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THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF AGENCY HEADS IN SWEDEN:

Trends and Explanations, 1960-2010

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has described both theoretically and empirically, the negative consequences of having a politicized civil service, recruited on political instead of professional merits. However, we know fairly little about what explains politicization, especially outside the U.S. context. This study reviews literature in the field and identifies four commonly used explanations, and tests them on a study of agency heads in Sweden between 1960 and 2010. For this purpose, we have collected new data that includes information about 1836 Director Generals' political and/or professional backgrounds. Our study demonstrates that none of the previously used explanations – NPM reforms, ideological bias of the government, the number of years that the government has been in power, and the Parliamentary support that the government enjoys – holds ground. Our general conclusion is therefore negative, and emphasizes the need for more systematic research on this matter.

Keywords: politicization, political recruitment, political appointment, Sweden, New Public Management, Director Generals, agency heads, public agencies, civil service.

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The politicization dilemma

The discussion about political-administrative relations has deep roots in the social sciences. It is in essence a question about good governance and efficient administration. In order to strengthen the efficiency of the administration and prevent misuse of public resources, influential authors such as Max Weber ([1921] 1978), Woodrow Wilson (1887), and Frank Goodnow (1900) argued against political recruitments already at the turn of the 20th century. The prime motive for early reform initiatives towards a merit-based recruitment system in Britain and the US was also to ensure competence and create a professional administration (for Britain, see the Northcote and Trevelyan report 1853; for the US, see the Pendleton act).¹

In practice, however, an absolute division between politics and administration is unrealistic and was, perhaps, never intended (Svara 1998). Elected politicians have a legitimate interest in controlling what government organizations do (Peters and Pierre 2004a, 6-8). Neutral competence is not the only important virtue of the public administration in a democratic society; responsiveness to democratically elected leaders is also important. By placing party loyal people on leading administrative positions, a government may attempt to facilitate the implementation of political decisions. A party loyal agency head is more likely to share the government's views on the best course of action, or at least is less prone to obstruct the implementation of the politics of her own party, particularly if she depends on the party for future appointments and assignments (Lewis 2008; Peters and Pierre 2004a). Some degree of politicization of the public administration could therefore serve a democratic purpose. Political appointment of public servants have even been claimed to be one of

¹ We would like to thank Christian Björkdahl for excellent research assistance, Veronica Norell for proof reading the manuscript and Mikael Gilljam, Johannes Lindvall, Victor Lapuente and Anders Sundell for helpful comments.

the most important measures available to executives who wish to control bureaucracy and influence policy (Moe 1985).

In spite of this, most scholars today would agree that an administration run solely by party loyalists is likely to have severe, negative impact on the competence, efficiency, and legitimacy of the public administration (Lewis 2008; Peters and Pierre 2004a; Rouban 2003). Furthermore, citizens tend to place a lower degree of trust in their political representatives than in bureaucratic institutions (Holmberg and Weibull 2010; Listhaug and Wiberg 1996), which imply that the public administration risks losing legitimacy should the politicization of the civil service be taken too far (Peters and Pierre 2004a). Empirical studies also show that countries, in which the recruitment of civil servants is mainly based on merits instead of political affiliation, perform better in the sense that they have a higher economic growth (Evans and Rauch 1999), a more universal welfare systems (Rothstein, Samanni and Teorell 2011), and are less prone to corruption (Dahlström, Lapuente, and Teorell 2011; Rauch and Evans 2000).

To sum up, the issue of how the bureaucratic apparatus should be controlled presents politicians as well as scholars with a delicate dilemma. The purpose of this paper is to explain why politicians' take the risk of politicizing the public administration, in spite of the well-known negative consequences. Previous research has contributed with several explanations, but they have rarely been tested in a systematic way, and even more seldom tested together (see for example Peters and Pierre 2004b). We identify four explanations: NPM (New Public Management) reforms, ideological orientation, and dominance of the state apparatus (entrenchment and parliamentary support). In the paper these explanations are tested on a new dataset including information of the political affiliation

of Director Generals (DGs) and other heads of public agencies in Sweden, between 1960 and 2010. The long time-period gives us a unique opportunity to keep important institutional factors constant while observing the potential effects of these explanation factors.

Interestingly, the results from our study show that previously suggested explanations lack empirical support when systematically scrutinized. Contrary to what is expected, NPM reforms are not positively correlated with a politicization of the public administration. Whereas NPM ideas steadily have taken hold and are now permeating Swedish public administration, the level of politicization is decreasing. The left-right affiliation of the government, the years they have been in power or the parliamentary strength of the government parties do not display any convincing effects either. We therefore conclude that our knowledge of what is driving the politicization of the civil service is actually very limited.

Politicization of the public administration: trends and explanations

There are different ways of studying the politicization of the public administration. In this paper, we will concentrate on how civil servants are recruited. In a politicized recruitment process, political criteria replace merit-based criteria in the selection, promotion, rewarding, and disciplining of public servants (Peters and Pierre 2004a, 2). Civil servants who are loyal to, or at least sympathize with the governing party may, for example, be prioritized in the appointment of leading public service positions.

