Novel openness of party organisations
– the role of networks and associations

Maritta Soininen, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Political Science
University of Stockholm
106 91 Stockholm
Sweden
Tel: +46 8 16 2641
Email: maritta.soininen@statsvet.su.se

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Inclusive party organisations

Parties have been successful as semi-public professional organizations. However, the role of party organisations as ‘parties on the ground’ is downplayed today (Wauters 2010), as is their traditional but time and resource consuming function of recruiting and educating new members. Parties give priority to media strategies in order to win over their opinion electorates while facing two interrelated challenges: the problem of declining and ageing memberships and, paradoxically, also the problem of persisting underrepresentation of immigrants and immigrant minorities, which comprise a continuously increasing share of the population in European polities, in party organizations and in elected office. The question addressed here is how open party organisations are to attracting new groups in society and what role institutional factors, such as network recruitment - that stresses the role of networks and associations in recruitment and nomination of candidates - and democratization of intraparty nomination processes play in facilitating the openness of party organizations. The empirical focus of the discussion in the following pages is on Swedish party organizations and their performance in the electoral system, which is highly party-oriented with a vote in elections being primarily a vote for a party list.

The aim of the paper is to contribute to the scholarly debate on openness of party organizations both in general and as it relates to immigrants and minorities of immigrant origin in particular. I will address this topic by examining how political parties introduce new inclusive methods for the selection and recruitment of nominees and the possible consequences that these inclusive strategies may have for the openness of party organizations to immigrant minorities.

Whether the novel forms of openness and enhanced democracy will paradoxically result in new forms of exclusion and closeness is the matter that will be discussed in the following pages.

Party organizations are semipublic utilities that today face changing media and communication opportunities, shifting demographic conditions and increasing ethnic diversity in society. They also adjust their organizations so as to be able to meet these challenges and have, therefore, developed new strategies for dealing with their key functions: to aggregate voter opinions, to educate members, to be a channel between the citizenry and decision makers and to recruit candidates to political posts. During the past decades the ongoing transformation of party organisations has created a need to rethink the meaning of membership in more inclusive terms. This can entail more innovative forms of recruitment, party affiliation, and use of intraparty democracy to attract members and candidates for elected office. I will argue that what these new forms of openness appear to have in common is that
that they point in the direction of the accentuated importance and role that networks both inside and outside of party organizations have in increasingly inclusive forms of candidate recruitment.

Since the organisational roots and history of parties can be expected to inform their understandings of appropriate ways of enhancing openness, we can assume that strategies for openness differ between older and newer party organizations. Inclusion and openness may play out differently in different party organizations, depending on whether their organizational development is characterized by a successively declining membership or, which is more rarely the case today, by a still expanding membership and internal recruitment base. I will illustrate the first situation with the Liberal Party’s strategy to expand the search for both candidates and those who wish to nominate them to outside and beyond their own party organization. The second alternative, a party with a still growing internal recruitment base, is exemplified by the Green Party and how it chooses to boost intraparty democracy in order to empower its current and potential new members.

When they alter their candidate recruitment routines, both the Liberal Party and the Green Party modify the meaning of what it is to be a party member and, moreover, give networks and interest factions, with shared interests, identities and experiences, a more central role in the selection and recruitment of ‘trustworthy’ candidates with ‘the right personal qualities’. The question is what happens with the representational interests of those large groups in society that neither are part of the established network structure nor have interest networks or associations of their own within party organisations?

**Request for openness**

At the present time, many advanced democracies face new demands for political representation as a result of immigration (Cross 2008; Bird, Saalfeld & Wüst, eds 2011; Soininen 2011). Western polities are experiencing a landscape of growing diversity among their populations and shifting demographics in terms of minorities and majorities, as is the case, for example, in the USA. In the European context, the percentage of the population comprised of immigrants and immigrant origin minorities is continually growing, and in Sweden as much as 20 percent of population are first or second generation immigrants. Whether the concern is for legitimacy of political decision making or a pure instrumental concern for maximisation of votes, political parties find it increasingly vital to reach out to these new groups in society. Less is known, however, about the factors inside of party organisations that facilitate or adversely affect the active participation and career paths within party organizations of immigrants and immigrant minorities.
During the past decades there has been a widespread consensus in Sweden on the importance of increased representativeness of elected politicians – and yet, persons of immigrant background remain underrepresented among elected office holders. While normative arguments speak in favor of equality of political representation (Phillips 1995; Young 2000; Goodin 2007), empirical studies often explain the underrepresentation of immigrants by their limited access to socio-economic resources, an argument that runs the risk of blaming the victims for their underrepresentation. The question of the openness of party organizations’ that we address here turns attention instead toward the institutional practices and routines of party organizations and how these can facilitate or hinder the openness of parties to immigrants (cp. Kittilson 2011).

Comprehensive scholarly work has documented how party organisations in Western democracies have undergone major organisational developments in the direction of professional parties (cf. Panebianco 1988). While the role of party organizations as ‘parties on the ground’ has declined in Sweden, as in other Western democracies, with lower levels of trust in parties, weaker party identifications and fewer members, parties are more successful in their roles as ‘parties in public office’ (political actors in government) and as ‘parties in central office’ (referring to the workings of the central party organization) (Wauters 2010). There has been an organizational shift towards electoral-professional parties with a focus on ‘opinion electorate’ (cp Panebianco 1988:263).

