizen empowerment and greater public access in a number of areas, and facilitates accountability. During the current intergovernmental conference, the Government intends to continue

pressing for a final wording of the treaty that largely corresponds in these particular respects to the convention proposals. Skr. 2003/04:110

Secondary law in the EU, i.e. regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations and opinions made by the Union's institutions in accordance with the treaties is constantly being revised. Together with the EU treaty, it governs the work of the institutions. By actively seeking rules and interpretations that facilitate public access, the Government is also striving at this level to improve prospects for a more open and democratic EU. The initiatives taken by the Government to strengthen freedom of expression among EU employees under the Staff Regulations of Officials, and efforts to give the rules on public access to official documents as transparency-oriented an interpretation as possible, are two examples of work in this area.

Where audits are concerned, as noted previously, a review of the requirements and *modus operandi* of municipal auditing (*dir. 2003:97*) is currently under way.

10. Obstacles to greater, more equal participation

10.1 Structural obstacles to the exercise of power and influence

The Government's assessment: In a democracy in which all citizens have the statutory right to equal treatment, the presence of structural discrimination is unacceptable. Bringing to light and combating structural obstacles that prevent different individuals from taking part in the political process – and thus exercising power and influence – will therefore be a matter of priority in the Government's continuing work in the democracy field.

The Government plans to commission the Discrimination Ombudsman and the National Agency for Special Educational Support to specifically seek improvements in opportunities for people with disabilities to take part in the political process. This endeavour is to be based on the work of the National Accessibility Centre and the work under way to develop professional skills relating to the treatment of people with disabilities. The Government is to allocate special funding for this purpose.

In addition, once the inquiry into structural discrimination has been completed, the need to review other grounds for discrimination should be considered. Consideration should also be given to the question of how the Discrimination Ombudsman and the Ombudsman against Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation could be brought into the fight against structural discrimination in political life.

Reasons for the Government's assessment

General considerations

In a democratic society, each individual is deemed to be of equal worth and entitled to equal treatment. The right to equal treatment is enshrined in the Swedish Constitution, which states that the public institutions "shall combat discrimination of persons on grounds of gender, colour, national or ethnic origin, linguistic or religious affiliation, functional disability, sexual orientation, age or other circumstance affecting the private person". To guarantee people the equal treatment that is their right, it may sometimes be necessary to take affirmative action to strengthen individuals who would otherwise be treated unfavourably in relation to others.

The right to equal treatment is a crucial aspect of democracy policy as it emphasises the right of all to take part in political life and requires central government to work actively to assure citizens of this right.

As noted in the first part of the communication, social representativity is unevenly distributed in the current political process in Sweden. This scenario is confirmed by a number of studies showing that many people feel they do not enjoy the same opportunities as others when seeking to take part in this process (see for instance the series of reports by the Swedish Integration Board entitled *Outside Democracy? [Utanför*

demokratin?]). This may be due to the presence of structural obstacles, such as institutional conditions, organisational forms or working methods that in practice exclude certain individuals. Attitudes may also be a factor. Structural obstacles may be visible or covert, intended or unintended. As noted in the first part of the communication, the studies by the Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Democracy, reported in *Taking Part for Real: Democratic Development in Municipal and County Councils*, showed that there were individuals in Sweden whose power and influence were curtailed by physical and practical obstacles such as inaccessible meeting venues for people in wheelchairs or, in the case of people with impaired hearing, a lack of technical aids.

On the need for greater know-how and new initiatives

Bringing to light and combating structural discrimination that affects the participation of various individuals – and thus their exercise of power and influence – is a priority issue in the Government's continuing work in the democracy field. The Government now has a relatively clear picture of the distribution of power among different sections of the population in Sweden, but lacks a proper understanding in certain respects of why power is unevenly distributed. To promote better understanding of the reasons for this imbalance in the case of people from foreign backgrounds, the Government has launched a number of inquiries. These have been described in greater detail in the first part of this communication. They include the Government Commission of Inquiry on the Political Integration of Immigrants (*dir. 2000:57, dir. 2001:111*) and the Committee of Inquiry into Structural Discrimination on Ethnic or Religious Grounds (*dir. 2003:18*).