As mentioned in the introduction, previous research in this field has shown that political recruitment of senior civil servants is a frequently used method to make the public administration more

responsive. The kinds of positions politicized, their number in relation to the civil service in general, and the background of those recruited vary between countries, but the phenomenon is observed in most administrative systems (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011, 212). The risks associated with a politicization of the civil service do not appear to have a strong deterring effect. On the contrary, scholars and international organizations observe an increasing politicization in several democracies in Western Europe and North America, in countries characterized by Germanic and Napoleonic administrative traditions, as well as in Scandinavia and the Commonwealth (Campbell and Wilson 1995; Eichbaum and Shaw 2007; Matheson et al 2007; Page and Wright 1999; Pierre 2004). The existing literature indicates that there are important differences in how much and when governments politicize, but there are clear expectations of a positive trend (Page and Wright 1999; Peters and Pierre 2004a).

There are several suggestions on why politicization of the civil service occurs. Maybe the most widespread is the New Public Management (NPM) reforms, which triggered far-reaching administrative reforms in several Western countries from the middle of the 1980s and onwards. One of the basic ideas of NPM is to uphold the divide between politics and administration; the politicians should focus on formulating goals and leave the implementation of these goals to the civil servants (Hood 1995; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011, 9-11). It is, therefore, somewhat ironic that this reform might have had the opposite effect in some respects and increased the politicization of the civil service instead. The reason for this suspicion is that politicians might be looking for new ways of controlling the administration. Since politicians are not supposed to directly interfere in the implementation of policies according to the NPM ideals, they try to secure the smoothness of this process by other means; they appoint agency heads whom they trust to be loyal to the government, or whom they think they will be able to control indirectly. The choice of agency heads can thus be

expected to become more important and more politicized when agency autonomy increases (Peters and Pierre 2004b; Rouban 2007). Even though NPM has created an administrative system in which audits and controls have largely replaced the belief in mutual trust formally (Christensen and Læg Reid 2011), mutual trust between politicians and agency heads may still be valued informally and accomplished through political appointments. Even though it is often suggested that the NPM reforms increase politicization, there are few systematic studies of this potential correlation, which is why we will spend some time analyzing it in this paper.

As indicated above, it is usually the political executive who has the authority to appoint the top administrative positions in focus of this study. Previous research disagrees, however, on whether governments on different sides of the left-right spectrum and of various strengths are equally inclined to use this privilege in order to politicize the administration. In the US, there has been a conception of politicization as primarily a Republican strategy to “implant their DNA throughout the government” (George W. Bush quoted in Rudalevige 2009, 13). The causal mechanism behind such an ideological bias is somewhat unclear though, and there are also other empirical studies that come to a different conclusion, namely that Republicans and Democrats make political recruitments to the same extent (Lewis 2008, 203; Bumgarner and Newswander 2011).

In the Swedish context, the general perception has been the opposite: the expectation is that it is mainly the Social Democratic party that has been responsible for the increasing politicization of the civil service. During the Social Democratic governments 1994-2006 (Carlsson II 1994-1996 and Persson 1996-2006), there were regular complaints from the opposition against the recruitments of agency heads. The opposition accused the governing party of illegitimate use of the state apparatus

as a means of power (Widfeldt 2007, 822). However, no systematic studies confirming this claim have been conducted.² There have, in fact, been very few studies outside the US looking into the relationship between the ideological bias of the government and the level of politicization in general (for overviews see Page and Wright 1999; Peters and Pierre 2004a; Rouban 2003). This is therefore the second explanation in focus in this study.

However, ideology might not be the only relevant government property when it comes to how different governments approach the dilemma of political recruitment. Folke's, Hirano's, and Snyder's (2011) research indicate that the time in office might also matter. They point out that the control of public sector recruitment is a valuable political asset that offers leading politicians the possibility to reward and care for loyal supporters and by that, also strengthen their power base. This resource may even win them elections. All parties are not equally good at making use of this resource, though. Weak parties or parties that have spent a long time out of office "lack the discipline, the trained leadership, and the surplus of potential jobholders to use the system to their maximum advantage" (Frank J. Sorauf quoted in Folke, Hirano, and Snyder 2011, 568). So-called *entrenched* parties, on the other hand, (parties that have been in control of the legislature for at least two years) are much better at exploiting the potential of political recruitment successfully.

Following Folke, Hirano, and Snyder (2011), we should therefore expect entrenched governments to contribute more to the politicization of the civil service. This is an interesting proposition that

² The Parliamentarian Committee on the Constitution (Konstitutionsutskottet) investigated these complaints, but found that the government had acted within the law when making the criticized appointments (Statement of Opinion 2005/2006:KU10).

might explain why Republicans are often perceived as responsible for the politicization in the United States, whereas the Social Democrats are the picked culprits in Sweden. If such a pattern does exist, it is quite possible that it is caused by entrenchment rather than by ideology. Both parties have often played a dominating role in their respective political systems. For 20 years, between 1969 and 1989, there was a Democratic president only for four years in the U.S. (James Carter, 1977-1981). Similarly, Sweden had a centre-right Prime Minister only for three years (Carl Bildt, 1991-1994) during the 24-year period 1982 - 2006. A third example is Germany. Between 1949 and 1998, the governments in Germany successfully stayed in power for 13 years or longer (Schröter 2004, 71) and Germany has also been pointed out as one of the most politicized countries in the Western world (Peters and Pierre 2004b, 288; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, 259; Schröter 2004, 56). The time in power is, therefore, a third independent variable that we will take into account when analyzing politicization in relation to different kinds of governments.

