Scandinavian Political Studies, Vol. 16 – No. 3, 1993
ISSN 0080–6757

Power in the Swedish Parliament

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This article is based on a mail questionnaire sent to members of the Swedish parliament (the Riksdag) in 1988. To increase our understanding of how the institution works, an analysis of members' perceptions of the distribution of power *within* the Riksdag is undertaken. Members were asked (1) how influential various groups and bodies are, and (2) how influential these groups and bodies *should* be. The results show that members want more power to be given to parliamentary party groups, committees and MPs as individuals, and less power to the party leaders and the chiefs of staff. Differences in perceptions along partisan lines are small. However, members of the Greens – an anti-establishment party – are more oriented toward strengthening the influence of individual MPs and toward weakening the power of party leaders than are members of the established parties.

"The Riksdag represents the Swedish people." This key passage in the Swedish constitution emphatically states that it is the responsibility of parliament to exercise the mandate of the people. When it comes to a precise description of how the Riksdag shall be organized in order to accomplish its task, however, the Swedish Code of Laws leaves us in the lurch. Like other constitutions, the Swedish *Grundlag* has little to say about which of parliament's various institutions and bodies shall be granted power and influence.

The silence of the constitution makes way for an internal struggle over power *within* parliament. Some parliamentary actors may benefit, for example, from a strong committee system, others from a strengthening of the position of the party groups. As the balance of influence between bodies change, so does the internal functioning of parliament. The outcome of the internal power struggle, in short, decides how the institution works.

Researchers interested in parliaments have so far been reluctant to analyze the internal workings of parliamentary bodies from the perspective of power and influence. There are, of course, a number of studies that assess the relative influence of two or three of the special parliamentary institutions (e.g. Mezey 1979; Arter 1984), but very few cover the whole spectrum of possible centers of power. Moreover, scholarly interest has been directed towards the distribution of factual influence and power. In

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order to understand how the institution works, however, it is just as important to gain insight into the actors' *perceptions* of power.

In this article we try to break new ground by analyzing how Swedish MPs perceive the distribution of power and influence in the Riksdag. We investigate (1) which institutions and bodies are perceived by members as being the most influential; and (2) perceptions of the way in which power and influence should ideally be distributed. Drawing on this information, we then discuss whether there is a propensity for change in today's Riksdag.

On an a priori basis, there is good reason to believe that members' perceptions of power are likely to be related to macro-level factors, such as party grouping, as well as to more micro-level factors relating to characteristics of the individual MP. With respect to the former, for example, members of opposition parties have limited influence over decision-making, which may color their thinking about power in the Riksdag. For similar reasons, members of anti-establishment parties, like the Left Party and the Greens, are more likely to be dissatisfied with existing conditions.

As for individual-level characteristics, backbenchers, newcomers to the parliament and perhaps female members may look differently on the workings of the Riksdag than do frontbenchers, veterans and male members. After all, a revolution from below was instigated against the procedures of the House of Commons in the 1970s (e.g. Norton 1980a; Judge 1981).

Perceptions of power, of course, are to some extent rooted in the factual distribution of power and influence. As a baseline for our analysis, we will therefore compare organizational structures of the Riksdag with parliaments in other western democracies. Which features of the internal workings are unique to the Riksdag, and which are shared by most parliaments?

Data used in this article were collected within the framework of a larger study on the role of the Riksdag within Swedish representative democracy. Shortly after the 1988 parliamentary elections, mail questionnaires were distributed to all 349 elected members of the Riksdag. The response rate was 96 percent. In the spring of 1991, complementary personal interviews were conducted with a subsample of 20 MPs. The data analyzed here are basically from the 1988 study.[1]

Institutional Centers of Power

Obviously, committees and party groups are possible centers of power and influence in most parliamentary bodies, but there are other alternatives as well. Party leaders, or specialist staff personnel, for instance, may also be

influential power-holders. Yet another possibility, usually associated with 19th century politics, is that parliament is dominated by individual members, who make decisions without ties to parties and committees. Finally, we need to take into consideration the relationship between parliament and the government. Even though we are dealing with the internal workings of parliament, power and influence exercised by the government are of crucial importance.

With respect to *committees*, scholars have identified a number of organizational factors which affect the relative power of a specific committee system, among these being size, the degree of specialization, permanence, stability of membership, and departmental parallelism. Thus, small, specialized standing committees with a stable membership and departmental parallelism are more influential than committees having the opposite characteristics (Shaw 1979; Olsen & Mezey 1991b).[2]

By comparative standards, the Swedish committee system can be placed in a middle position in terms of its power and influence over political decision-making. Because of their limited size, permanent status, relative specialization and departmental anchorage, the Riksdag's committees, together with the committees of the German Bundestag, are ranked as more influential than the corresponding institutions in the French National Assembly and the British House of Commons, although less powerful than the committees of the US Congress (Shaw 1979, 395–404; Olson 1980, 255–257; Arter 1984, 204–208).

Parliamentary parties constitute a parallel and competitive institution to the committees. Decisions made in parliamentary party groups frequently serve to restrict committee autonomy. A rule of thumb is that power is centralized by strong parliamentary parties and decentralized by strong committees (e.g. Loewenberg & Patterson 1979).

Parliamentary parties can, in turn, be more or less hierarchal. In hierarchically organized parties, decision-making is concentrated in a small number of dominant *leaders*. Less hierarchal parties are characterized by a more even distribution of influence over decision-making among party members (e.g. Jewell 1973).

In Sweden, as in other parliamentary democracies, parliamentary parties hold a strong position in the legislature. As to the internal distribution of power, the Swedish parties have in international comparisons been placed in a middle position, with substantially less centralized processes of decision-making than are found in British parliamentary parties for example.[3] The domestic Swedish debate has followed other lines, however. "Party leader cult" is an expression that has been used to describe power conditions within the parliamentary parties – a phrase indicating strongly centralized decision-making and substantial influence on the part of the party leaders (Gahrton 1983).