For Swedish party organizations’, membership fees comprise around ten percent of the budget (SOU 2004:22), while state funding - related to the electoral success of a party - makes up 70-80 percent. In the spirit of modern organizations, political parties have also adopted ideas of levelled-up “cost-effectiveness” by enhancing “professionalism”. In western democracies, staffs of highly skilled employees run party activities, and party organizations are increasingly comparable to business and commercial entities: they “sell their ‘products’, i.e. policies, to an increasingly inconsistent audience of voters (Gibson and Römmele 2009). Political marketing in an attempt to control opinion markets through the use of databases, mail and social media to form public opinion strategies is seen as a more effective way of securing seats than traditional efforts to recruit, mobilize and educate new members.

In addition to promoting ideological agendas and presenting potential voters with policy alternatives, a central function of party organizations has traditionally been seen to involve “engaging in social mobilization and educational efforts” (Hofnung 2008:727). In practice, however, party organisations can be described as having successively relinquishing their traditional key functions of socialising and mobilizing members, which place great demands on time and resources and which are of particular importance for immigrants, who are relative newcomers with weaker ties to the social and political networks of society. We can compare this situation historically with the recruitment and mobilisation of the working class when universal political rights were being formulated. Similar to that time,
socially heterogeneous groups and, as well, immigrants may be particularly costly to reach, both as voters and as recruits (Bäck & Soininen 2004).

As the role of ‘party on the ground’ has declined, there are only a few European countries where more than 5% of their citizens in 2000 (in Sweden the figure was 6%) were registered as party members, in comparison to figures of around 10% in the 1950s and 1960s (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010:825). If the current rate decline in membership continues, the last member of a Swedish political party would be expected to be gone by 2017 (Petersson 2005). According to international comparative studies, one consequence of this is that the average age of party members continues to increase (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010:839). The groups that are overrepresented among party members in Sweden include retirees and middle-aged persons, men, the middle class and entrepreneurs (Bäck & Öhrvall 2004; Petersson ed. 2000). Meanwhile, persons of immigrant background remain underrepresented among those elected to public office on all levels of government in Sweden: in the parliament and in the regional and municipal council assemblies (SOU 2005:56; Rodrigo Blomqvist 2005).

Party membership, notwithstanding declining figures, remains today the primary base for recruiting candidates to elected office. Recruiting appropriate nominees is one of the core tasks performed by political parties (Field & Siavelis 2008:620), as candidate selection and nomination is one of their defining activities (Cross 2008:614-615) and one that distinguishes them from other organizations. If a party fails to make nominations, its very existence is at risk. Today, as was even more the case in the past, intraparty selection and nomination is seen as a private process, in which formal de jure rules do not always reflect the de facto informal process (Field & Siavelis 2008). The historical argument for this is well recognized: party organizations’ are ‘private, voluntary associations, and therefore their affairs are their own business’ (Cross 2008:615). Ultimately, the argument is that democracy is about competition between effectively functioning political parties – and not about processes in the party organizations (Michels’ 1915).

However, critics claim that party organizations have been transformed in a way that makes it necessary to reconsider the legitimacy of the way in which the extralegal intraparty nominations are made. Parties ‘on the ground’ have declined, as have member activities, resulting in an increasingly symbiotic relationship between parties and the state (Hofnung 2008; Katz and Mair 1995). The state not only legitimizes their status in the political system but also supplies them with resources. If the work of ‘parties is increasingly seen as an essential public good’ (van Biezen 2004:702) and parties themselves are viewed as semi-public utilities of representative democracy, then does the state not have the right to intervene in their internal affairs? It is possible to argue that ‘party structures have become legitimate objects of state regulation’ (Hofnung 2008:728).
**Sweden – a highly party-centered system**

In Sweden, as in many other Western democracies, the political parties have experienced a shrinking activist base, with people less willing to devote time to party activities. Parties have become less dependent on their members, and the slimmed down organizations tend to be more closed, the party and the citizens being viewed in “we and them” terms (Soininen 2012; Peterson ed. 2000). There has been a downward spiral for several decades, and, as with many other traditional membership-based movements in Sweden, parties are particularly weak in areas with a high proportion of citizens of immigrant background.

In comparison with factors like degree of inter-party competition and openness of the system to independent candidates, the electoral system is the most crucial factor in determining how important intraparty nominations will be for representational outcomes (Cross 2008). In the electoral systems that grant voters in general elections a high degree of choice between a large number of candidates, voters have significant power in the selection of representatives. Conversely, in proportional representation systems with (relatively) fixed lists, as in Sweden, the intraparty pre-selection process becomes decisive for the representational outcome and for who ends up in the legislature. Although the Swedish voters are allowed to express a candidate preference and to indicate a favored candidate on party electoral lists, the threshold for preference votes to have an effect is 8% on the national level and 5% in municipal elections. If this threshold is not reached, the choice of voters is basically limited to selecting the preferred party list. In short, this system gives party organizations’ broad powers to decide, with the help of popular member primaries or suggestions from party associations, over the party lists and how the competing representational claims of different groups in society are ultimately to be reflected in political bodies. In this way, Sweden offers an ideal case for studying the direct impact that different intraparty arrangements can have on representational outcomes for immigrants. To what extent are they, then, represented in elected office?

The proportion of elected candidates with migrant background in the parliament, Riksdag, has increased during the 2000s, and after the 2010 election, 28 of a total of 349 MPs were of migrant background, i.e. were born outside of Sweden. This corresponds to 8% of the seats in the parliament, which can be related to the proportion of foreign born people in the population (aged 18 and above), which is 16.8% (Statistics Sweden, Bivald, Hertz, Qvist, Soininen 2014). Given that foreign citizens with a minimum of three years of residence have since 1975 had the right to vote and to run for office in municipal and regional elections, we might expect the number of migrant candidates on these two levels to be higher than in the national parliament. However, this is not the case. Migrant representation in the regional councils is fairly similar to representation in the parliament. There are, though, significant differences in migrant representation in the parliament between the political
parties, with the Liberal, Green and Left Parties having the highest proportion of MPs of migrant background. In the municipal councils we can find rather a clearer left-right pattern, with the parties on the left displaying a higher proportion of migrant representation. Previous studies have also shown that migrant representation is lower in more prestigious organs of local government, such as the municipal executive board, where persons of migrant background were most frequently found as alternates and most rarely as chairpersons or vice-chairpersons (Bäck and Öhrvall 2004).