Folke, Hirano, and Snyder (2011) point out, however, that the entrenchment of the government mainly shows in contexts where the continued parliamentary (and electoral) support for the incumbent government is uncertain. A government that enjoys its own parliamentary majority and feels confident that it will win the following election does not need to use political recruitment as a power resource. Such a government does not need to rely on successful negotiations with other parties in order to gain sufficient legislative support for their bills. They do not need to tempt potential collaboration partners with prestigious positions as agency heads, for example. The extra leverage that the possibility to make political appointments entails becomes important when a government needs to secure its power. Thus, we will distinguish between strong (majority) governments and weak (minority) governments in order to see whether they act differently with regards to politicization of the public administration.

To sum up, we will evaluate four different explanations to why governments might politicize the public administration: 1) NPM reforms 2) ideology, 3) time in office, and 4) their power base (minority or majority).

Research strategy and data

In order to map out the politicization processes of the public administration and analyze the reasons behind these processes, we use a unique dataset of top-bureaucrats in Sweden. We have collected new data from 1960 to 2010 regarding the political affiliation of Director Generals (DGs) and other heads of public agencies for a selection of about 310 agencies each year (see below for the selection criteria). For convenience, we refer to all the heads of public agencies in our sample as DGs throughout this paper, even though some of them have other titles such as *Landsbövding* (County governor), *Rektor* (Vice Chancellor), *Ordförande* (Chair), *Direktör* (Director), *Kanslichef* (Administrative Director), and *Överintendent* (Superintendent).

We have been able to obtain information for between 68 and 93 percentages of the agency heads each year. In total, the dataset includes 867 agencies and information about 1836 different heads of public agencies.

Studying the Swedish case over a long time-period enable us to study the effect of government behavior as we keep several institutional factors, such as the election system and administrative traditions, constant. Furthermore, Sweden as a country case offers the opportunity to test all four of the explanations to the politicization trend discussed in the theoretical section. The ideas of NPM have, for example, contributed to thorough reform of the Swedish public administration.

These reforms were initiated in the beginning of the 1960s already and are now permeating the administrative system entirely (Hood 1995; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, 286; Sundström 2003, *passim*).

The level of politicization in Sweden can be expected to be relatively low, but with a lot of variation over the time-period studied. It is therefore an ideal case. In a comparative perspective, Sweden has a strong *Rechtsstaat* tradition (Pierre 2004; RRV 1996:50, 35-36), even though research and reports have shown that the recruitment of agency heads certainly is politicized to some extent (Statement of Opinion 2005/2006:KU10; Ehn 1998; Nyman 1976; Statskontoret 1999:21; Sanddahl 2003; Niklasson 2007; Wallin 1997). The central agencies in Sweden are examples of semi-autonomous public organizations that enjoy a great deal of independence in relation to the government (van Thiel 2011). Public servants are not only physically separated from the ministries, that is, they do not share the same premises. On top of this organizational arrangement, their autonomy is also protected in the constitution. The authority of the government to issue orders for the agencies is restricted (Instrument of Government, chapter 7, §2).

Consequently, we know that the value of the first suggested independent variable (NPM) has varied over time in Sweden. This is also the case for the other independent variables included in this study. During the time period studied, Sweden has experienced left-wing as well as centre-right governments, entrenched governments as well as non-entrenched governments, and majority as well as minority governments. Furthermore, we expect the value of the dependent variable (politicization) to be fairly low. This means that Sweden presents a favorable case for observing any potential effects that the suggested explanations might have on the level of politicization; there is variation in

the independent variables and they have enough space to affect the dependent variable in a positive direction, since the latter is far from hitting the ceiling.

Our analyses will only include the very top-positions of the public administration in Sweden. We believe that this is a reasonable limitation, as previous studies have shown that the political appointees at the top of the agency make a significant difference in how the agency performs (Krause, Lewis and Douglas 2006; Lewis 2007). More important to our research design, however, is that these top-positions are under the direct control of the Swedish executive. As we are interested in analyzing party political dynamics of the recruitment processes, it is crucial to our design that the Government actually is in command of the positions that we analyze, which would not have been the case if we had dug deeper into the administrative hierarchy in Sweden. The dataset thus includes all Swedish agencies with DGs appointed by the government.

The data collection is based on several sources. The two main sources are i) a yearly publication including information about all Swedish agencies (*Sveriges statskalender*, various years), and ii) the Swedish version of the reference publication “Who is Who?” (*Vem är det?*, various years), which includes biographical information on most agency heads. These sources have been complemented with other sources containing biographical information on heads of public agencies or information on Swedish agencies (e.g. *Statsbyggaren*, various years; *Statliga myndigheter*, 1975, 1980, 1986, 1989; *Fakta om folkvalda*, various years; *Enkammarriksdagen*, various years), as well as with CVs for heads of public agencies provided through personal communications with agencies or former DGs.

It should be noted that the data for each year is registered in March/April. This is important to keep in mind as Swedish elections take place in September. We should, therefore, not expect a change of government in, for example, 1982 to have an impact on the political recruitments in our data until 1983.

A brief note should also be made on how we operationalize political affiliation. We consider an agency head to have a political affiliation if he or she has i) served as minister, ii) been elected to Parliament or a local democratic assembly, iii) been State secretary³, iv) been employed as political advisor at the Government Offices, or v) been employed by a political party or an organization clearly associated with a political party, such as the blue collar union confederation *LO*.