Closely associated with party development is the principle of parliamentarism and the *government's* strong position in relation to the legislature. Since Bryce (1921) introduced his noted thesis on the "decline of parliaments" in the 1920s, there has been discussion as to whether there exists any power to be distributed within the legislatures. Critics allege that Western parliaments function solely as rubber stamps for governmental policy. Yet, in recent years the dominant standpoint has been that parliamentary institutions do in fact have a certain independent power over decision-making.

Sweden has here again been placed in a middle position in international comparisons. As with the majority of Europe's parliaments, the Swedish Riksdag has been classified as a "reactive legislature" as opposed to an "active legislature" like the US Congress.[4] More detailed Swedish studies have emphasized that the Riksdag has gained strength since the 1960s, thanks in large part to developments occurring in reaction to weak minority governments (Isberg 1982, 1984; Arter 1984; von Sydow 1990; Sjölin 1991; Damgaard 1992).[5]

In contrast to committees, parties and governments, the *staff* is a body of decision-makers within parliaments that is relatively little researched. Parliamentary parties and committees all over the Western world employ a large group of specialized staff in order to manage the ever-growing number of complex tasks. With their knowledge and central positions in the bureaucracy, these experts have at least a potential influence over decision-making. The phenomenon of staff as a hidden power holder has received the greatest attention in the US, but is found in other Western parliaments as well, including the Swedish Riksdag.[6]

Assessing the Distribution of Power

One part of the story behind the cautiousness of scholars to analyze the overall distribution of power within parliament is the difficulty in finding criteria for comparison. It is perplexing enough to compare the power of two bodies having the same function. Arriving at a reasonable measurement for the amount of power of groups and bodies having different functions is even more worrisome a task. Researchers concerned with parliaments often wisely avoid specifying the criteria used in making their assessments.[7]

One feasible proceeding is of course to make use of the subjective reputational method. In his book *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*, Kingdon (1973) tries a variation of this subjective method by asking representatives what influenced their voting decisions and whether they had been in contact with various actors. Kornberg & Mishler used a more traditional reputational method by first asking Canadian members of parliament to

identify a number of influential persons and then analyzing their formal positions (Kornberg 1967; Kornberg & Mishler 1976).[8]

Our approach differs from Kingdon's and Kornberg & Mishler's not only in that we focus on members' perceptions of power rather than on factual conditions, but also in that our measurement technique concentrates directly on the groups and bodies in question. In our survey, the members were asked to estimate the influence of the following eight groups and bodies on decision-making in the Riksdag, using an 11-point scale reaching from 0 (very low influence) to 10 (very influential): "the Standing Committees", "Standing Committee Chiefs of Staff", "Parliamentary Party Groups", "Parliamentary Party Leaders", "Parliamentary Party Group Leaders", "Parliamentary Party Chiefs of Staff", "the Government" and "Individual Representatives".[9] The members were asked to mark how much influence the groups/bodies in question actually *have* within the parliament and also how much influence they *should* appropriately have.[10]

Our method has the advantage of offering comparisons on a unified scale, at least in theory. We left it up to the members themselves to define the concept of "influence over decision-making in the Riksdag"; no detailed instructions were given. Furthermore, the measurement technique makes it possible to cover a broad spectrum of conceivable power sources.[11] Although our simplified technique provoked certain objections on the part of the members, an absolute majority of MPs (between 218 and 275 depending on the group or body in question) agreed to give their views on the distribution of power within the Swedish Riksdag.[12]

Parliament According to Parliamentarians

Swedish MPs do not see themselves as kings of the parliamentary castle (see Table 1). In their view, it is the government and not any internal body or group that is most influential. Party leaders are second, followed by the committees and the parliamentary party groups. Farthest down on the list are the individual representatives – lower than both the parliamentary party staff and the committee staff. Thus, representatives see a Riksdag steered from the top. It is the government and the party leaders who control parliament, while individual representatives have even less to say than do the chiefs of staff.

Our interpretation, of course, is somewhat forced. The members primarily see a government-dominated Riksdag, but beyond this the differences between the influence of the party leaders, committees and parliamentary party groups are not particularly large. The Riksdag is controlled from the top, but such traditional collective bodies as the committees and the parliamentary party groups are also perceived to

Table 1. Members' Perceptions of the Actual Influence of Various Groups and Bodies on Decision-making in the Riksdag in 1988 (averages).

Group/Body	Average perceived influence
Government	818
Parliamentary party leaders	763
Standing committees	756
Parliamentary party groups	743
Parliamentary party group leaders	646
Parliamentary party chiefs of staff	520
Standing committees chiefs of staff	406
Individual representatives	383
Minimum N	253

Members were asked to rank the influence of each group and body on a scale reaching from 0 (very little influence) to 10 (very influential). Ratings reported in this and subsequent tables have been transformed to values between 0 and 1000 for ease of interpretation.

have considerable impact. When we look at the bottom of the hierarchy, however, it is evident that, above all, the party staff is perceived as having significant power in relation to individual members.[13]

Members' perceptions of the distribution of power in the Riksdag both confirm and modify earlier studies of factual conditions. Pictures of a dominant government, strong parties and a relatively powerful committee system have been painted before. What is new is the impression of strict control from the leadership within the parties, the relatively influential position of the party staffs, and perhaps also the strong position of the committees vis-à-vis the party groups. Especially remarkable in relation to the international literature is that decision-making in the Riksdag is strongly associated with a small number of party leaders. It would seem that the Swedish party leaders have a perceived authority in parliament virtually equal to that of the almost omnipotent British Prime Ministers.