On the one hand, the Swedish political opportunity structure is favorable for immigrant representation. Integration policy, with its international top ranking, is considered to be progressive (MGP-index 2012/13), and, unlike what is most common internationally, citizenship legislation guaranteeing easy access to Swedish citizenship is used to speed up the political and social integration of immigrants rather than as a reward for successful integration. In addition, non-citizen residents have had local voting rights since 1975. On the other hand, although Swedish party organizations actively welcome immigrants, research shows that prejudicial attitudes, jokes and abusive language use is also a part of the organizational culture of all of the major parties (Bäck & Inkinen 2005; Dahlstedt 2005). If organizational culture and identity are expressed in norms and understandings of what is seen as the appropriate way to act, then in Swedish party organisations these norms often involve non-reflected assumptions of ethnic homogeneity (Dahlstedt 2005; Soininen 2011). As a nomination committee member explained in an interview study (Soininen 2011): As regards prejudicial attitudes, local party associations are not an exception from rest of the society. To conclude, there are factors in favor of immigrant representation among elected officials but also factors that are disadvantageous for the political careers of immigrants and immigrant minorities.

The following discussion about Swedish party organizations is based primarily on two interview studies: the first one with nomination committee representatives for 14 local party organizations (Soininen and Etzler 2006; Soininen 2011) and the second study conducted in 2013 with approximately 40 party representatives, including MPs, members of nomination committees and party office staff members (Bivald, Hertz, Qvist and Soininen 2014).

A novel candidate selection and nomination process
Party organizations face growing problems with their most basic function: to select and nominate candidates for elected office. Several governmental commissions of inquiry, therefore, looked into problems of recruitment faced by political parties. The consequences of the shrinking recruitment base are considerable, not least because Swedish parties rely on their memberships to supply large numbers of candidates to municipal government posts and boards. The 2012 commission of inquiry indicated that the turnover rate in municipal and regional councils was as high as 39.2% and 45.5%,
respectively, in the 2010 elections. In addition, 16% of the elected municipal council members had declined nomination during the previous electoral period of 2006-2010. Results also show that it is especially difficult for the political parties to fill the seats in small and middle-sized municipalities, where the rate of attrition is also higher. The commission of inquiry suggested the possibility of reducing the required minimum number of council positions (SOU 2012:30, Vital kommunal demokrati p. 20-21). In an interview study that was conducted ten years ago with members of 14 local nomination committees, one committee member explained that although there were more willing aspirants than available positions of the electoral lists, it was still difficult to find competent nominees to fill all of the electable positions of the lists (Soininen Etzler 2006:143).

A fresh report from Statistics Sweden reveals that young people in particular avoid politics: almost 50% of the persons under 30 years who were elected in the most recent election to 290 municipal councils have declined being nominated again (DN 21/12 2013). The explanations offered for declining include so-called ‘political reasons’. They claimed that the debate climate in councils was ‘unfriendly’, that the municipal councils were ‘toothless’ and that they experienced ‘feelings of powerlessness’. The results also indicated that there was a generation gap in expectations of how local politics works. For example, a younger politician explained how ‘I have had enough…Those of us born in the 70’s and 80’s have learned to be critical and to challenge….. We are not anybody’s marionettes.’ According to the reporter, the main problem lies in differences in mentality: the younger generation is used to getting what it wants, and sooner rather than later. This is in stark contrast to the traditional political culture characterized by innumerable long meetings and arguments over detailed formulations, combined with copious coffee drinking and endless walking in long corridors, only to result eventually in what the younger generation sees as a worthless compromise.

Not only do major established parties experience problems of being able to recruit appropriate candidates, but they also struggle with problems of a high rate of turnover among those that are elected. A second solution to recruitment problems (prop 2001/02:80), which the government has advocated and which has also grown in popularity, is to allow for greater freedom in forms of party affiliation beyond formal membership. As a result, the number of nominated candidates that are not formally party members has increased.

The Liberal Party’s open nomination policy
An important component in reforming the Liberal Party is to introduce open nominations in Stockholm regional and local elections in 2014 (SvD 12/11 2013). In November 2013, while preparing for the electoral campaign for the approaching elections in 2014, the chair of the Liberal Party in Stockholm declared in a debate article in one of the major Swedish newspapers that the party was
launching a process of open selection and recruitment of candidates to the Stockholm municipal and county councils.

Briefly put, in order to give more people a chance to run for elected office, the party has opened up the nomination process: Every citizen, he explained, including all non-members in Stockholm county that have liberal values and that wish to contribute either as elected politicians or by nominating candidates, have been invited to propose local candidates on the party’s website or through social media. In this way, all citizens in Stockholm are given the opportunity to get involved in nominating local representatives for the Liberal Party.

According to him, most of us can think of several persons that are interested in social and political issues and that we feel we can trust. He refers further to a study showing that 16% of those eligible are positive to working as a political representative, however, only slightly more than 1% of citizens are ever asked whether they wish to run for elected office. He argues that the reason so few ever get a chance to let the electorate vote for them is mainly that ‘the internal processes in party organizations are too far too closed’ and that the nomination process has historically been seen as an internal issue. Since party members are expected both to propose candidates and then to decide who will be on the electoral lists, this excludes from the process large numbers of citizens that are interested in society and politics but that are not members of the party. At present, they do not have any possibility of influencing the selection of candidates for the party they sympathize with. The Liberal Party wishes to change this in order to boost the vitality of democracy and is, therefore, opening up elected positions to all of those that have not yet chosen to run or that are not members of the Liberal Party.

