

FACTS ABOUT THE RIKSDAG

The people vote – how the MPs are chosen



PHOTO: MELKER DAHLSTRAND

Just over 7.3 million Swedes were entitled to vote in the 2014 elections.

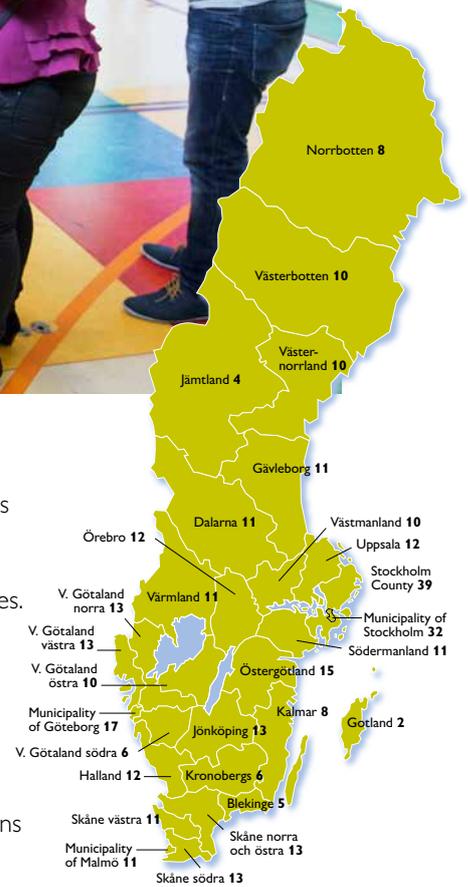
Democracy in Sweden is based on universal suffrage. The Swedish people choose which parties are going to represent them in the Riksdag, the county councils and the municipalities. This is why the Swedish form of government is known as a representative form of government.

First of all, the voters choose the party they wish to vote for. But they can also mark one of the candidates on their voting slip and in this way influence who will represent the party. This is known as personal preference voting. The candidates listed on the voting slip must themselves be entitled to vote and have been nominated by a political party.

At a general election, voters choose those who are to represent them in the Swedish Parliament – the Riksdag. Elections to the Riksdag are held every four years, on the third Sunday in September. The next ordinary election will be on 9 September 2018.

All Swedish citizens who have reached the age of 18 by Election Day at the latest are entitled to vote in the election to the Riksdag – more than 7.3 million people in the 2014 elections. EU citizens and citizens of Iceland and Norway also have the right to vote in the elections to county councils and municipal councils, which are held on the same day as the election to the Riksdag. Other foreign citizens have the right

For general elections to the Riksdag, Sweden is divided into 29 constituencies. Stockholm County was the largest constituency with 39 MPs and Gotland County the smallest with 2 MPs at the elections in 2014.



to vote in these elections if they have been registered residents in Sweden for a continuous period of three years before Election Day.

Everyone has one vote and votes in person. No one should know how you have voted. For this reason, the voting takes place in a special voting booth.

When the polling stations close at 8 p.m. on Election Day, the election supervisors start counting the votes. The count is presented in the media. The final count is then done during the following week by the county administrative boards. The general public can follow this as it is being done.

It is also possible to vote in advance in special premises provided by the local authorities starting 18 days before Election Day.

Those unable to vote in person can vote by proxy. The local authorities are responsible for ensuring that people who are entitled to vote can do so at such places as homes for the elderly and prisons. Swedish citizens abroad can vote at embassies, some consulates or by post.

Seats are distributed in several steps

The Swedish electoral system is a proportional one. This means that the number of seats any one party obtains in the Riksdag is proportional to the number of votes the party received in the election.

There are 349 seats in the Riksdag altogether. Once the county administrative boards have counted the votes, these seats should be distributed as fairly as possible among the parties.

Any one particular party must receive at least 4 per cent of the votes to be assigned a seat. This results in there being fewer small parties in the Riksdag. Any party receiving at least 12 per cent of the votes in any

one constituency can participate in the allocation of seats in that particular constituency.

The 349 seats consist of 310 fixed constituency seats and 39 adjustment seats. The number of fixed seats is based on the number of people eligible to vote in each particular constituency. The distribution of these seats is reflected in the voting result in each constituency.

The Election Authority distributes the fixed seats using a method of calculation called the *adjusted odd numbers method*. In simple terms, the method allows the number of votes for each party to be divided by a series of numbers until all of the 310 seats are allocated.

Adjustment of 39 seats

The purpose of the 39 adjustment seats is to make sure that the distribution of seats between the parties over the whole country should be as proportional in relation to the number of votes as possible. The whole country is viewed as it were a single constituency and is compared with the distribution of votes in the various constituencies. The adjustment seats are allocated first to the party and then to the constituencies.

Finally they are distributed among the candidates. The parties' lists of candidates are compared with the names the voters have ticked. If 5 per cent of those voting for a certain party in any one constituency have marked the same name on the voting slip, this person will be allocated a seat in the Riksdag. If there is more than one name coming up to the 5 per cent level, the seats are allocated according to the number of personal preference votes.