The scenario described is common to all parties (see Table 2). The government is perceived as most powerful by members of all parties, followed by either the party leaders (Social Democratic and Liberal members) or the committees (Left Party, Center, Conservative and Green members). Parliamentary party groups tend to fall into the fourth position in the various rankings. Only Social Democrats see the parliamentary party groups as being more influential than the committees. The parties also agreed on the lower end of their rankings. Individual members, for example, are perceived as least influential among all parties except among Social Democrats, who rank the committee chiefs of staff as having less influence.

Table 2. Party Affiliation and Members' Perceptions of the Actual Influence of Various Groups and Bodies on Decision-making in the Riksdag in 1988 (averages).

Party Affiliation					
Left Party		Social Democrats		Center Party	
Government	727	Government	812	Government	838
Committees	715	Party leaders	770	Committees	803
Party groups	683	Party groups	765	Party leaders	763
Group leaders	531	Committees	745	Party groups	735
Party leaders	515	Group leaders	674	Group leaders	645
Party staff	430	Party staff	484	Party staff	491
Committee staff	400	Individ. repr.	424	Committee staff	443
Individ. repr.	390	Committee staff	355	Individ. repr.	353

Party Affiliation					
Liberals		Conservatives		Greens	
Government	854	Government	818	Government	791
Party leaders	800	Committees	783	Committees	717
Committees	739	Party leaders	778	Party groups	700
Party groups	731	Party groups	724	Party leaders	678
Group leaders	627	Group leaders	644	Committee staff	573
Party staff	576	Party staff	612	Group leaders	536
Committee staff	406	Committee staff	463	Party staff	422
Individ. repr.	350	Individ. repr.	353	Individ. repr.	275

See note to Table 1 regarding data transformation. The average *N* for individual parties is as follows: Left, 12; Social Democrats, 120; Center, 35; Liberals, 37; Conservatives, 49; and Greens, 10.

Thus, on the whole, the results show great consistency in the perceptions of power. Complete consensus does not exist, but a calculation of the rank correlations demonstrates rather impressive similarities along party lines. The average rank correlation between the different views reaches +0.90, with +1.0 as the highest value (Center and Conservative members) and +0.76 as the lowest (Social Democrats and Greens).

One interpretation of the results is that MPs tend to differ in their perceptions of ideologically loaded aspects of the political world, but have similar perceptions of political procedures. Kingdon (1973) found only small differences between Democrats and Republicans in how they viewed the distribution of power in the House of Representatives – evidence that is consistent with our results.

Other studies, however, speak against this interpretation in terms of ideological and procedural issues. Depending on whether they belong to the party in or out of government, Canadian MPs show radically different perceptions of the influence of the committees over governmental policy (Rush 1979, 229). Scholars have also shown that members of different

Table 3. Members' Assessments of the Preferred Level of Influence of Various Groups and Bodies on Decision-making in the Riksdag in 1988 (averages).

Group/Body	Average preferred influence
Parliamentary party groups	821
Standing committees	804
Party leaders	691
Government	655
Parliamentary party group leaders	604
Individual representatives	546
Parliamentary party chiefs of staff	395
Standing committees chiefs of staff	303
Minimum N	218

See note to Table 1 regarding data transformation.

parties have different perceptions of which norms are basic for work within the parliament (Searing 1982; Kim & Patterson 1988; Hedlund 1985). Obviously, there is need for more evidence before we can solve this matter.

The Ideal Parliament

According to the members, the greatest power in the Swedish parliament should be held by the party groups and the committees. The ideal Riksdag would thus be dominated by two traditional, collective institutions with, one may suppose, a capacity for mutual control (see Table 3). Today's primary holders of power, the government and the party leaders, should also play a role, but with significantly less influence than at present. The idea of a parliament dominated by independent individuals, however, receives only weak support; Members as individuals rank sixth in the order of suitable holders of power. Influence of individual members, it would seem, should be channeled primarily through party groups and committees.

The resistance to staff influence is evident in all parties; the members' views are that party and committee chiefs of staff should be considerably less influential than other groups in the Riksdag. There is a somewhat greater understanding for the influence of politically appointed party chiefs of staff, however, than for the non-political heads of the committees.[14]

Agreement between parties is not as great over who *should* have power as it was over perceptions of the actual distribution of power. Thus, as is evident from Table 4, views regarding ideal conditions are more divided along partisan lines than were perceptions of current conditions.[15] It is

Table 4. Party Affiliation and Members' Assessments of the Preferred Level of Influence of Various Groups and Bodies on Decision-making in the Riksdag in 1988 (averages)

Party Affiliation					
Left Party		Social Democrats		Center Party	
Party groups	850	Party groups	842	Committees	853
Committees	711	Committees	815	Party groups	813
Individ. repr.	657	Government	740	Party leaders	744
Group leaders	611	Party leaders	694	Group leaders	618
Party leaders	500	Group leaders	618	Government	617
Government	411	Individ. repr.	559	Individ. repr.	475
Party staff	344	Party staff	347	Party staff	431
Comm. staff	300	Comm. staff	260	Comm. staff	348

Party Affiliation					
Liberals		Conservatives		Greens	
Party groups	819	Party groups	814	Individ. repr.	670
Committees	778	Committees	814	Committees	660
Party leaders	754	Party leaders	740	Party groups	644
Group leaders	638	Group leaders	630	Government	427
Government	631	Government	623	Group leaders	309
Individ. repr.	512	Individ. repr.	551	Comm. staff	290
Party staff	469	Party staff	467	Party staff	255
Comm. staff	314	Comm. staff	368	Party leaders	230

See note to Table 1 regarding data transformation. The average *N* for individual parties is as follows: Left, 9; Social Democrats, 97; Center, 32; Liberals, 36; Conservatives, 43; and Greens, 10.

mainly the Greens, and the Leftists – i.e. the anti-establishment parties – that demonstrate divergent normative views of power. Other parties, in contrast, share similar notions of how the distribution of power in the Riksdag should be arranged.