Politicized recruitment to the Swedish agencies, 1960-2010

We will now turn to our empirical analysis, in which we describe and try to explain the politicization of the Swedish bureaucracy from 1960 to 2010. There are four questions that will be discussed here: 1) has the level of politicization increased as a consequence of NPM reforms? 2) Is there any difference between left-wing and centre-right governments when it comes to the politicization of the civil service? 3) Do entrenched governments make more political appointments? And 4) do minority governments make more political appointments? We start out by drawing a general picture of the implementation of NPM reforms in Sweden based on previous research. This development is then related to the proportion of Director Generals with a political background over time. Do these two trends follow the same pattern?

³ In the Swedish system, State secretaries are the second in command at the Government Offices, following the ministers, and are clearly a political position (Larsson 1986).

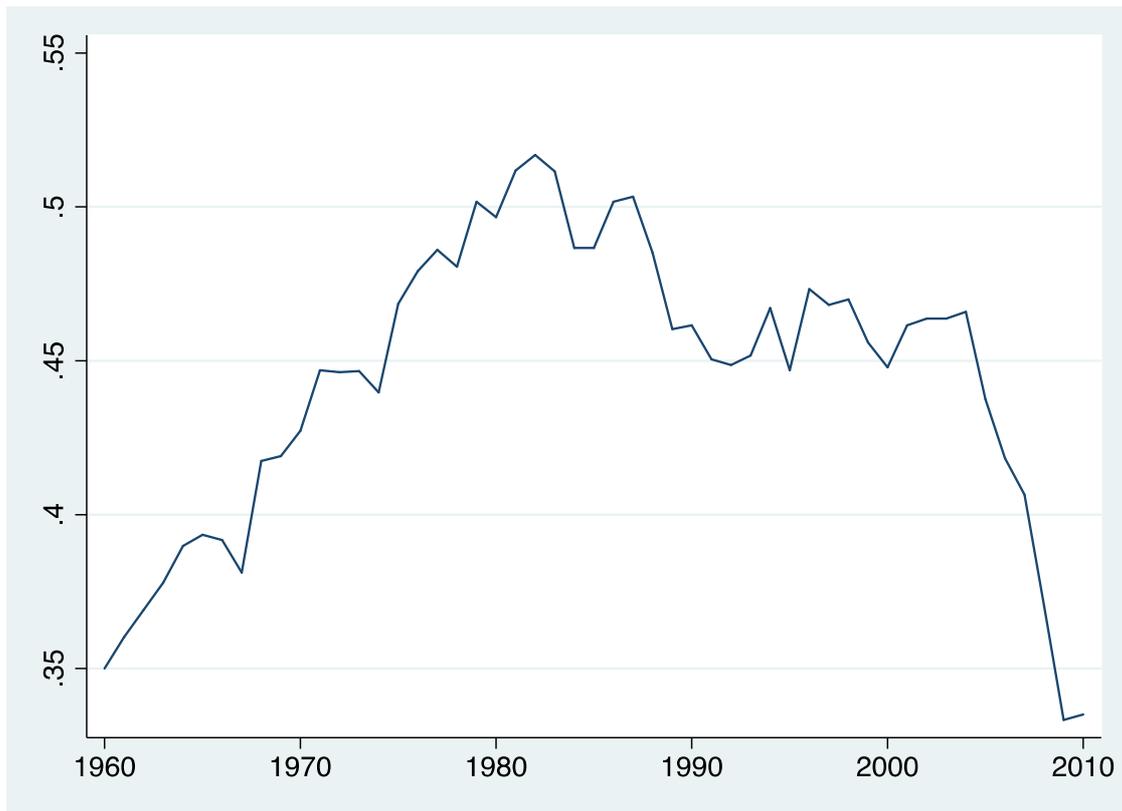
According to Göran Sundström (2003, 319-320), the introduction and implementation of administrative reform in Sweden have roughly occurred in four stages: the Program Budgeting phase (1963-1976), the Economic Administrative System phase (1976-1985), the Complex Allocation Analyses phase (1985-1992), and the Management by objectives and results phase (1992-). However, these four phases should not be understood as periods characterized by different administrative ideals or goals. Rather, they represent different tools and methods that have been used in the attempt to achieve the same NPM ideal; something that runs through all of these phases is the ambition to decrease agencies' involvement in policy formulation on the one hand, and increase their managerial autonomy on the other (SOU 2007:75, 104; Sundström 2003, *passim*), an ambition that is very much in line with the NPM idea that policy should be formulated by politicians, whereas agencies should enjoy a great deal of freedom in the realization of these policies.

These ideas gained a strong support and were implemented at great speed (SOU 2007.75, 74; Sundström 2003, 329) much thanks to the growing criticism of the increasing political involvement by the reform bureaucracies in policy areas related to social welfare (Rothstein 2005; RRV 1996, 50). The building of the welfare state after the Second World War had resulted in a growing number of agencies and they enjoyed a high degree of policy autonomy. They did not enjoy much financial or managerial autonomy, however. The idea that took hold during the Program Budgeting reform was that these two aspects of the agencies' autonomy should be switched around. Consequently, agencies have gradually gained a greater financial and managerial autonomy, but they have also been submitted to more controls and evaluations in relation to politically defined goals. It is somewhat unclear to what extent agencies are still involved in policy making (Niklasson and Pierre 2010; Rothstein 2005; SOU 2007:107), but it is fairly safe to say that agencies financial and manage-

rial autonomy have steadily increased over time. If NPM reforms should drive the politicization of the civil service, political recruitment of DG's in Sweden should follow the same linear pattern.