The Government has observed, however, that its knowledge is incomplete as regards the obstacles that various sections of the population encounter when seeking to exercise power and influence. There is no clear-cut picture, for instance, of the extent to which women are obstructed in the political process. This means that in-depth analysis will be required (see also section 10.2, Women's and men's power). Nor is it known whether elected representatives who are homosexual encounter discrimination in their political activities as a result of their sexual orientation. The task of learning more about why the distribution of power and influence is unevenly distributed among certain sections of the Swedish population must continue and be broadened in scope. When the Committee of Inquiry into Structural Discrimination on Ethnic or Religious Grounds has completed its work in March 2005, the need for similar inquiries into other grounds for discrimination should be considered. Consideration should also be given to the question of how the Discrimination Ombudsman and the Ombudsman against Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation can be brought into the fight against structural discrimination in political life.

The Government plans to assign the Discrimination Ombudsman and the National Agency for Special Educational Support to specifically seek improvements in opportunities for people with disabilities to take part in the political process. This endeavour is to be based on the work of the National Accessibility Centre and the work under way to develop

professional skills relating to the treatment of people with disabilities. Skr. 2003/04:110
The Government is to allocate special funding for this purpose.

The Government has also initiated exchanges of know-how and experience between the Government Offices, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the Federation of County Councils. These two bodies recently launched a project focused on obstacles and opportunities for foreign-born citizens in the political process. They also plan to issue a joint publication, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, on obstacles to power and influence. This will be distributed to administrative officials and elected representatives in an effort to further understanding of the obstacles and opportunities people from different backgrounds encounter when seeking to take part in the political process.

10.2 Women's and men's power

The Government's assessment: The fact that due to the prevailing gender-based power structure in society, women and men do not enjoy the same rights and the same opportunities to exercise power and influence is a fundamental democratic problem and an infringement of the statutory right to equal treatment. Democracy policy should therefore proceed from a feminist analysis of the relations and functioning of representative democracy.

Further analysis is needed of why men are over-represented in the upper echelons of public and business life. The Government is planning to initiate a preliminary study into the prospects for providing regular statistics in cohesive form on the distribution of power between women and men in various sectors of Swedish society.

Reasons for the Government's assessment

A feminist analysis of the preconditions for and functioning of democracy

As can be seen from the first part of the communication, years of effort to achieve a balance between female and male representatives in directly elected decision-making bodies has put Sweden among the world leaders in this respect. When discussing the democratic system, however, it is important not to focus on directly elected assemblies alone. At local government level, the proportion of women declines the higher up they move in the political hierarchy.

The active efforts being made in the Government Offices to achieve a gender balance among members of state boards and committees have yielded results. Seats on both national and regional government boards are now more or less evenly distributed between women and men.

Outside the political sphere – in the business community, for example – progress is slower, although in recent years there has been a slight decline in male over-representation at executive level. The educational sector is another area with a gender bias, particularly among the country's professors but also to some extent at lower levels in the academic system. Efforts to increase the proportion of women in decision-making bodies are crucial to democratic progress and to the fulfilment of the Government's principal gender policy objective. This is

for women and men to share the same opportunities, rights and opportunities in all areas of life. Representation is one of the five main areas of focus in the Government's latest communication on gender policy, The Swedish Government's National Action Plan for Gender Equality (*Jämt och ständigt – Regeringens jämställdhetspolitik med handlingsplan för mandatperioden (skr. 2002/03:140)*).

We know today that the gender-based power structure limits opportunities for both women and men to develop as individuals, and also that it limits democracy and impedes growth as it fails to make full use of women's and men's skills and resources. Awareness of the underlying mechanisms that perpetuate this power structure increased in the 1990s. Value patterns and priorities, definitions of skill and competence, structuring and planning in working life are all areas in which the gender-based power structure affects women's and men's opportunities to develop.

One issue to which the Government and others have drawn attention is the relationship between administrative officials and elected representatives at municipal and county council level. New operational and management models have been introduced in recent years as a result of which greater powers of authority have devolved on senior officials. As the proportion of women in this group in both municipal administrations and public utilities is considerably lower than in political assemblies, this transfer of power has led to a decline in the actual power and influence exercised by women. From a democratic viewpoint, a proper gender balance is vital in all public decision-making bodies and other bodies in society where *de facto* decisions are taken. As a result of the gender roles and gender inequalities that still characterise Swedish society, women and men often have different experiences of life. Both sexes, therefore, must be part of the decision-making process. In a wider perspective, an even gender balance at the decision-making stage is essential as women and men are, after all, members of the same human species.