Moreover, ‘the party now needs the help of citizens in order to reach out to all potential candidates in Stockholm County, he concludes. The party has tested the system of open nominations in 2005 and 2009 in some smaller municipalities, such as Skellefteå where today more than half of those elected have been elected on the basis of open nominations, as well as in a few municipalities in the Stockholm area.

Open nominations – inclusive or not?
If formal party membership does not count, then the question of which selection criteria guide aspirant recruitment in Swedish local elections becomes even more important.
Research on local nominations processes shows that during the past decades personal qualities have come to play an increasingly central role, and subtle and highly sensitive judgments about an aspirant’s individual qualities are thus critical for his/her possibilities for being nominated. Therefore, as members of nomination committees describe it, the procedure is that there are no open arguments
presented against an aspirant. The person who is being discussed leaves the room, and, moreover, closed voting is applied (Soininen Etzler 2006).

Traditionally, just after personal qualities, an aspirant’s capacity to communicate the political message in the media and active work in the party organization are ranked as key qualities. So is group membership, in particular in terms of gender and age, followed by political-ideological position within the party (Soininen 2011). The latter is, however, given less weight today, perhaps mirroring the openness to recruiting from outside of the party and the general convergence of the ideological positions of the parties.

In the context of the Swedish nomination process, along with personal qualities, “group membership” - being part of different networks, within and outside of the party organization - is seen as an important quality and a central asset for a candidate. This is so not least because social representation in relation to different voter categories, including homeowners, union members, environmentalists and professions, such as teachers, etc., is crucial for parties. Both established networks of party organisations and informal social contacts are critical for mobilising support in the making of a candidacy. It is reasonable to believe that the open nomination policy that the Liberal Party applies, and which reaches beyond the scope of closed intraparty nominations, makes membership in networks and associations outside of the party organization even more important for a candidate than before.

The following is an illustrative example of how the assessment of ‘personal qualities’ works in practice as described by a local nomination committee representative that discusses nominations by intraparty associations (Soininen Etzler, 2006:138):

... they (the proposed candidates) are ‘quality checked’ persons that have been judged to have the required qualifications and are trustworthy….you sometimes think a bit too traditionally, it can be so that associations try to secure their positions and say that we have always had the chair position in the council. So, you just continue to fight for that. Then there are immigrants and women, they are not as easily nominated.

Next, what is needed in order for an aspirant to be considered trustworthy? A key question is how to generate trust. It can either be based on knowledge resulting from a rational calculation on the basis of information about a person’s past behavior, or it can be based on a sense of shared identity and shared experiences that is used to compensate for a lack of information (Gallagher & Marsh 1988). As a result, ‘People tend to trust others if they know or believe that they are indirectly linked in a social network through mutual friendship or acquaintances’ (Yuki et al. 2005). Because memberships in
networks and social groups act as ‘information short cuts’ (Shugart et al., 2005), they make the assessment decision easier.

Given how difficult – if not impossible – it is, not only for average citizens, but also for party activists and members of nomination committees, to gather all of the relevant information that is needed to make a rational evaluation of all potential aspirants, being able to rely on shared identity and shared experiences suddenly becomes an important factor. The use of ‘information short cuts’ will be a highly valued necessity, and, as the research findings show, people tend ‘to rely on familiar faces and traditional characteristics when selecting their candidates’ (Norris & Lovenduski 1995; Murray 2008).

If we also consider people’s social psychological need to perceive the social group to which they belong as superior to other groups, triggered by the urge to maintain a positive social identity (Tajfel 1978), not only do we use ‘information short cuts’ to choose ‘familiar faces’ when identifying proper nominees, but we also prefer persons belonging to the group or groups that represent us, as we see them as superior to members of other groups. These subtle mechanisms link trustworthiness as a candidate’s central quality to group membership. It then becomes linked to the group or groups we happen to belong to, identify with and share experiences with, thereby disfavoring, for instance, aspirants with immigrant background since it is more difficult to see them as ‘familiar faces’ with shared identity and experiences. They easily appear as less trustworthy, in relative terms. As a Swedish nomination committee representative described it, the problem is that you tend to select persons who either are similar to you or with whom you have shared interests (Soininen Etzler 2006 p. 176). The use of information ‘short cuts’ has a tendency to work in favor of established majority candidates.

Not surprisingly, research shows that local roots and local lower-level electoral experience (Shugart et al., 2005; Tavits 2010) are powerful factors seen as signaling that a candidate is knowledgeable of local interests and needs and that voters ‘wish to be represented by somebody who is familiar with local concerns’ (Tavits 2010:231). Because historically local roots have also been an important objective characteristic of a candidate, outsiders from other parts of the country (in the U.S.) wishing to run were typically seen as ‘carpetbaggers’ or opportunists (Gallagher and Mars 1988:251). Analogous negative attributions likely also apply to immigrant candidates, who not only have their ‘roots’ in other parts of the country but in other countries and parts of world. It is a relative disadvantage not to be able to embody the ‘familiar’ identity of the local community and local party organization.
Why it is so important for a candidate to benefit of membership both in formal associations and in informal networks inside and outside of the party organization is explained by a committee representative (Soininen Etzler 2006:173-177):

‘There is no formal application procedure. So, it is about making an individual judgment, it is a lot about having knowledge about the person, that you have been socializing in the party association.’