As a political movement, the Greens emphasize the importance of breaking with traditional political organizations, and this ideological standpoint is also reflected in members' view of the parliament. In accordance with the philosophy of minimizing the concentration of power, representatives of the Greens would allocate the least amount of influence to party leaders in their ideal Riksdag. They prefer a Riksdag in which power is wielded by individual representatives and committees rather than one steered from the top by a handful of powerful leaders. It should be noted, however, that our survey was performed shortly after the Green Party's entry into the Riksdag in 1988. In our interview study in the spring of 1991, after three strenuous years of everyday parliamentary work, prominent representatives of the Greens showed greater sympathy for traditional forms of political organization.[16]

Table 5. Difference Between Perceived Influence and Preferred Influence of Various Groups and Bodies of Decision-making in the Riksdag Among Members in 1988

Party affiliation	Average difference between influence and preferred influence of eight groups/ bodies in the Riksdag	Rank correlation (Rho) between influence and preferred influence of eight groups/bodies in the Riksdag
Left Party	122	+0.33
Social Democrats	91	+0.79
Center Party	84	+0.67
Liberals	97	+0.60
Conservatives	101	+0.62
Greens	250	+0.10
All	99	+0.69

The average differences between perceived influence and preferred influence (column 1) can vary between 0 and 1000. High values represent dissatisfaction with the present distribution of influence in the Riksdag. Low values represent satisfaction with the present conditions. Excluding evaluations of the government, the average difference between actual and preferred influence of the remaining seven groups/bodies runs as follows: Left Party 94, Social Democrats 93, Center Party 64, Liberals 78, Conservatives 87, Greens 233 and All 90.

Members of the Left Party also have an individual-oriented view of power in the parliament. Individual representatives move to third place on the list of preferred holders of power, with average points almost as high as those among the members of the Greens (657 as compared with 670). Party leaders and the government are similarly ranked low in the desired hierarchy (in fifth and sixth place respectively). Indeed, the Left Party members' ideal Riksdag is formed more after the new left-wing soft principle than after the democratic centralism of the old communist tradition.

Level of Dissatisfaction

The members of the Greens are most dissatisfied with the perceived distribution of power within the Riksdag. As shown in Table 5, the distance between norm and reality is clearly greater for representatives of the Greens than for representatives of the established parties.[17] The average difference between perceptions and normative positions concerning power distribution among the Greens' representatives is more than twice that of any other party, with a relation between the ranking of actual and desired power among the investigated groups and bodies of nearly zero (rho = +0.10).

For the other parties, the greatest dissatisfaction is noted among members of the Left Party, while Center Party members are the most content. Social Democrats, Liberals and Conservatives show roughly the same results,

Table 6. Members' Preferences for Increasing or Decreasing the Influence of Various Groups and Bodies on Decision-making in the Riksdag in 1988 (percent).

Group/body	Should have more influence (1)	Should stay the same (2)	Should have less influence (3)	Percentage difference index (1–3)	(N)
Individual representatives	69	30	1	+68	208
Parliamentary party groups	37	58	5	+32	213
Standing committees	32	61	7	+25	221
Parliamentary party group leaders	10	64	26	−16	209
Party leaders	4	56	40	−36	216
Standing committee chiefs of staff	2	54	44	−42	215
Parliamentary party chiefs of staff	3	46	51	−48	210
Government	3	37	60	−57	211

The results in the table are based on comparisons of each MP's scores concerning perceived influence and preferred influence for each group or body. Tied scores have been classified as "Should stay the same". Percentage difference index scores are obtained by subtracting the proportion favoring "Should have less influence" from the proportion favoring "Should have more influence".

especially if one considers that the government was included among the bodies studied. Since the government was Social Democratic at the time of the study, members of the Social Democratic party are more likely to have been positive toward governmental influence. Members of the other parties, in contrast, graded the government lower on the scale.

Comparisons between perceived and desired power can also be made for each of the groups or bodies individually and for the individual MPs. By looking at the data from this angle, we can analyze whether the members feel that the different groups/bodies should have more or less influence, or whether the degree of influence is satisfactory. Such an analysis gives an idea of how the MPs would like to change the distribution of power in the Riksdag, and which representatives feel most urgently that a change should take place (see Table 6).[18]

The results suggest that representatives do not want a wholesale change. In only three instances do a majority of representatives want change to occur – i.e. individual representatives' influence should be *increased* (61 percent), while the influence of governments and parliamentary party chiefs of staffs should be *decreased* (60 percent and 51 percent respectively). Furthermore, there is relatively strong support for increasing the influence of the party groups and the committees (37 percent and 32 percent respectively). A substantial proportion of the MPs would also like to decrease the influence of the standing committee chiefs of staff, the party leaders and the party group leaders (44, 40 and 26 percent respectively).

This analysis clarifies the earlier message: the MPs would like to have a

greater say, both as individual representatives and via the party groups and the committees. At the same time, they would like to decrease the power of government and party leaders. A relatively large number of MPs also feel that the influence of the chiefs of staff should be limited.

The results are essentially the same among the different parties, with the exception of the Greens (see Table 7). In their efforts to reform parliamentary work, the majority of Green members would like to decrease the influence of *all* groups and bodies other than individual representatives. Of particular note here as well is the weak Left Party support for increased committee power. Members of small parties with few representatives in committees tend in general to be less interested in strengthening the influence of these bodies. The greatest support for strengthening the influence of the committees is found in the large Social Democratic Party.