The Government plans to coordinate and integrate gender policy and democracy policy to a greater extent in the future. An important basis for this endeavour should be the findings of the committee recently appointed to review the future course and organisation of gender policy in Sweden (*dir. 2004:18*). Democracy policy should include a feminist analysis of the relations and *modus operandi* of representative democracy. This means that the existence of a gender system in which women as a group are subordinate to men must be acknowledged as a starting point. Equality-promoting measures based on qualitative analyses of the political system and of our democratic institutions will play a prominent part in future work in this area. Such measures will be introduced as part of the gender mainstreaming effort that began at the Government Offices in the mid-1990s. Qualitative analyses need to be supplemented by statistics on the relative strength of women and men in public decision-making and in administrative structures. The report on elected representatives described in the first part of the communication is an example of relevant and applicable statistics. Researchers have noted, however, that further study and better supporting data are required for such purposes as determining why women's representation among

elected representatives at municipal level varies from place to place and which mechanisms apply within the political parties when chairs are to be appointed. In order to explain over-representation among men, analyses will be needed that take account of sex, age, foreign background and other factors. In many fields, too, there is a lack of basic data concerning women's and men's representation. The Government is planning to initiate a preliminary study into the prospects for providing regular statistics in coherent form on the distribution of power between women and men in various sectors of Swedish society. The study will include a survey of available statistics on the distribution of women and men in positions of power, and an analysis of the need for new statistics to be produced in this area.

10.3 Threats to democracy

The Government's assessment: The Government views the presence of threats and violence directed at the country's democratic institutions as a matter of grave concern. Accordingly, it will shortly be appointing a committee to consider ways of countering threats and violence against elected representatives. The Government will also be discussing with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, the Federation of Swedish County Councils and other bodies how to prevent threats and violence against administrative officials. It is of the utmost importance that the political parties also assume their share of responsibility and take appropriate action in this matter.

The fact that parties with a xenophobic, racist or homophobic message are increasing their representation in our elected assemblies is a cause for concern. The arguments of the anti-democratic movements in Sweden are offensive to others and must never be allowed to go unchallenged. The Government therefore welcomes the initiatives taken by multi-party networks to counter anti-democratic forces of various kinds.

Reasons for the Government's assessment

Countering threats and violence against elected representatives

The presence of violence and threats directed at democratic institutions and their representatives at national, regional and local level threatens democracy itself. In light of the threats that have been directed at elected representatives, the Government initiated a joint programme in 2001 bringing together central government representatives and representatives of municipal and county councils and relevant authorities (see section 3.2.4). In the Statement of Government Policy to the Riksdag session of 2003–2004, the Government declared that this work needed to be followed up. To this end, a committee will shortly be appointed to consider ways of countering threats and violence against elected representatives. Part of the committee's task should be to undertake a comprehensive analysis of threats and violence directed at elected representatives at national, regional and local level, identifying obstacles to efficient cooperation between public authorities, exchanging

information, knowledge and experience concerning threats and violence directed at elected representatives, and recommending action in this field.

As a part of the effort to counter threats and violence, an inquiry (*dir. 2003:132*) was launched on 23 October 2003 with the aim of surveying and analysing the regulations and procedures governing the protection of leading officials in the Swedish administration. The inquiry will also examine how the system of personal protection was applied in connection with the murder of minister for foreign affairs Anna Lindh. A final report will be submitted to the government in May 2004.

The Government intends to enter into discussions with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, the Federation of Swedish County Councils and other bodies aimed at devising ways of preventing threats and violence directed at administrative officials.

The Government takes a favourable view of the many joint efforts initiated by political parties to deal with the issue of threats and violence against political representatives. In the province of Östergötland, for instance, the Social Democrats, the Greens, the Moderate Party, the Liberals, the Christian Democrats, the Centre Party and the Left Party have all chosen to take part in a network against political violence in the region. It is of the utmost importance that the political parties assume their share of responsibility and take appropriate action. The Government welcomes further dialogue with the parliamentary parties in this matter.