Figure 1

Proportion of agency heads with party political background,
1960-2010



Comment: The figure shows the proportion of agency heads with party political background. Data is mainly from a yearly publication including all Swedish agencies (Sveriges statskalender) and the Swedish version of "Who is Who?" (Vem är det?). Note that the agency heads are registered in March/April each year, which for example is before the general elections take place in September.

As reported in Figure 1, a large proportion of agency heads in Sweden have a background in politics. The variation is however not constantly increasing, and thus not in line with expectations. Instead, it follows an inverted U-shaped form. The share of agency heads with a political background increases in the beginning of the period, especially during the 1970s. Their numbers go up

about seven percentage points during the 1960s, followed by another nine percentage points until 1982. In total, the proportion of agency heads with a political background rises from 35 to 51 percent from 1960 to 1982. The beginning of this period overlaps with the era when politicians were trying to take back some of the power from the strong and policy driven “reform bureaucracies”. In this process, it might have been a strategy to make more political recruitments of agency heads in order to regain control over the agencies, a strategy that would be in line with the NPM hypothesis. The centre-right government that came into power in 1976 did, for example, perceive that they were facing a resistance towards their political reforms by some of the agencies (Levin 1983).

The growing politicization of agency heads comes to a halt in 1982, however, and the pattern over the following 20-year period, from 1983 to 2004, appears remarkably stable considering that the number of agencies included is only about 310 each year. This means that only 35 agency heads with a political background make up the difference between the bottom notations of 1991 and 2000 (44 percent each year) and the top year of 1982 (51 percent). During this time period, the ideas of NPM experienced their international breakthrough and even though these ideas were not new to the Swedish context, the international discourse did influence the national debate on public administrative reforms. The international NPM trend that was advocated by important international organizations, like the OECD, IMF, and the IBRD, gave legitimacy and weight to those in favor of management by objectives and results (SOU 2005:75, 93). This steering model was thus consolidated and taken even further. It is therefore somewhat surprising that the level of politicization does not continue to rise after 1982. If the NPM trend indeed has been one important factor driving the politicization of the civil service, one would expect the share of politically recruited agency heads to grow once this international trend reached Sweden.

The sudden and dramatic change in the proportion of politically recruited agency heads that occurs after 2004 also speaks against a NPM explanation. The share of political recruitments drops with more than 13 percentage points in just five years, from 46 percent in 2004 to 33 percent in 2009. This means that the level of politicization among agency heads is lower 2009 than it was in the beginning of the time period observed, which is quite the opposite to the pattern related to agency autonomy. If increased managerial and financial autonomy of agencies motivate politicians to control agencies through political recruitments instead, there should be a much greater share of politically recruited agency heads today than in the 1960s, but this is not at all the case.

We are therefore inclined to answer “no” to our first research question of whether NPM drives politicization. Whereas the financial and managerial autonomy of Swedish agencies has been gradually increasing over time, the development of politicization follows a curve shaped pattern.

We will now continue to the issue of whether certain kinds of governments are more likely to politicize the civil service, and start with the ideology explanation. The expectation in the Swedish case is that Social Democratic governments have been more inclined to politicize the civil service.

Table 1

Political recruitments of left-wing and centre-right governments 1960-2010 (percent)

	Left-wing	Centre-right	Both
Non-political recruitments	53 (606)	54 (252)	53 (858)
Political recruitments	47 (538)	46 (212)	47 (750)
All	100 (1144)	100 (464)	100 (1608)

Comment: DGs have only been included in the analysis in the year/s that they were recruited, not in all the years they spent in office. Note also that the analysis does not include DGs recruited before 1960, which is why the total is only 1608. Figures in parentheses are number of cases. Political recruitments have been defined as i) served as minister, ii) been elected to Parliament or a local democratic assembly, iii) been State secretary, iv) been employed as political advisor at the Government Offices, or v) been employed by a political party or an organization clearly associated with a political party, such as the blue collar union confederation LO or the employer organization Svenskt Näringsliv.

Table 1 clearly shows that there is no difference in how the left-wing (Social Democratic) and the centre-right coalition governments handle the recruitments of agency heads. When we look at all the DG appointments made between 1960 and 2010, the figures turn out almost exactly the same for both kinds of governments: 47 percent of recruitments under left-wing governments' are political, compared to 46 percent of those of the centre-right governments. If we look at the absolute numbers within parenthesis we see that the only major difference is that left-wing governments have made more appointments overall, since these governments have spent more time in power.

While these results clearly speak against an ideological explanation, one could argue that the decreasing politicization observed since 2004 mainly has taken place under a centre-right government. It is also the case that the centre-right coalition (the so-called Alliance) that came into power in 2006 actually made an election promise to strengthen the meritocratic recruitment of agency heads (Official letter of the government 2009/10:43, 4). As a result, a greater number of DG position openings are posted publically. The purpose of this is to widen the recruitment pool and increase the level of transparency in the recruitment process in order to improve the competence and the legitimacy of the people appointed (Press conference with the minister of public administration and housing, Stefan Attefall, on August 2 2011), but it is too early to know what effect these reforms will have on the politicization of the civil service.