‘... Social contacts play a huge role’. ‘You must know whom you nominate. The more members the aspirant knows, the easier it is’.

In addition, a candidate’s possibilities for being nominated to an electable position on the electoral list is dependent on support from internal networks:

‘If you are going to be nominated to a higher position on the list, you must either have the support of a leading politician who backs up you or you must have a network of people who are prepared to insure that they know you and are prepared to support you.’

An interview study conducted with 9 MPs in 2013 highlights how personal networks, with their highly informal nature, are understood to be crucial for one’s political career. The networks - referred to as “friends” - had been established during a number of more or less informal meetings during a longer period of time, either while in service at the local level or in the party’s youth organization. The MPs saw youth organizations as an important entry point into a political career, and it was also there that most senior politicians had begun their own political journeys. Not only had these taught future politicians how politics is done - campaigning, achieving compromises, writing political proposals and the art of debating - but participation in youth organisations had, even more crucially, offered opportunities to form important personal networks that were needed in order to become an elected representative.

Opening up party organisations?
If being active in party associations and networks is so vital for an aspirant’s possibility for mobilizing support, a problem for immigrant candidates is that they, as newcomers, lack the same access to these associations and informal social networks inside and outside of party organisations. Indeed, if it is required that you have been active for years and have your network of “friends” from your time in the party’s youth organisation in order to be nominated for a position, this can certainly discourage one from even attempting to be nominated, particularly if you do not have strong compensatory networks outside of the party organisations.
Most parties have some form of regulation of their intraparty nomination process, although this may vary between local organizations. The new open nomination policy of the Liberal Party, which enlarges the categories both of nominees and of those that are allowed to proposed nominations to include the entire citizenry, introduces yet another set of rules. The question is whether these new rules are more inclusive for groups such as immigrants, which are underrepresented in party organizations, or not?

Both established networks and informal social contacts are crucial for the making of a candidate in terms of mobilising support. The new open nomination policy of the Liberal Party is based on the assumption that “we all know persons that are….”. But, do we? For newcomers in a society, existing networks may work as a barrier. Since networks are about inclusion, they also entail exclusion: by definition, not everyone can be a member of a social network. In informal networks, unlike in formal associations, the membership criteria are not explicitly defined, which makes it even more difficult to gain access to, address and change these powerful interest formations. Instead, due to their conserving effect, informal networks may work against groups that are underrepresented in party organizations.

The vicious circle of “risky recruitment” is a problem for all organizations that loose in attractiveness and popularity. In the present situation, with shrinking recruitment base in terms of membership, a high rate of turnover among elected local politicians and a large number of elected officials that decline nomination, parties may have to consider less appropriate candidates. This, in turn, makes it crucial for a party to ensure that aspirants, whether they are party members or not, are trustworthy and have the right attitudes and values. The accentuated vulnerability of party organizations leads to increased insecurity in candidate selection that can easily result in a defensive recruitment practice, involving skeptical attitudes towards individuals that in one way or other deviate from the picture of the familiar average candidate. Criteria for ‘trustworthiness’ may then contain prejudicial attitudes towards persons with less familiar social attributes. The mechanisms that generate necessary trust and familiarity for a candidate is thus one factor that can help to explain the persisting underrepresentation of immigrants and minorities in elected office.

One problem with the use of ‘the right personal qualities’ as a key selection criterion, in comparison with traditional objective merits such as work in the party or ideological position, is not only that it leaves space for more subtle interpretations of whom of those having the appropriate qualities needed to fit the party’s profile to trust but also that ‘the right personal qualities’ is also a less transparent criterion. This shift in recruitment practices, while creating a more flexible and perhaps also more open system for recruitment, is most likely disadvantageous for groups like immigrant aspirants.
Time for intraparty democracy – and diversity?

Party organizations struggling with declining membership have a growing tendency to employ selective incentives, such as expanding intraparty democracy by offering members new powers in candidate selection processes in order to attract new members and to keep old ones (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010:839).

The Liberal Party, as an established and relatively old party organization, has, however, abandoned the idea of enhancing intraparty democracy as a way of solving its recruitment problems. Instead, it simply relies on powers outside of the party organization to identify, select and nominate candidates to represent the party, in that way broadening ‘intraparty’ democracy to include even those sympathizers that are not formally party members.

The Green Party, with a much shorter organisational history and a still expanding party membership, represents another kind of exception from the pattern of relying on strengthened intraparty democracy to combat problems of declining party membership. As I will show, the Green Party consciously enhances intraparty democracy within its still expanding member organization.

The question of how democratization of nomination processes affects groups that are underrepresented in party organizations has recently received increased attention in scholarly debates. Rahat, Hazan and Katz show that the relationship between inclusive participation in candidate selection and representativeness of electoral lists is non-linear, or even negative (Rahat, Hazan and Katz 2008:673). Briefly put, the most internally democratic parties that practice a system of ‘direct’ member voting produced less representative candidate lists, while lists produced by small nomination committees were more balanced with regard to gender (Rahat, Hazan & Katz 2008:672).

An interesting question is, therefore, why the ‘democratic’ use of membership balloting leads to a less democratic result in terms of a less balanced representational outcome? The explanation can be found in the two different logics that guide members’ voting behavior in contrast to decisions made by a nomination committee (Rahat, Hazan and Katz 2008:667). In a membership ballot, party members give their votes to the candidate(s) they individually prefer, and the final list is simply a result of aggregated individual preferences. This procedure does not allow members to express any preference regarding the overall design of the party list; they can only promote the candidate(s) they wish to place in a high position on the candidate list. Conversely, nomination committee members are appointed as trustees who have both the responsibility and the power to place the collective interests of the party at the forefront. For that reason, electoral lists produced by committees will more balanced with regard to representing a variety of internal party interests.
Can this theory of two nominating mechanisms help us to explain the underrepresentation of immigrants? What can we say about the effects of internal party democracy on representational outcomes for immigrants as an underrepresented group in party organizations and their possibilities for getting elected? The Green Party nomination process offers an interesting test case. We compare the nomination process in the Green Party with the processes in the Conservative Party and the Social Democratic Party, both of which represent old, well established party organizations with declining memberships. During 2013 all three party organizations were busy working with the nomination of candidates in the Stockholm area in the face of upcoming national and local elections in 2014.