Xenophobic parties and other anti-democratic forces

Anti-democratic forces continue to make themselves felt in Sweden. The fact that parties with a xenophobic, racist and/or homophobic message increased their representation in our democratic assemblies at the latest elections is a cause for concern. Following the elections of 2002, for example, the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna, SD*) held 50 seats on 30 of the country's municipal councils. The fact that a party operates within a formal democratic framework does not mean it has no anti-democratic aims. The arguments put forward by the anti-democratic movements are offensive to others and must never go unchallenged. The Government welcomes the efforts that have been made to create networks of elected representatives uniting across party boundaries to fight the xenophobia, racism and homophobia expressed by certain representatives of elected assemblies.

In recent years, the Government's Action Plan against Racism, Xenophobia, Homophobia and Discrimination (*Handlingsplan mot rasism, främlingsfientlighet, homofobi och diskriminering, skr. 2000/01:59*) has provided a solid basis for work in this area. The plan can also serve as a guide and inspiration to individual citizens or elected representatives wishing to become involved locally in the fight against anti-democratic forces. The Government is considering introducing its next action plan against racism, xenophobia, homophobia and discrimination during its present term of office.

11. Scope for greater, more equal participation

11.1 Conditions for elected representatives

The Government's assessment: As a system, representative democracy is predicated on the ability and willingness of citizens to undertake political appointments. It is also essential that all citizens enjoy the right and opportunity to do so. The Government intends to appoint a number of committees of inquiry to report on existing training opportunities for politically elected representatives and their access to modern information technology. A committee will also be appointed to examine the possibility of long-distance decision-making. During its term of office, the Government also intends to initiate exchanges of information, knowledge and experience with municipal and county councils.

Reasons for the Government's assessment

General considerations

In a democracy, every citizen is entitled to take part in and contribute to the development of the common society. Representative democracy also presupposes the existence of people willing to serve as elected representatives at some stage in their lives. The terms and conditions under which elected representatives carry out their assignments must therefore be as favourable as possible.

These conditions should help and encourage people from all backgrounds to take on political appointments. As the Government pointed out in its democracy bill, appointments must also be perceived as meaningful; they must offer appointees opportunities to exercise real influence. The growing tendency of recent years to delegate decision-making to administrative officials can be perceived as a weakening of political accountability.

During its previous term of office, the Government initiated a process aimed at improving conditions for elected representatives. This resulted in the incorporation of a number of specific proposals in the democracy bill, subsequently passed into law by the Riksdag. An account of some of these proposals and their implementation is set out in section 3.2. In its statement of policy to the current session of the Riksdag, the Government once again emphasised that more people must have an opportunity to take up a political appointment at some period in their lives, and declared that conditions for elected representatives must be overhauled.

Training, IT support, long-distance decision-making, etc.

According to the findings of the Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Democracy (see *SOU 2001:48*), newly elected representatives felt that the introductory training courses contributed significantly to their ability to carry out their political tasks. However, the committee noted that councils and political parties varied

considerably with regard to the presence and/or frequency of introductory training activities. According to the Government, it is essential that newly elected representatives be given the opportunity to learn about their rights and responsibilities and the conditions governing political decision-making. A sound basic introduction can also encourage and make it easier for young adults and people from foreign backgrounds – to cite two examples – to take on and carry out political appointments. Those who have served as elected representatives for a period should also be offered further training. The Government accordingly intends to initiate a survey of the extent and content of training programmes for elected representatives. As it declared in its statement of policy to the 2003–2004 Riksdag session, it also plans to increase external financial support to political parties to better enable them to fund schooling for newly elected political representatives in the parties' youth organisations.

Another important aspect of conditions for elected representatives is access to information technology. The final report of the Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Democracy (2001) also revealed that many representatives lack computers with Internet access – a tool which would greatly facilitate the work of preparing meetings, the collection and compiling of data and information, and dialogue with citizens. Although the Government is well aware of the rapid development taking place in terms of access to and use of information technology, it lacks up-to-date information in this area with respect to elected representatives. It therefore intends to commission a study of access to modern information technology and other administrative aids of potential use to representatives.

The committee also raised the question of long-distance decision-making in the course of its discussions on access to information technology. In light of recent technological development, particularly with regard to user security and protection when transmitting data, the committee considered that the feasibility of taking decisions at a distance should be looked into. The need for this and other capabilities is likely to increase as geographical mobility grows. The Government therefore intends to commission a committee of inquiry to consider the practical and other implications of long-distance decision-making. The committee will also be instructed to draw up legislative proposals as required.