The decline in political recruitment of agency heads cannot be entirely attributed to the present government, however, since the decline started already under the previous Social Democratic government. As noted in the methods section, all figures in our data are from March/April each year, which means that not only 2005 but also 2006 belongs to the Social Democratic government (the

Swedish elections are held in September), and as can be seen in figure 1 these were the years when the decline started. We thus conclude that there is no reason to believe that the level of politicization depends on the ideological bias of the government.

Table 2

Party affiliation of the politically recruited DGs appointed 1960-2010 (percent)

	Left-wing	Centre-right	Both	Difference
LEFT-WING PARTIES	80 (432)	53 (113)	73 (545)	+27**
Left Party	0 (2)	1 (1)	0 (3)	-1
Social Democratic Party	79 (426)	53 (112)	72 (538)	+6**
Greens	1 (4)	0 (0)	1 (4)	+1
CENTRE-RIGHT PARTIES	20 (106)	47 (99)	27 (205)	-27**
Centre Party	7 (36)	16 (34)	9 (70)	-9**
Liberal Party	6 (32)	11 (24)	7 (56)	-5*
Moderate Party	7 (35)	17 (36)	10 (71)	-10**
Christian Democratic Party	1 (3)	2 (5)	1 (8)	-1
ALL	100 (538)	100 (212)	100 (750)	

Comment: DGs have only been included in the analysis in the year/s that they were recruited, not in all the years they spent in office. This analysis also only includes DGs with a political background, which is why the total is only 750. Figures in parentheses represent number of cases. The last column states the difference in percentage points between left-wing and centre-right parties.

**The difference is significant on a 95 percent confidence level (tau-b)*

***The difference is significant on a 99 percent confidence level (tau-b).*

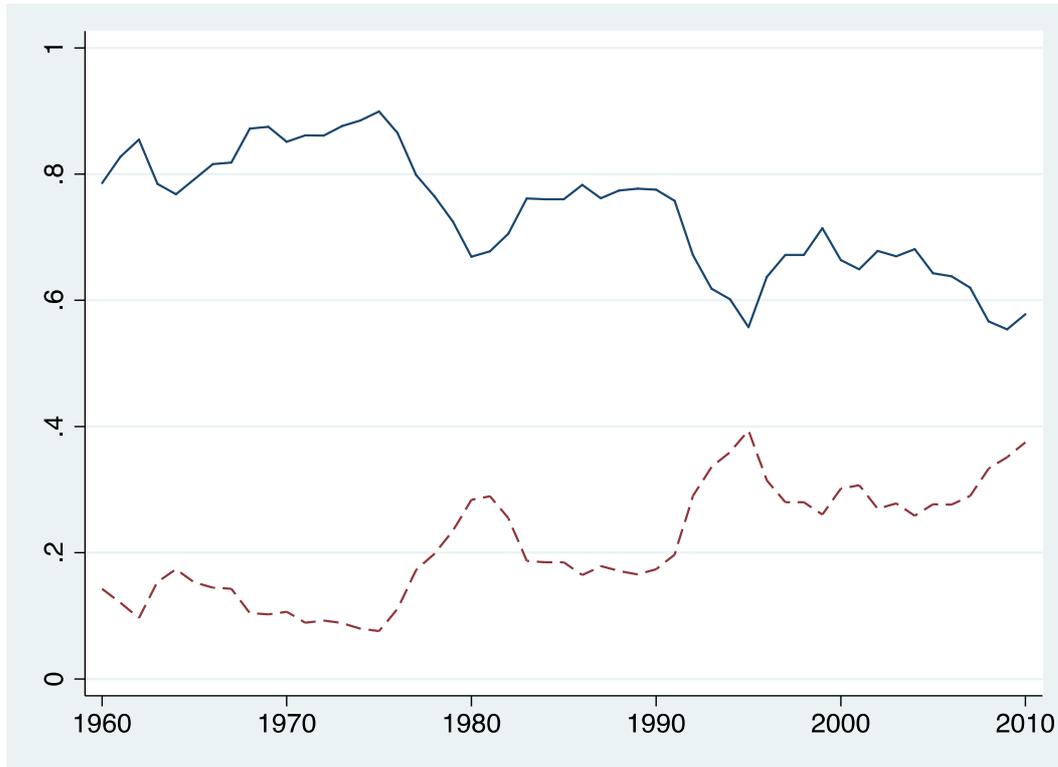
If we look at ideology from another perspective, namely for the ideological bias of the DGs recruited, there are however some interesting differences. Table 2 shows that Social Democrats constitute the great majority of the politically recruited DGs. 79 percent of the DGs appointed by a left-wing government are associated with the Social Democrats. This might not be so surprising considering i) that all left-wing governments have been Social Democratic governments and ii) that these governments have spent a long time in power. What is more surprising however is that 53 percent of the centre-right governments' political recruitments also have been people with a Social Democratic background. Even though this is a significantly smaller share than that appointed by the left-wing

governments, it is still a majority of the recruitments made. Only 20 percent of the agency heads whom have been politically appointed by left-wing governments have been recruited from one of the centre-right parties. Thus, centre-right as well as left-wing governments mainly make political recruitments of Social Democrats, although left-wing governments display a stronger inclination in this direction. One explanation for this could simply be that the supply of potential DG's with a Social Democratic background is much larger, especially during the periods with Social Democratic domination. Another explanation that has circulated is that the dominance of Social Democrats among agency heads is caused by a lack of interest in these public service positions shown by resigning centre-right politicians, as they prefer continuing their careers in the private sector (Statement of Opinion 1997/98:KU25; Statskontoret 1999).