A traditionally important task for nomination committees is to identify and actively encourage persons to run in a primary election by coaching and mentoring them, by making them known among members, by promoting them in the party organization and by mobilizing support for them. Another task is to produce a draft list. In all three of these parties, the nomination processes differ throughout the country and in different constituencies.

Instead of relying on the results from a consultative party primary, the Social Democratic nomination committee receives nominations from party associations and interest factions as a basis for its draft list, a procedure which is also used by the Left Party (Johansson 1999; Soininen Etzler 2006:133). This procedure gives nomination committees broader power over the final ranking of candidates, while members are left with less direct influence over the draft list. For the nominee, it means that he/she needs the approval of a member association or stakeholder that wants to appoint her/him as its representative. According to a Social Democratic committee representative, there is no leeway for ad hoc nominations (Soininen Etzler 2006:138).

In 2013 in the Stockholm region, the Social Democratic selectorates consists of 7-11 delegates, each representing one of the central stakeholders within the party: two trade unions (LO/blue-collar workers and TCO/professionals), Social Democratic women (The National Federation of Social Democratic Women in Sweden), Social Democratic pensioners, SSU (the Social Democratic youth organisation) and representatives from different geographical constituencies. In Stockholm the Social Democratic immigrant committee, which is an umbrella organisation for 32 immigrant associations within the Social Democratic Party, is also recognised today as a stakeholder and is, therefore, represented in election committees.

The nomination committees explicitly represent divergent intraparty interests. Not surprisingly, the main role of the committees is stated to be to weigh and balance different intraparty interests. The regulations stipulate a process involving negotiations with a large number of organised intraparty interests in order to identify the main candidates representing these interests. The process of putting
together a draft list is characterized by seeking trade-offs and compromising, while going back and forth between interest factions with suggestions. In the end, the list should include, in addition to the traditional representation of blue-collar workers and professionals as well as geographical representation, a mix of experience and renewal and persons with leadership qualities, experience of work in elected office and of the culture of intraparty negotiations and cooperation. A list of formal and informal national criteria is also to be adhered to, including the policy of every other seat to women and, since 2012, a goal that 25% of those nominated should be under 35 years of age.

In addition, Social Democrats in Stockholm are implementing a local decision for the 2014 elections according to which at least 25% of the electable positions on the electoral lists must go to persons with non-Nordic immigrant background, which means that the party in Stockholm has introduced a quota system for representation of immigrants in a similar way as for women. The Social Democratic candidate recruitment process requires that the candidates have an organisational background in one of the stakeholders linked to the party. The corporatist representational system that guarantees electable positions on the lists to all of the organised interests, and which much is in line with the old Swedish corporatist policy making style, reinforces the currently existing organised interests in a way that could be disadvantageous for those that find it difficult to identify with those interests.

The nomination process for the Conservative Party, Moderaterna, in the city of Stockholm is quite different. The party congress appoints the election committees, which in the case of the city of Stockholm consists of a chair, a vice chair and 10 delegates representing different geographical parts of Stockholm, as well as the youth organisation of the party. The goal is to have a committee that is comprised of a mixed group of persons with various backgrounds.

The Conservative Party also sees the nomination committee as an arena for negotiations, though in their case primarily in relation to divergent geographical interests. Traditionally, a party primary is used to decide on the draft list and ranking of the proposed candidates. According to the formal guidelines, the party list should on the whole be balanced with regard to competence, experience, gender, age, ethnicity and geographical residence, as well as continuity and renewal. A decision on the final list is eventually made by the party congress, but only rarely does it make changes to the draft that is presented.

As a step towards increased renewal among its representatives, the party in the 2010 elections adopted the goal that 20% of the nominees on the party list should be new aspirants, not candidates seeking re-election. To be able to successfully implement this policy of renewal, the party felt that it was necessary to fine-tune the organisation by strengthening the position of the nomination committee and simultaneously limiting intraparty democracy and the power of party members over the nomination
process. As a result, the party replaced the traditional party primary with a “consultative member ballot” which gives the nomination committee more influence over the draft list. The Conservative Party thus chose to try to solve its recruitment problems by weakening the originally relatively strong intraparty democracy and concentrating more powers in the hands of the nomination committee. Although the nomination process is very differently organised than the corporatist Social Democratic one, the two parties still have a common ambition to give the nomination committees a very central role in the process.

The Green Party, with its relatively shorter organisational history and a still expanding membership, represents yet another kind of candidate selection and nomination process, which is characterised by a decentralised and participatory democratic selection and nomination process. More than any other party, it puts its faith in boosting direct intraparty democracy and downplaying the role of the nomination committee.

The procedure is as follows. After having interviewed all of the members that wish to volunteer to work in the nomination committee, the Green Party’s electoral committee presents a proposal to a membership meeting to approve a nomination committee consisting of 7 delegates. The composition of the committee should mirror the membership, be gender balanced and include a representative of Green Youth. Moreover, it should also represent experiences of persons with immigrant background – which is seen as an informal norm. The committee organisation is flat, granting equal rights and responsibilities to all members. Both the committee and other members may propose candidates, who are then asked to write a short presentation in support of their candidacy. The next step is to randomise the draft list, after which the popular membership vote is open to all registered members who have paid their membership fee in the city of Stockholm.