As regards the question of institutional change, one cannot interpret our data as signs of a pending revolt. The results in Table 8 show that members whom one might expect to be inclined to upset traditional power relationships in the Riksdag generally agree with the more established members. However, the differences that do exist run in the expected direction. The Riksdag's backbenchers would like to increase the influence of individual members, committees and party groups more than the frontbenchers.[19] A similar pattern also emerges among female members and among newcomers to the Riksdag, who are particularly eager to decrease the influence of the party leaders and the government.[20] Yet, it should also be noted that newcomers feel less of a need than senior members to increase the influence of the committees, which may be explained by the fact that the newcomers have fewer permanent committee seats and less experience of committee work than their more established colleagues.

The same pattern can be found in the British House of Commons, where backbenchers showed increasing tendencies to protest against control from the party leadership during the 1970s (Norton 1980a, 1980b, 1985; Judge 1981; Wood & Jacoby 1984; Franklin et al. 1987). These protests were one of the factors which led to the decision in 1979 to create a number of new select committees (Drewry 1985; Marsh 1986). The relatively limited dissatisfaction among Swedish backbenchers may have to do with the fact that the Riksdag's 16 permanent standing committees offer nearly all its 349 members the opportunity to carry out meaningful work from the very start of their parliamentary careers.

Another important explanation for the limited discontent is the strong position of the parties. For the great majority of MPs, party loyalty is the most important norm. Career-oriented members also know that they generally need the support of their party in order to accomplish any particular goal. By comparison, British MPs have strong, if now somewhat dwindling, party loyalty as a basic political norm (Crowe 1983, 1986;

Table 7. Party Affiliation and Members' Preferences for Increasing (+) or Decreasing (−) the Influence of Various Groups and Bodies of Decision-making in the Riksdag in 1988 (Central Tendencies)

Group/body	Party affiliation						
	Left Party	Social Democrats	Center Party	Liberals	Conservatives	Greens	All
Individual representatives	+67	+62	+71	+68	+74	+90	+68
Parliamentary party groups	+75	+34	+33	+40	+25	−13	+32
Standing committees	+1	+41	+24	+17	+20	−30	+25
Parliamentary party group leaders	−51	−19	−14	−1	−13	−50	−16
Party leaders	−87	−40	−7	−39	−28	−78	−36
Standing committees chiefs of staff	−62	−37	−39	−47	−44	−78	−42
Parliamentary party chiefs of staff	−100	−47	−25	−48	−60	−56	−48
Government	−100	−41	−83	−55	−60	−80	−57
Minimum N	6	89	27	33	38	8	208

Scores for central tendency are obtained by subtracting the proportion favoring "Should have less influence" from the proportion "Should have more influence". The measurement can vary between +100 (more influence) and −100 (less influence). For further details, see Table 6.

Table 8. Members' Preferences for Increasing (+) or Decreasing (−) the Influence of Various Groups and Bodies on Decision-making in the Riksdag in 1988, Controlling for Gender, Seniority and Own Position of Influence (Central Tendencies)

Group/body	Gender		Seniority			Position of influence	
	male	female	new-comers	seniors	veterans	front-benchers	back-benchers
Individual representatives	+69	+66	+69	+74	+63	+59	+70
Parliamentary party groups	+31	+35	+32	+44	+24	+20	+38
Standing committees	+31	+17	−3	+36	+27	+22	+27
Parliamentary party group leaders	+14	−23	−35	−7	−18	−27	−15
Party leaders	−32	−45	−50	−42	−24	−34	−37
Standing committees chiefs of staff	−38	−49	−49	−48	−35	−38	−43
Parliamentary party chiefs of staff	−48	−48	−44	−56	−44	−48	−48
Government	−53	−63	−82	−57	−46	−48	−59
Minimum N	136	69	30	89	86	29	187

The variables are defined as follows: "Newcomers" – elected MP for first time in 1988; "Seniors" – MP for a maximum of two terms (six years); "Veterans" – MP for more than two terms. "Frontbenchers" are MPs who function as chairman or deputy chairman of a standing committee; as speaker or deputy speaker; or are members of the parliamentary party group executive. All other MPs are classified as "backbenchers". Scores of central tendency can vary between +100 (more influence) and −100 (less influence). For further details, see Table 6.

Table 9. Members' Evaluation of the Structure of Influence in Their Own Parliamentary Party Group in 1988 (percent).

	Party affiliation						
	Left Party	Social Democrats	Center Party	Liberals	Conservatives	Greens	All
Parliamentary party executive:							
too much influence	17	21	18	14	29	6	20
should stay the same	83	78	82	86	71	75	79
too little influence	0	1	0	0	0	19	1
Standing committee party groups:							
too much influence	6	2	0	3	5	0	2
should stay the same	94	82	98	85	92	100	88
too little influence	0	16	2	12	3	0	10
Rank and file members:							
too much influence	0	1	2	2	0	6	1
should stay the same	78	60	78	56	53	94	63
too little influence	22	39	20	42	47	0	36
Minimum N	18	139	40	41	59	16	314

The total *N* for each question was 314, 323 and 321 respectively. The question wording was as follows: "Do, in your opinion, any of the groups or bodies below have too much or too little influence on the decision-making in *your parliamentary party group* or should they stay the same?"

Rasmussen 1988; Patterson 1989; cf. Kornberg 1967; Cayrol et al 1976). It has been shown in earlier studies (e.g. Holmberg & Esaiasson 1988; Sannerstedt 1982; Sjölin 1993) that the party is also central for Swedish MPs, and analyses in this article clearly indicate that the party groups, together with the committees, are granted key positions in the ideal Riksdag. Thus, there is reason to look more closely at the Swedish parliamentarians' relationship to their respective party groups.

Party Groups in the Center

As may be expected, MPs' perceptions of their own party group are more positive than their perceptions of party groups in general. The three analyses presented in Tables 9, 10 and 11 confirm that Swedish parliamentarians have a good relationship with their party group and that they do not shrink from the idea of party power.