Dialogue and exchanges of know-how and experience

As regards conditions for elected representatives, there are a number of issues – in addition to those already raised here – which urgently require discussion. One such concern is time. As stated in the first part of the present communication, there are clear indications that task concentration is on the rise. The local democracy committee's findings showed that many elected representatives feel their duties and assignments take up far too much time. This poses a problem in the Government's view as it could deter – or simply exclude – many citizens. Many who might otherwise consider taking up a political appointment could be forced to abandon the idea as they would be unable to put in the necessary time. Similarly, people who have political tasks or assignments could feel compelled to renounce them. The considerable time required to attend to

political appointments, etc. could conflict with the private lives of elected representatives, particularly those with full-time jobs and/or small children. It also means that representatives who carry out assignments or tasks in their free time will be increasingly less able to do so. The transformation in practice of 'free-time' politicians to part-time representatives tends to weaken the citizen's role in the local decision-making process, a development which could in turn widen the gap between elector and elected.

A large share of the responsibility for improving conditions for elected representatives rests with the political parties and the municipal and county councils. In December 2003, the Government opened discussions on this issue with the parliamentary parties. It also intends to initiate exchanges of information, knowledge and experience with municipal and county councils during its present term of office.

11.2 Channels of influence and forms of participation

The Government's assessment: Representative government is predicated on continual, effective dialogue between politically elected representatives and the citizens they represent. Lack of or inadequate dialogue can impair trust in politicians, indifference to the political process and/or social and political exclusion. More and better channels of influence and participation should therefore be created in order to keep the dialogue alive.

Reasons for the Government's assessment

General considerations

In a representative democracy, effective dialogue between elected representatives and their electors is crucial if the former are to correctly understand the latter's views and perform effectively as their delegate and spokesperson. It is vital that the discussion of the relationship between elector and elected be kept alive. If politicians represent, or are perceived to represent political institutions rather than the citizen, there is a danger that the gap between the two groups will widen. If, on the other hand, citizens feel that there are effective, meaningful channels of communication and opportunities for dialogue where they can influence their elected representatives, interest in participation will also grow. Thus it is very much a matter of getting across the message that participation is meaningful and of making it clear what forms of participation are available. It is also a question of the way in which these forms are presented and described. As mentioned earlier, opinion surveys by the National Board for Youth Affairs reported that many young people described themselves as uninterested in politics, but interested in taking part in and influencing the development of society. This, however, is precisely what 'being interested in politics' really means. It is also important to convey a realistic picture of what participation can actually achieve, i.e. ensure that all citizens are familiar with the ground rules of democracy. Democratic participation is not about getting one's own way

regardless. Respect for democratically taken decisions is fundamental, however much one may dislike or disagree with them. Skr. 2003/04:110

Future development

As reported in the earlier sections of this communication, various studies have indicated that interest in influencing policy-making and community development as a whole is considerable. Finding ways to harness involvement in community concerns without recourse to the traditional structures constitutes a major challenge for the future. The Government will accordingly continue its efforts to develop ways of facilitating dialogue between elected representatives and citizens between elections. As noted earlier, there is a general need to find out more about the channels that exist at the present time and how well they work. New forms of involvement can generate new channels and structures. However, these must be perceived as open and meaningful to those individuals who do not take part today. Some of the numerous and varied projects planned or currently under way are set out below.

Local level

The 'popular initiative' proposals set out in the Ministry of Justice memorandum, Consultation Process following a Popular Initiative, including Proposals on the Design of Popular Initiatives (*Ds 2004:4*), have been processed by the Government and circulated for comment. The memorandum proposed that municipal and county councils be required to organise a consultation if at least 10 per cent of municipality or county residents eligible to vote had tabled a motion in the assembly requesting a consultation and the said motion was passed by at least one third of the members assembled. A consultation is defined as a referendum, hearing or other public meeting, or electronic conference or forum to which views and comments are contributed. The Government will report back to the Riksdag in due course with its final assessment.

Discussions held by the Government Offices, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the Federation of Swedish County Councils on the dialogue between citizens and elected representatives will continue.