What is required for a membership vote to count is that it is gender neutral, i.e. it meets the criterion that every other proposed list position goes to a woman, which also applies to the final list after the candidates are ranked according to the number of votes they have received. According to the party representative interviewed, there is a positive view of diversity in general in the party, and in particular in relation to gender and age. However, what is meant by ‘immigrant background’ is perceived as a more complex issue. After the primary, the committee decides on the lowest number of votes a candidate needs in order to be included on the list and on the total number of candidates. The draft list is based almost entirely on the popular membership vote. The exception is that the nomination committee is allowed to move candidates with low list positions to lists in other districts if there are too few candidates to nominate in those districts. Finally, the membership meeting has two options: to approve the entire list or to remit it back to the nomination committee. The way the Green Party structures the nomination process gives the members sovereign power over the party list.
According to committee members, the role of the nomination committees in Stockholm has been reduced almost exclusively to administering the process, as the membership vote is the instrument that is used to decide the ranking of the candidates on the party list. The goal is for selection and nomination of candidates to be decentralized and to rely on direct democracy. The role left for the committee is to transform the votes into lists, which are subsequently approved at a membership meeting.

The critical point, according to the party’s own assessment of the 2013 nomination process, is that electoral participation in primaries was as low as 19-30%. In addition, critics noted that persons with immigrant background were underrepresented on the lists, which, according to them, reflected the local context rather poorly. At the same time, the party feels that it is important to recruit more members with immigrant background in order to have a more diverse membership and to be able to attract additional votes from immigrant communities.

In internal discussions it has been suggested that in order to improve the nomination process, it is necessary to provide the nomination committee with broader powers than it has today, either before or after the primaries. However, the membership meeting has rejected such proposals and instead supports the current flat process with maximal direct membership influence over the composition of the party list.

_The Green Party protest (DN 22/11 2013)_

In November 2013, in the middle of the ongoing nomination process, 23 members and sympathisers published a debate article titled ‘The Green Party program for diversity is just empty words’ in which they publicly criticised the Green Party’s diversity policy. They described how persons with non-Nordic background did not even comprise 10% but only 3 of the 40 candidates on the Green Party list for the European parliamentary elections in 2014 and, furthermore, how their share among Green Party MPs was only 12%, which is under the national average.

Talk of open doors and integration is just empty words, they argued. While the newly revised party program states that ‘We see how ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class and age, as power structures, interplay with the dominating gender order’ and that we need to change this as well as how “[p]eople are discriminated on the basis of their ethnicity, name and how they speak Swedish/dialect”. However, given the nomination results, this only seems to be empty words. ‘Where is the diversity the Green Party so willingly promotes and talks about?’ And further, we have heard all the excuses, including that ‘we did not have any appropriate candidates” and that “we don’t pay attention to the aspirant’s person or background”.

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The article concludes that while the nomination committee has made considerable efforts to recruit candidates from different parts of the country and areas outside of larger cities, it has not succeeded in engaging young people with immigrant background, who now do not have a chance to demonstrate their competence. Candidates with immigrant background are placed on the lower part of the list, from where political power is beyond their reach, but are used as an alibi by the party. They further argue that the failure of the Green Party in Stockholm can be compared with the Social Democratic nomination results: in the upcoming elections in 2014, 4 of the 10 top candidates for the Social Democrats in Stockholm have immigrant background.

Given the critical authors of the debate article and the nomination results, the question is to what extent the differences in representational output, a less balanced output in the case of the Green Party in comparison with the greater balance for the Social Democratic Party, can be explained by the different logics of their nomination processes: direct democracy contra centralised corporatist?

**Balanced list?**

Both in the case of the Social Democratic Party and the Conservative Party (Moderaterna), the central task assigned to nomination committees is that of balancing different organised interests, groupings, fractions and preferences within the party organization. Theoretically, committees have broad powers: first, to promote potential candidates; second, to draft the party electoral lists; and third, to make changes in the ranking of nominees after the popular member vote. The Green Party, however, has chosen a different path by reducing the role of the nomination committee to an administrative one while guaranteeing the members exclusive power over the party list. The comparison between the nomination processes in these two parties provides evidence for the theory that a system in which centralized nomination committees have a great impact on the selection and nomination of candidates is a better guarantee for a balanced party list with regard to immigrant and minority representation than systems based solely on a direct democratic popular member vote.

In sum, whether the Green Party representatives choose to publicly criticize the low number of persons with immigrant background on the party lists or not, at least a part of the explanation obviously lies in the highly decentralized and democratized nomination process. The results suggest that the centralized system that the Social Democrats apply, based on hierarchically led negotiations between different internal interest factions, among which are immigrant candidates, results in a more balanced representational outcome for that category of nominees.

Which groups have the broad powers of the nomination committees conferred upon them? All three of the parties stress the need to include persons with varying backgrounds, not only with regard to age
and gender but also ethnicity. Since the nomination committee of the Green Party has such limited possibilities for influencing the party list, the representation of different interests, experiences and social backgrounds on the committee is of less importance for the representational output. In contrast, for the two other parties the question of who is making use of the powers of the committees is highly central. The internal party associations and networks that embody so-called special interests and have their guaranteed seats on the nomination committees can make the difference in how the final party list is comprised.