A very clear majority of members (79 percent) feel that the executive of their own party group has a satisfactory amount of influence over decision-making (Table 9). An even greater majority (83 percent) are happy with the emphasis on cohesion and discipline within their respective parties. In fact, more members would prefer that party cohesion be increased rather

Table 10. Members' Position on the Demands for Party Cohesion and Discipline in Their Own Parliamentary Party Group, 1988 (percent).

	Party affiliation						
	Left Party	Social Democrats	Center Party	Liberals	Conservatives	Greens	All
Should be stronger than today	28	9	5	2	8	11	9
Should stay the same	67	84	93	79	78	89	83
Should be less than today	5	7	2	19	14	0	9
N	18	153	41	42	59	19	332

The question wording was as follows: "Generally speaking, what is your opinion about the demands of party cohesion and party discipline in your party?"

Table 11. Members' Evaluation of their Own Chances to Influence the Decisions of Their Parliamentary Party Group in 1988 (percent).

Chances to influence decisions in party group	Party affiliation						
	Left Party	Social Democrats	Center Party	Liberals	Conservatives	Greens	All
Within own specialized issue areas:							
very good	83	33	71	67	52	63	50
fairly good	17	64	29	31	46	32	48
rather/very poor	0	3	0	2	2	5	2
On issues outside own specialized areas:							
very good	0	2	7	5	2	26	2
fairly good	88	47	71	67	63	58	58
rather poor	6	43	21	26	32	16	33
very poor	6	8	0	2	3	0	5
Minimum N	17	144	42	42	56	19	330

The total *N* values for the two questions were 329 and 320 respectively. The question wording was as follows: "How do you estimate your chances to influence the decisions of your parliamentary party group?"

than weakened (Table 10). Nearly all members feel that they have a very good (50 percent) or fairly good (48 percent) chance of influencing their party's position within their own special field. The possibility of exerting influence is judged to be somewhat less outside these special fields, although a majority of members still feel that it is good even then (Table 11).

Differences along party lines are on the whole small. There is some tendency for the representatives of the larger parties to be less satisfied than other representatives. Social Democrats (with 151 representatives) and Conservatives (with 64 representatives) judge themselves to have the greatest difficulty in gaining attention for their standpoints within the party. The Conservatives, furthermore, have the greatest number of members who feel that their party executive has too great an influence in the party group, while ordinary members have too little. A relatively large number of Conservative representatives would also like to see a decrease in the demand for discipline within the party.

The size of the party is not the only possible explanation here, however. In the 1960s, the Conservatives were the most individually oriented representatives, and it is conceivable that this tradition has lived on to a certain degree.[21] As regards Social Democrats, their position as the party in government is an alternate explanation for the members' perception that it is difficult to gain attention in their party.

Another difference along partisan lines is that 25 percent of the Leftists would like to *sharpen* discipline within their party, thus revealing internal conflict between traditionalists and reorganizers.[22] Note also the Greens'

almost unanimously positive attitude toward each aspect of the work within their own party group. In all probability, this unanimity reflects a new parliamentary party's initial enthusiasm for its tasks.

These limited differences should not conceal the major result, however, i.e. that the majority of members of all the parties find themselves at ease with the distribution of power in their own party groups.[23] The parties have a very strong position among members. It may well be appropriate to speak of party decline among the voting population, but the trend within parliament is the opposite.[24]

Our analyses, moreover, allow us to highlight the meaning of the members' wish to strengthen the influence of the party groups in the Riksdag. Here, the key concepts are *specialization*, *division of work* and *shared responsibility*. The party groups afford the members an opportunity to work within a specialized political field in which most see themselves as having the chance to gain attention for their ideas (Table 11). A further demonstration of the members' positive attitude toward specialization, division of work and shared responsibility is that the committee groups of the party, in which members of related committees hold regular discussions with one another, receive very strong support in all parties (Table 9).[25]

A similar philosophy concerning the need for joint efforts and an equal distribution of responsibility has been demonstrated among British and Canadian MPs (Judge 1981; Jogerst 1991; Kornberg 1967). The concept of team work, where all members are given their individual tasks and the leader's right to decide is limited, seems to enjoy broad support among most Western parliamentarians. While corresponding data are lacking for the US Congress, it is highly unlikely that American legislators see a strengthening of party groups as an appealing reform proposal (Fenno 1973; Mayhew 1974; Frances 1985).

Summary and Discussion: Power in the Riksdag

In the eyes of the members, the Riksdag is an institution which is controlled from the top and where the greatest power is held by the government and the leaders of the parties. However, the standing committees and the party groups are collective bodies that offset this control. When compared with analyses of the distribution of factual power and influence, our study shows that Swedish parliamentarians ascribe stronger influence to the party leaders than is normal. The members also see the staff of the parties as being relatively powerful.

Overall, members agree along partisan lines on how to view power in the Riksdag. It is mainly anti-establishment parties like the Greens and the Left Party that differ. The party with the most divergent views, the Greens,

is also alone in seeing political organization as an integrated part of their ideology. The great consensus observed also applies to individual members who could be expected to have differing notions, such as backbenchers, female members and newcomers to the Riksdag. It would not be difficult to read into the results characteristics that are usually associated with "Consensual Democracies" – shared values and, most importantly, strong parties.

Swedish parliamentarians have clear wishes with respect to their ideal Riksdag. The standing committees and the party groups are the two bodies which should in the first place be given greater strength, while the influence of primarily the government and the party leaders should be decreased. The Riksdag should be a working parliament for full-time professional politicians, where everyone plays his or her part. The traditional Westminster Model, in which most MPs are content with supervising the government, and where there is an inherent opposition between parties and standing committees, receives weak support among Swedish parliamentarians.[26] The positive view of cooperation within collective organs also implies a dissociation from an individual-oriented American model. Swedish MPs do *not* wish to function as independent legislators.