A consequence of that the Social Democratic Party has lost its position as the dominating political party over time is that the share of Social Democrats among politically appointed DGs varies over time. The more time has gone, the more the Social Democrats have also lost their privilege to make politicized appointments of DGs.

Figure 2

The party affiliation of politically recruited DGs, 1960-2010



Comment: The solid line shows the share of politically recruited DGs associated with left-wing governments (Social Democrats), while the dashed line shows the share of politically recruited DGs associated with centre-right governments (the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, the Moderate Party, and the Christian Democratic Party). Data is mainly from a yearly publication including all Swedish agencies (Sveriges statskalender) and the Swedish version of "Who is Who?" (Vem är det?). Note that the agency heads are registered in March/April each year, which before the general elections take place in September.

Figure 2 reports on the proportion of the politically recruited agency heads with a background in either the centre-right, or the left-wing parties over time. This analysis shows that Sweden has gone from having a civil service where political recruitments are dominated by Social Democrats – about 90 percent of the agency heads with a political background were Social Democrats in the mid 1970s

– to a system in which almost 40 percent of the politically appointed DGs are from the centre-right parties.

Figure 2 also discloses that new governments of all political colors indeed take the opportunity to recruit DG's of their own ideology. The proportion of agency heads with a background in centre-right parties increases dramatically first between 1976 and 1982 when four different centre-right governments were in power (Fälldin I, 1976-1978, Ullsten 1978-1979, Fälldin II 1979-1981, and Fälldin III, 1981-1982). As mentioned previously, the new centre-right government was skeptical towards agency heads with presumed Social Democratic sympathies (Levin 1983). It is plausible that this motivated the centre-right governments to make political recruitments of agency heads in order to compensate for this ideological bias. Thus, the share of political appointed agency heads from any of the centre-right parties increased dramatically after 1976, while the number of Social Democrats dropped. The share of centre-right sympathizers falls back again between 1983 and 1991, however, when the Social Democrats are back in power, but the story keeps repeating itself. The political appointments of centre-right DGs increase again during the centre-right government led by Carl Bildt (1991-1994), just to drop once more when the Social Democrats regain power in 1994.

Based on these results, there is no reason to suspect that the ideological bias of a government matters to the level of politicization; left-wing and centre-right governments appear to make political recruitments when they can and more or less to the same extent.

Finally, we will study whether there is a correlation between the strength of the government and the politicization of the civil service. The two questions are if entrenched governments and minority governments make more use of their authority to appoint DGs with a political background, since they have the experience and the motivation to do so.

Table 3

Entrenched governments and political recruitments of DGs (percent)

	Non-political recruitments	Political recruitments	All
0-1 years in power	47 (165)	53 (189)	100 (354)
2-3 years in power	60 (231)	40 (155)	100 (386)
4-5 years in power	51 (103)	49 (98)	100 (201)
≥ 6 years in power	54 (359)	46 (308)	100 (667)
All	54 (858)	46 (750)	100 (1608)
Difference between 0-1 and ≥ 6 years in power	-7*	+7*	

Comment: DGs are only included in the analysis in the year/s that they were recruited, not in all the years they spent in office. Note also that the analysis does not include DGs recruited before 1960, which is why the total is only 1608. Figures in parentheses are number of cases. Difference refers to the percentage points between governments that have been in power for 0-1 years and governments that have been in power for six years or longer. Political recruitments have been defined as i) served as minister, ii) been elected to Parliament or a local democratic assembly, iii) been State secretary, iv) been employed as political advisor at the Government Offices, or v) been employed by a political party or an organization clearly associated with a political party, such as the blue collar union confederation LO or the employer organization Svenskt Näringsliv.

**Significant on a 95 percent confidence level (two-tailed t-test).*

When operationalizing entrenchment, Folke, Hirano, and Snyder (2011) divide governments into four groups according to how many years they have spent in office. The first group consists of those not entrenched at all (0-1 years), whereas the last group has been in power for six years or longer. Table 3 compares the share of political appointments made by four different kinds of gov-

ernments. The figure presented in the bottom row show that there is a significant difference of seven percentage points between governments that are not entrenched and the most entrenched governments, but the difference is small. 53 percent of the non-entrenched governments' appointments are political compared to 46 percent of the most entrenched ones. The pattern is however opposite from what we expected; entrenched governments do not appear to be more effective when it comes to politicizing the civil service. On the contrary, new governments seem to take the chance to make the political appointments they wish to do as soon as possible. This might be interpreted as an election effect, which is also supported by the previously discussed figure 2. When in power the government takes the opportunity to make political appointments, and the entrenchment has, if any, a negative effect.

However, the fact that the experiences and networks of entrenched governments do not result in a greater share of political recruitments might be because they do not always have the right motivation to politicize more. It has been suggested that entrenched governments only make use of this capacity when they need to secure their power base (Folke, Hirano, and Snyder 2011), for example when a parliamentary majority does not support them.