All three parties also seem be concerned with the necessity for the nomination committees to have and to be able to use their powers over the selection and nomination process. In the Social Democratic Party the centralized corporatist structure of the nomination process provides the committee with an autonomous position in leading the crucial negotiations between stakeholders. The Conservatives have taken measures to strengthen the position of the nomination committee in order to include new, not previously elected candidates. Finally, the Green Party has tried to enhance the position of its nomination committees but was forced to back down when faced with the reluctance of the members.

The role that party associations and networks have in relation to the possibilities for immigrant aspirants to be nominated involves two closely interrelated aspects: first, the way in which the current stakeholders, associations and networks function; and second, the status of immigrant stakeholders and the role they play during the candidate selection and nomination process. In this regard, the Social Democratic nomination process and how it is structured seems to be very beneficial for the representation of immigrants, given that they meet the criteria of having formed an interest platform of their own and that this platform is recognized by the party as a legitimate interest.

**Concluding remarks**

Political parties are semi-public professional organizations that continue to be central venues for mainstream political activity and important gate-keepers for democratic representation. Today, not only do the shrinking and ageing party organisations have an increasingly symbiotic relationship with the state, but they also risk widening the gap between themselves and a citizenry that is characterized by increasing ethnic diversity. The question of the extent to which candidates selected to parliaments and local councils reflect significant societal cleavages, i.e. whether the representational outcome can be considered balanced, also needs to address the issue of openness to nominating persons of immigrant background, given that immigrant minorities make up a growing share of the populations in West democracies.
When internal organisational developments and demographic changes in society challenge party organisations and how they perform their key functions, the selection and nomination of candidates perhaps becomes the most fundamental challenge; a party that fails to nominate representatives to elected office undermines its own existence. How intra-party nominations are structured and which rules apply becomes of paramount importance both for the social make-up of the persons holding elected office and for the future of the political party.

What, then, is the answer to the initial question addressed in this paper, i.e. whether the novel forms of openness and enhanced democracy in party organizations might paradoxically result in new exclusion.

The internal party competition over nominations and the increasingly central role that formal and informal networks in the negotiations, bargaining and struggle for positions on the party lists are significant for nomination of candidates. Networks are important as well in the initial stages of the process, from suggesting suitable candidates to mobilizing strong enough support for an electable position on the list. It follows that groups, such as immigrants, that have more limited access to a party’s established informal networks will be disfavored by the system. In addition, they are disfavored by the fact that they do not usually have their own internal factions that can work for their candidacy in a way that, for example, women and youth associations or other special interests actively mobilize for their aspirants.

In theory, nomination committees have broad powers: first, to promote potential candidates; second, to draft the party list; and third, to make changes to the ranking of nominees after the membership vote. However, as the example of the Green Party with a still expanding membership organization shows, a party can choose to reduce the role of the nomination committee to an administrative one while giving the members exclusive power over the party list. The comparison between the nomination processes in the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party provides some evidence for the assumption that a system in which a centralized nomination committee has a greater impact on the selection and nomination of candidates is a better guarantee for a balanced party list with regard to immigrant minority representation than a system based solely on a direct democratic popular member vote. The enhanced internal democracy and openness to member opinions in the Green Party produces a less inclusive representational outcome. The centralized system that the Social Democratic Party applies - based on hierarchically led negotiations between internal factions, which
moreover recognizes and includes a faction representing the interests of immigrant associations in the party - results in a more balanced representational outcome for this category of nominees.

The three parties in Stockholm - the Conservative Party, the Green Party and the Social Democratic Party - are all concerned with the need for nomination committees to be able to use their powers over the nomination process to guarantee a representational outcome in the best interests of the party. However, their attempts to enhance the powers of their nomination committees vary in terms of how successful they have been.

The vicious circle of “risky recruitment” is a problem, not only for parties and their candidate recruitment, but for all organizations that lose attractiveness and popularity. With the shrinking recruitment base in memberships, a high turnout rate among local elected politicians and a high number of elected officials that decline to run, parties face serious problems in finding appropriate candidates. As a solution the Liberal Party in Stockholm introduced a new and radical form of recruitment policy with open nominations which enlarges the pool of both nominees and people that are allowed to propose nominations so as to include the entire citizenry in the Stockholm area. The question that is whether these new rules are more inclusive in relation to groups, such as immigrants, that are underrepresented in party organizations.

Given, first, that informal networks and social contacts are crucial for making a candidacy and, second, that the novel open nomination policy is based on the assumption that we all know persons that are trustworthy enough to be nominated, it is necessary for a potential nominee to be part of an established social context. Then again, for newcomers in a society such existing networks may work as a barrier. Since networks are about inclusion, they also entail exclusion: by definition, not everyone can be a member of a social network. In informal networks, unlike formal associations, the membership criteria are not explicitly defined, which makes it even harder to gain access. Instead, due to their conserving effect, informal networks may work against groups that are underrepresented in party organizations. In addition, criteria for ’trustworthiness’ may include prejudicial attitudes towards persons with less familiar social attributes. The mechanisms that generate necessary trust and familiarity for a candidate may thus work against persons with immigrant background as may then the system with open nominations.
Even for the Liberal Party, it will be necessary to ensure that the aspirants, whether they are party members or citizens suggested by your closest neighbors or your sports club, are trustworthy and have the right attitudes and values. In this way, the accentuating vulnerability of party organizations creates increased insecurity in candidate selection and can easily result in a defensive recruitment practice. In that case, a central problem with the use of the ‘right personal qualities’ as a key selection criterion, in comparison with traditional objective merits such as work in the party and ideological position, is not only that it leaves considerable leeway for subtle interpretations of whether the aspirants have the appropriate qualities needed to fit the party’s profile but also that the ‘right personal qualities’ is a less transparent criterion. A shift of this kind towards more flexible and open recruitment practices is likely to be disadvantageous for less established groups and candidates.

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