In addition to the empirical results, our study has two major implications – one having to do with strategies for institutional analysis of parliaments, the other with the current debate over the need for curtailing the power of parliaments. On the first point, our strategy of asking for members' perceptions of the distribution of power within the Riksdag has proven to be useful. By allowing the protagonists to speak for themselves, we gain complementary insights about the workings of parliament. We have learned, for instance, that members tend to agree with the often heard description that the Riksdag is an elite-dominated institution. Of course, the analytical value of survey data of this kind will continue to grow as we gain further points of reference from repeated studies.

The second implication of our study is related to the calls heard in many western democracies for a strengthening of the position of the executives and a curtailment of the power of legislatures. Such views are heard both in the new democracies of Eastern Europe, and in the countries of Western Europe as well as in the US. The debate on this matter, moreover, is not only restricted to politicians; one can also find it among legislative researchers.

In Sweden, the Lindbeck Commission (1993) recently suggested a series of constitutional reforms with the purpose of limiting the possibilities for the Riksdag to interfere with propositions presented by the government. These proposals would, among other things, reduce the number of MPs by half, tighten up the budgetary process, and concentrate decision-making power in economic matters to the Finance Committee.

From our results it is clear that attempts to increase the influence of the government will run into trouble in the Riksdag. Members of all parties, Conservatives and Social Democrats alike, would prefer a radically different development. Self-assertive MPs want to lead, they do not want to follow; they do not want a parliament led by the government, they want a government led by the parliament. In essence, this is nothing new. This is a continuation of the world-wide and ongoing conflict between the legislative and executive arms of government.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research for this article was supported by a grant from The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. We thank John Geer, Mikael Gilljam and Rick Herrera for valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

NOTES

1. For detailed information on the studies, see Holmberg & Esaiasson (1988).
2. Mezey (1991, 209) mentions certain reservations regarding the factor of departmental parallelism: "An additional caution is suggested by the case of the West German Bundestag where a strong committee system that parallels the bureaucratic structure does not seem to be associated with significant levels of parliamentary activity because of the decisive role of political parties." This objection, however, is not convincing. Under the assumption that we wish to isolate the significance of the organization of the committees, the relevant question is what significance the factor of departmental parallelism has in controlling for the influence of parties.
3. Olson & Mezey (1991b, 13); Arter (1984, 198–208); cf. Loewenberg and Patterson (1979, 125–140); von Beyme (1986); Norton (1981, 26–46); Rose (1986).
4. See Mezey (1979, chs 2 and 5). The Costa Rican Congress also belongs to the exclusive group of active legislatures in Mezey's classification. Other nations with influential parliaments are the Philippines, Uruguay, Chile, Italy and France during the Third and Fourth Republics. The list of reactive legislatures include, in addition to Sweden, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. Employing stricter frames of reference, the German Bundestag is one that has been classified as more influential than the British House of Commons (Loewenberg & Patterson 1979).
5. A related comment in this context is that Bryce's study has increasingly taken on the character of a "straw man". It is considerably more controversial today to maintain that parliaments lack influence than to take the opposite position.
6. De Gregario (1988) and Aberbach (1990) are two of the most recent studies dealing with this topic. For an overview of the literature, see Hammond (1985).
7. Mezey (1979, 23) addresses the fundamental question of what type of power and influence is at issue here: "Although not always stated explicitly, such statements (about the strength or weakness of particular legislative institutions) usually refer to the importance of the legislative in the policy-making process relative to the importance of nonlegistlative institutions . . ." For an unusually clear textbook approach to this subject, see Keefe (1980, 91–137). Cf. also Daalder & Rusk (1972, 165–8).
8. Eulau (1962) employs a similar method for evaluating the significance of individual factors such as "respect," "affection" and "expertise." Caldeira and Patterson (1988) and Hibbing and Thomas (1989) demonstrate new areas of use for the reputational method.
9. The category "Standing Committee Chiefs of Staff" refers to the collective of chief

officials within the standing committees. Likewise, "Parliamentary Party Chiefs of Staff" refers to the chief executive for the different parliamentary parties' staffs. The "Parliamentary Party Leaders" are the same as the five persons who stood at the head of their parties in 1988. It is customary in Sweden for the same person to be chairman for both party branches, as long as he is not also a part of the government, in which case the leadership of the parliamentary party is assigned to someone else (Esaiasson 1985, 1–12). Only the Greens refuse to designate one party leader, preferring instead one male and one female group representative who lack the traditional authoritative position of party leader. The "Parliamentary Party Group Leader" is the next highest official within the party, but is not nearly as well known outside the party as the party chairman.