As part of the second phase of its metropolitan policy, the Government also intends to commission a survey of people's experience and observations regarding the 'bottom-up' approach, its implementation and its effect on the ability – in terms of available opportunities – of residents to take part in the democratic decision-making process. This survey and other evaluation and follow-up reports will be scrutinised by the special inquiry commissioned to evaluate reports, etc. compiled as part of ongoing work in connection with local development agreements. This will be accompanied by efforts to promote exchanges of knowledge and information at national and international level as part of the implementation of metropolitan policy. The second phase of policy implementation will also focus on incorporating knowledge and experience gained in local and central government from implementation of local development agreements.

The Swedish referral process (see section 4.3.1 and footnote 29) is to be further developed through innovative approaches now being tested in the Government Offices. Efforts – aimed at reaching new organisations and individual citizens – include further trials involving electronic consultation via the Internet and invitations to comment addressed to individuals citizens. The way in which the referral process is used in connection with EU-related matters is also being closely examined.

At national level, dialogue with the voluntary sector will continue within the framework established for the Popular Movement Forum. This will include seminars at national and regional level on specific issues relating to the role of and conditions for organised community activities. Interaction with the reference group for children and young people will be expanded into a forum for active debate and dialogue based on current issues of concern to children and young people. In its forthcoming youth policy bill, the Government will be proposing further measures to develop opportunities for young people to have a say in the policies and decisions affecting their lives.

Efforts to ensure that national minorities can exercise their right to influence the political process, and have the opportunities to do so, will continue. The Government aims to gradually increase self-determination for the Sami on a trial basis in areas where this is feasible and having regard to the findings of ongoing and recently concluded inquiries. Self-determination for the Sami people is at bottom a question of democracy and the rights of indigenous people; it should be seen in this context even though it is dealt with within the framework of Sami policy.

EU level

Work on the Convention on the Future of Europe, discussed in section 4.1.4, is one example of the Union's ability to act in an open, transparent manner and make use of technology to involve its citizens. The Commission continually develops modes of public consultation with citizens before drawing up new legislative proposals. Mention should also be made in this connection to the efforts of the Swedish EU 2004 Committee to promote closer dialogue with citizens on EU-related issues. The committee was responsible *inter alia* for organising activities in connection with matters relating to the future of the EU in all 21 counties as part of its outward-oriented project, the so-called Swedish EU Relay (*EU-stafetten*). Also worth mentioning is the Government's democracy campaign ahead of the 2004 election to the European Parliament. This was aimed at enhancing interest in and awareness of ways of participating in and influencing EU policy-making among young people aged 18–23.

Research

The Government intends to submit a research policy bill to the Riksdag during its present term of office. As mentioned in Chapter 6 below, the terms of reference of the Ministry of Justice Working Group on Research

Issues (*Arbetsgrupp för forskningsfrågor, C 1991:A*) will be extended. Skr. 2003/04:110
The group will be instructed to carry out a strategic analysis of the need for measures in the democracy policy sphere, of which research forms an important part.

Special measures in connection with the 2006 general election

In light of the continued decline in voter turnout referred to earlier, the favourable results achieved by the development project, Time for Democracy, and the successful implementation of the Government's metropolitan policy, the Government intends to launch a democracy initiative aimed at promoting higher voter turnout in the run-up to the 2006 general election. It plans to present a more detailed description of the campaign, including financing proposals, in its 2005 budget bill.

12. Our collective responsibility

The right and ability of all citizens to take part in the shaping and development of their society is fundamental to every democratic polity. It is accordingly the responsibility of the state (and local government authorities) to remove obstacles to, extend support and provide effective opportunities for, and follow up and examine the prevailing conditions and functioning of democracy. It should also be emphasised that responsibility for democracy's continued existence rests with each and every one of us. A democracy is not just about rights. Every citizen's personal responsibility to make full use of her or his opportunities to exercise influence on the political and decision-making process must be emphasised. A democratic society should be based on the principle of equal rights and opportunities for all – and on the notion of every citizen's obligations and responsibilities to the community at large.

Extract from the minutes of a cabinet meeting held on 11 March 2004.

Present: Government Ministers Ulvskog (chair), Freivalds, Sahlin, Pagrotsky, Östros, Messing, Engqvist, Lövdén, Ringholm, Bodström, Sommestad, Karlsson, Lund, Nykvist, Andnor, Nuder, Johansson, Hallengren, Björklund, Holmberg, Jämtin.

Business presented by Government Minister Sahlin.

Government Communication 2003/04:110, Policies for Democracy, approved by the Government.