The members vote for the Prime Minister

Once the seats are allocated, the newly elected members of parliament vote for a Speaker and three Deputy Speakers. The vote is led by the member who has been in the Riksdag longest. Then, the Speaker, the presiding officer of the Riksdag, proposes the Prime Minister. In other democracies, usually the head of state – the King, Queen or President – has this task.

The Speaker prepares the election of Prime Minister by speaking with the party leaders. The purpose of this is to get an idea of how the Government is to be composed to obtain as strong support in the Riksdag as possible. Then the newly elected members of parliament vote for the Prime Minister.

The voting in the Riksdag is open – it is possible to see how everyone has voted. A majority is not

Distribution of seats in the Riksdag after the 2014 elections

The turnout at the election was almost 86 per cent. Of the elected members of the Riksdag, 197 are men and 152 are women, corresponding to 56 and 44 per cent respectively.

	The Social Democratic Party (SocDem)	113
	The Moderate Party (Mod)	84
	The Sweden Democrats (SweDem)	49
	The Green Party (Gm)	25
	The Centre Party (Cen)	22
	The Left Party (Lft)	21
	The Liberal Party (Lib)	19
	The Christian Democrats (ChrDem)	16
		349

PHOTO: MEIKER DAHLSTRAND



Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and the new Government meeting the press in October 2014. The Prime Minister has just presented the Statement of Government Policy in the Chamber.

required for the Speaker's proposal to be approved. However, if more than half of the members in the Chamber vote against the proposal, it is not passed.

The Government presents its policies

The newly elected Prime Minister nominates the ministers in the Government and notifies the Riksdag. The Prime Minister usually presents the broad outlines of the Government's policies to come in the Statement of Government Policy when the Riksdag opens in mid-September. In election years, the Riksdag opens a couple of weeks later.

The formal change of government takes place in the Royal Palace and is chaired by the King. The Speaker presents the Riksdag's decision on who is to be Prime Minister. The King cannot influence this decision.

The Prime Minister is entitled at any time to reshuffle the Government without interference by the Riksdag, for example to replace ministers, put them in other positions and change their number. But the Government has to notify the Riksdag of the changes.

Test of support for the Government

The members always have to take a vote on the Prime Minister following an election, regardless of the balance of power between the parties. Any government that does not have the support of the Riksdag has to resign.

A government that is about to resign has to apply to do so, and the Speaker deals with the application. But the Speaker first calls on the Government to remain in office in the form of what is known as a caretaker government until a new government has been appointed. The caretaker government deals only with day-to-day issues and avoids taking political initiatives or calling new elections.

Extraordinary elections

Extraordinary elections may be held between regular elections and it is the Government that decides whether they should be held. Extraordinary elections have only occurred once in Sweden – this was in connection with the controversial election issue of the national supplementary pension (ATP).



Women demonstrate in Gothenburg in 1918 for the right to vote. In 1921, both men and women voted for the first time.

Extraordinary elections may also be called following a regular election if the Speaker after four attempts has still failed to gain approval for candidates for the post of Prime Minister. This has never happened.

Referendums – a form of direct democracy

Referendums represent an exception to the regular way of examining and determining issues in the Riksdag. Instead of representative democracy, the electo-

rate is given direct influence in a particular issue – a form of direct democracy (see the fact box below).

It is the Riksdag that decides whether a referendum is to be held in the whole country. If the Riksdag decides in favour, the Riksdag adopts a special law explaining the issue the people are to vote on and which day the referendum is to take place.

Referendums may also be held on amendments to the Constitution and on international agreements affecting constitutionally protected rights and obligations. Such referendums are legally binding, but as yet no such referendums have been held.

Referendums dealing with other issues are consultative in nature.

Referendums

The possibility to hold referendums was introduced in 1922. Since then, 6 referendums have been held.

- 1922** *A ban on intoxicating liquor.* No – the ban was not implemented.
- 1955** *Right-hand traffic.* No – right-hand traffic was introduced anyway.
- 1957** *National supplementary pension (ATP).* Yes – ATP was introduced.
- 1980** *Nuclear power.* Three alternatives – Line 2 won, one of the two alternatives in favour of phasing out nuclear power.
- 1994** *Membership of the EU.* Yes – Sweden became a member of the EU.
- 2003** *Introducing the euro.* No – the currency was not introduced.

Constitutional monarchy

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy, with the reigning monarch – King Carl XVI Gustaf – as head of state. As head of state, his duties are purely representative and ceremonial in nature as stipulated in the Instrument of Government. Unlike in many other monarchies, for example, he does not propose the Prime Minister – this prerogative is now exercised by the Speaker, and bills passed by the Riksdag do not need his signature to become law.

Read more

- Elections, members, referendums: www.riksdagen.se
- Electoral system, election results, the Elections Act (2005:837): www.val.se