10. The question read as follows: "Using the scale below, please state your view of the following two aspects of the influence of the groups and bodies given below on decision-making *in the Riksdag*: (a) their actual influence; (b) the influence you would consider appropriate."
11. A number of studies have been made using similar points of departure. Jackson (1979), for example, asked Philippine MPs who had the greatest influence over committee decisions – the committee chairman; committee members; the President of the Republic; the speaker/President of the Senate/floor leaders; the staff of committees; or interest groups. See also Rush (1979); Frances & Riddlesperger (1982); Frances (1985).
12. The average internal refusal rate was higher than for other controversial questions in the survey, for example concerning the placement of parties, voters and the members themselves on the Green dimension (on an average, 27 percent as compared with 9 percent). Also, the members were somewhat less willing to indicate their normative views about the Riksdag than to assess present conditions (average internal refusal rate of 33 percent as compared with 22 percent). After this predominantly positive evaluation, we would also like one critical voice to be heard. The academician and former MP John Mackintosh gives the following bitter view of the British representatives' ability for self-analysis: "This gap between what people say about themselves and what is the case is intensified by the fact that most performers in politics are poor observers; they can perform but not describe the process" (quotation from Judge (1981, 187)).
13. The difference between the party leaders and party groups is significant at the 0.10 level. Other differences are either strongly significant (0.000-level) or clearly insignificant. The influence of the party chiefs of staff shall be seen in the light of the fact that the majority of actions on the part of the representatives, e.g. the introduction of private members' bills, must be cleared in the party staff. For further detail, see Isberg (1982) and Arter (1984).
14. All group comparisons named here are strongly significant (0.000-level).
15. We stumble again upon a non-trivial result. Analyses undertaken earlier regarding members' views of power in society at large (Holmberg & Esaiasson 1988) similarly show that agreement in cognitions is not always greater than agreement in norms.
16. The Swedish Greens have to a large extent taken their organizational principles from their sister party in Germany, *die Grünen*. This party has wrestled with how to handle the balance between ideological principles and parliamentary effectivity in the Bundestag as well (see Poguntke 1987; Frankland 1988).
17. The results shown in the table are based upon a totaled and averaged comparison of how much influence the members perceive the eight groups/bodies to have and how much they would prefer them to have. The interpretation of the measure is simple. The larger the distance between perceived and preferred reality, the larger the dissatisfaction and the desire to rectify the situation.
18. Members who gave higher points for preferred influence than for perceived influence have been classified as taking the position that the group in question should have greater power. Likewise, members who gave lower points for preferred power than for perceived power have been classified as taking the position that the group's or body's influence should be decreased. In the case of tied scores, the members' views have been logged in the middle category, "satisfactory as it is".

19. Frontbenchers are defined as committee chairmen, speakers of the Riksdag, and members of the party group executives.
20. All representatives of the Greens are included in the group of "newcomers". The conclusion does not change, however, if the analysis is carried out solely among newcomers from other parties.
21. Holmberg (1974, 243–249), on the basis of four different interview questions concerning attitudes toward one's own party, classified 35 percent of the Conservative MPs in 1969 as individual-oriented "Mavericks". The corresponding proportion in other parties varied between 11 percent (Social Democrats) and 21 percent (Liberals).
22. The party in which the greatest number of representatives would like to ease party discipline is the Liberal party. In our interview study in 1991, several representatives also called attention to the fact that the party leadership for the Liberals has unusually strict rules concerning e.g. the introduction of bills. The comments can be seen as an indication that our survey questions capture something politically essential.
23. The MPs' generally positive attitude toward their party groups was confirmed in the interview study in 1991. Three of four interviewees expressed their satisfaction with work within the party group. Only the Left Party Communist representatives, and to a certain degree the Green representatives, were dissatisfied, and this dissatisfaction then applied only to a lack of cohesion and leadership within the party. Perhaps not surprisingly, however, more than half of those interviewed had negative perceptions of the power distribution and internal workings of *other* party groups.
24. On the Swedish Parties' loosening grip over voters, see Gilljam & Holmberg (1993); Granberg & Holmberg (1988).
25. On the parties' committee groups in the Riksdag, see Isberg (1982) and Arter (1984).
26. It is now unusual openly to support the Westminster model. However, for a fervent defense using New Zealand as an example, see Jackson (1987).

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From our results it is clear that attempts to increase the influence of the government will run into trouble in the Riksdag. Members of all parties, Conservatives and Social Democrats alike, would prefer a radically different development. Self-assertive MPs want to lead, they do not want to follow; they do not want a parliament led by the government, they want a government led by the parliament. In essence, this is nothing new. This is a continuation of the world-wide and ongoing conflict between the legislative and executive arms of government.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research for this article was supported by a grant from The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. We thank John Geer, Mikael Gilljam and Rick Herrera for valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

NOTES

1. For detailed information on the studies, see Holmberg & Esaiasson (1988).
2. Mezey (1991, 209) mentions certain reservations regarding the factor of departmental parallelism: "An additional caution is suggested by the case of the West German Bundestag where a strong committee system that parallels the bureaucratic structure does not seem to be associated with significant levels of parliamentary activity because of the decisive role of political parties." This objection, however, is not convincing. Under the assumption that we wish to isolate the significance of the organization of the committees, the relevant question is what significance the factor of departmental parallelism has in controlling for the influence of parties.
3. Olson & Mezey (1991b, 13); Arter (1984, 198–208); cf. Loewenberg and Patterson (1979, 125–140); von Beyme (1986); Norton (1981, 26–46); Rose (1986).
4. See Mezey (1979, chs 2 and 5). The Costa Rican Congress also belongs to the exclusive group of active legislatures in Mezey's classification. Other nations with influential parliaments are the Philippines, Uruguay, Chile, Italy and France during the Third and Fourth Republics. The list of reactive legislatures include, in addition to Sweden, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. Employing stricter frames of reference, the German Bundestag is one that has been classified as more influential than the British House of Commons (Loewenberg & Patterson 1979).
5. A related comment in this context is that Bryce's study has increasingly taken on the character of a "straw man". It is considerably more controversial today to maintain that parliaments lack influence than to take the opposite position.
6. De Gregario (1988) and Aberbach (1990) are two of the most recent studies dealing with this topic. For an overview of the literature, see Hammond (1985).
7. Mezey (1979, 23) addresses the fundamental question of what type of power and influence is at issue here: "Although not always stated explicitly, such statements (about the strength or weakness of particular legislative institutions) usually refer to the importance of the legislative in the policy-making process relative to the importance of nonlegistlative institutions . . ." For an unusually clear textbook approach to this subject, see Keefe (1980, 91–137). Cf. also Daalder & Rusk (1972, 165–8).
8. Eulau (1962) employs a similar method for evaluating the significance of individual factors such as "respect," "affection" and "expertise." Caldeira and Patterson (1988) and Hibbing and Thomas (1989) demonstrate new areas of use for the reputational method.
9. The category "Standing Committee Chiefs of Staff" refers to the collective of chief