There is actually some anecdotal evidence suggesting that recruitments to agency heads are used as rewards for supporting a minority government. The collaboration between the Social democratic minority government and the Left Party and the Green Party between 1998 and 2006 might illustrate how this could work. It has been claimed that in exchange for support, the Left and the Green parties might have gained other things, like DG positions. The first agency head with a background in the Green Party was, for example, recruited in 1999 (Kjell Dahlström) and the first DG from the

Left Party was recruited in 2002 (Maggi Mikaelsson). The following year, the Left Party gained another appointment: Anne-Marie Morhed, and from the Green Party, Marianne Samuelsson and Matz Hammarström were recruited in 2004.

Table 4

Political recruitments of entrenched minority and majority governments 1960-2010 (percent)

	Entrenched majority	Entrenched minority	Not entrenched majority	Not entrenched minority	All majority	All minority	All
Non-political recruitments	61 (122)	54 (571)	50 (65)	45 (100)	57 (187)	53 (671)	53 (858)
Political recruitments	39 (77)	46 (484)	50 (65)	55 (124)	43 (142)	48 (608)	47 (750)
All	100 (199)	100 (1055)	100 (130)	100 (224)	100 (329)	100 (1279)	100 (1608)

Comment: DGs are only included in the analysis in the year/s that they were recruited, not in all the years they spent in office. Figures in parentheses are number of cases. Entrenched had been coded as having spent two or more years in power. Political recruitments have been defined as i) served as minister, ii) been elected to Parliament or a local democratic assembly, iii) been State secretary, iv) been employed as political advisor at the Government Offices, or v) been employed by a political party or an organization clearly associated with a political party, such as the blue collar union confederation LO or the employer organization Svenskt Näringsliv.

When put to a more systematic test, there is however no general pattern of this kind of horse-trading in our data. Table 4 instead indicates that governments that have spent more than two years in power make less political recruitments, even when they lack their own parliamentary majority. 55 percent of the non-entrenched minority governments' appointments are political. The corresponding figure for entrenched minority governments is 46 percent. Similarly, non-entrenched majority governments make more political recruitments (50 percent) than entrenched majority governments (39 percent). The differences are statistically significant in both cases.

Thus, entrenched governments do not drive politicization more, not even when they need resources in the negotiations with other parties in order to gain parliamentary support.⁴

Nor does there seem to be a convincing independent effect of parliamentary support in Table 4. 48 percent of the minority governments' DG appointments are political, compared to 43 percent of the appointments made by majority governments. In this case, the difference points in the expected direction, but it is not statistically significant.⁵

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to test four commonly used explanations for civil service politicization. More specifically, we have studied if the proportion of political recruitments is related to NPM reforms, or to certain qualities of the government itself, like its ideological bias, time in office, or its parliamentary support. These explanations have been tested on unique data containing information on the political and professional background of 1836 DGs in Sweden between 1960-2010.

⁴ We have run OLS regressions in which we test the effects (individually and under control for one another) of the entrenchment (tested as an ordinal, interval, or logged variable), the strength (dummy: majority - minority), and the ideological bias (dummy: left-wing or centre-right) of the government on the proportion of political recruitments (dummy 0-1). The entrenchment variable (dummy) turns out to have a significant ($p=.000$) and noticeable effect. The b-value (unstandardized) is 0.123. The explained variance (adjusted R^2) of the model that includes all three independent variables is no more than 0.007, however. An interaction variable of entrenchment and minority governments has also been included, but this variable does not contribute to any noticeable improvements of the model.

⁵ It becomes significant (τ -b) when we control for the ideological bias of the government, but only for centre-right governments. When centre-right governments do not control a parliamentary majority themselves, their political DG recruitments make up 53 percent of their total number of recruitments, compared to only 40 percent when they are supported by a parliamentary majority.

Our first conclusion is that NPM reforms do not appear to have a positive effect on the politicization of the civil service. Whereas ideas in line with NPM have become increasingly dominating in the organization of the Swedish public administration over time, the politicization development follows a curved shaped pattern. The share of politically appointed DGs increased during the 1960s and 1970s, but in the beginning of the 1980s it leveled out and stayed remarkably stable until 2004, when it starts to fall dramatically. The application of NPM cannot explain this development.

The other three explanations related to the government itself are no better at explaining the politicization pattern observed. We have, for example, not detected any evidence of an ideological bias in the extent of political recruitments made. These kinds of appointments are made by left-wing and centre-right governments to approximately the same degree. Rather than being an aspect of the ideological dimension, political recruitments appear to be a part of a political system in which the actors agree on how this resource should be used.

We can also conclude that the level of politicization does not increase with the years a government has spent in power. On the contrary, non-entrenched governments make more political recruitments, regardless of whether they need to negotiate with other parties in order to get their bills passed Parliament or not. We interpret this unexpected result as a confirmation that political recruitments are indeed a valuable asset for governments. Perhaps so important that governments that come into power are in a hurry to make the most of their newly acquired privilege to make DG appointments. However, it also clearly speaks against the hitherto accepted explanation that politicization is driven by time-in-power or the Parliamentary power-base of the government.

Our study thus boils down to the conclusion that none of the theoretical explanations from earlier research help us to understand the politicization patterns observed in Sweden from 1960-2010. One reason for this might be that many of the studies from which these explanations stem are case-studies from one, specific point in time. More research, longitudinal as well as comparative, is therefore needed in order to improve our knowledge of how politicization develops in different countries and what is driving it.

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