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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A former Swedish party leader once asked me what I study. I told him that I am interested in politicians with career ambitions. “Are there really such politicians?” he replied. The question was rather telling. In Swedish political memoirs and even in Swedish political science the notion of ambitious politicians has long been frowned upon. As I have come to realize, this skepticism is not just a Swedish phenomenon but an overall European one. Ambitious politicians are somehow seen both as a problem and as something that does not even exist.

In this book, I take inspiration from the prevalent American discussion about ambition in politics, and I claim that there is a similar category of politicians who strive to become leaders of the party-centred European democracies. What is more, those politicians reach high positions and are different from those who do not: politicians with career ambitions have a distinct idea of representation. They perceive their own opinion to be of greater importance than other politicians do, and they are more active in their party’s group meetings. Politicians with career ambitions are also more prone to develop a strategy that aims at being responsive to the wishes of the party elite. I also show that politicians with career ambitions are more common in some European parliaments than in others. In more equalitarian societies there are fewer politicians with career ambitions. Countries like Greece and Italy have considerably more politicians with career ambitions in their parliaments than countries like Germany and Sweden. Therefore, it would be a mistake not to consider career ambitions in analyses of party-centred democratic systems. My hope is that this book will contribute to a greater interest in and understanding of individuals who aim at—and obtain—top positions in representative democracies.

With that said, I’d like to take this opportunity to be more personal. For a period of time, I have had two odd goals in my life (among other goals, I should add). One was to bench press at least 150 kilograms (about 330 pounds), and the other was to publish the book you hold in your hands. I have now accomplished both of them. For the progression in the gym, I have to give most of the credit to myself. (Yet, I do want to thank all the guys in the gym who over the years have lifted bars off my chest when my optimism was stronger than my muscles.)

For the book, in contrast, many people deserve to be acknowledged and thanked for making the project possible. Among them, Paul Sniderman deserves

special note. Paul, I am so grateful for all your efforts and for believing that this project had potential. I also want to thank my skilled and dedicated colleagues at the vibrant Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg. I always find it fun to go to work. A special mention goes to Peter Esaiasson and Lena Wängnerud, who once upon a time were my supervisors and who have supported me so much during the research that led to this book. A sincere thank you also goes to all the Swedish Members of Parliament (MPs) who after each election since 1985 have answered the Parliament Survey conducted at the Swedish National Election Study Program at the University of Gothenburg. Without their efforts, our research on political elites would not be possible.

An indispensable insight into the MPs' everyday life was given to me when I received a Parliamentary scholarship that made it possible for me to work in the Riksdag for a year. I am very happy for that opportunity. I am also very grateful to Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, which funded the translation of my manuscript, and to Sören Holmberg, who vouched for me during that process and who has supported me in important ways throughout this project.

Finally, it is appropriate to thank my "wingman"—Elin Naurin. It is such a privilege to have you as a colleague, coauthor, and wife. I truly believe that our best days are ahead of us, and that is to say a lot, since we have had so many good ones already. To Miranda and William: you are my wonderful darlings. I am looking forward to many more exciting endeavors and discussions about what is going on in the world—in yours and in mine.



1. Are There Ambitious Politicians among Us?

This book is about personal motivators in the lives of politicians, especially those aiming for the highest levels of the political hierarchy—ambitious politicians. At the center of interest is the potential conflict between politicians' personal ambition and their parties' collective goals. The question is, how do politicians handle their own personal ambitions in a collective context? In the United States there is a prevalence of literature on personal driving forces; in Europe there is very little. The difference is striking: whereas personal ambition is a constant in US studies of the senators and representatives of Congress, studies of European ministers of parliament (MPs) instead focus on collective party goals and institutional constraints.

Though it makes sense to put more focus on candidates' ambitions in the US context than in the European, this is no argument for not studying individual politicians' career ambition *at all* in the European party-centered contexts. Instead, the findings from within the United States clearly indicate that politicians with career ambitions make a difference. American politicians with career ambitions are strategic about when and where they campaign for office (Jacobson 1989). Moreover, they work hard to cultivate a personal relationship with their voters and to understand voters' preferences (Maestas 2003). Politicians with career ambitions also introduce more bills, are more active on the floor, and believe in legislative specialization (Herrick and Moore 1993). If there are ambitious politicians also in the national European parliaments, we should study who they are and what they do in the legislatures.

The main claim I make in this book is that individuals' drive to achieve successful careers in politics affects how representative democracy works also in party-centered systems. In a nutshell, politicians' personal driving forces deserve to be brought to the foreground of political analyses outside the American context.

This book is the first to provide a thorough study of elite politicians who aspire to the top echelons of the parliamentary system. As surprising as it may seem, there has been no previous systematic study to determine who these politicians are and how they behave in parliament. The study makes use of a unique data set that enables comparisons among eleven European parliaments. It delves especially deep into a country where parties are particularly strong and coherent: Sweden. Sweden

provides a case where politicians need to balance potential personal driving forces toward the collective goals formulated by their party. If personal career ambitions matter in the Swedish context, they are likely to matter also in other settings where the party places constraints on politicians—so the argument goes. Sweden offers an excellent opportunity to work with data from an exceptionally long and ambitious tradition of studying political elites (which I'll describe later in this chapter).

Chapter 1 takes the reader through the argument that reluctance toward career politicians is deeply embedded in human nature. We will see that evolutionist studies claim that individuals' ambition could threaten the group's survival. Similar arguments are found in early religious thinking as well as in early political philosophy.

Thereafter follows a description of the role of personal ambitions in Sweden along with some background on the Swedish political system. The methodological approach of the book is thereafter described, and I outline the data sources used. The specific research questions that the data enables me to pose end this first chapter.

In Chapter 2 I discuss political science theories that explain personal driving forces in politics. The American approach to personal driving forces in politics is central—in particular, Joseph Schlesinger's framework for analyses of political ambition. The chapter ends with a description of how I define and operationalize *ambition* in this book.

Chapter 3 investigates the extent to which there are MPs who aspire to high positions in party-centered parliaments. Chapter 4 asks what these highly ambitious MPs have in common and whether they come from different backgrounds compared to other politicians. Chapter 5 investigates to what extent ambitious politicians' attitudes and behavior differ from that of other politicians. And Chapter 6 zooms in on the actions of the ambitious politicians, asking whether they indeed are more successful than politicians who lack ambition. Chapter 7 discusses whether the lessons learned from the Swedish case are generalizable to other European party-centered systems. Chapter 8 summarizes and concludes the book.

COLLECTIVE GOALS VERSUS PERSONAL AMBITIONS

Political ambition has an accepted place in American political science.¹ Joseph Schlesinger, an early identifier of the effects of ambition on representative democracy, goes so far as to argue that the drive to hold office is a fundamental building block of effective democracy. "Representative government depends above all upon a supply of individuals with strong office drives. It must provide the refinements

of power and status that attract as well as direct men's and women's aspirations. No more irresponsible government is imaginable than one of high-minded individuals unconcerned for their political futures" (Schlesinger 1994:35).

While it may seem both cynical and oversimplified to reduce political engagement to raw ambition, the notion of the power struggle as an expected element recurs in the theoretical discussion of good representation (Aldrich 1995; Downs 1957; Riker 1962; Schumpeter 1942). If politicians are indifferent about whether or not they stay in office, voters lose an important channel of voice (Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999). This perspective has played only a minor role in Europe (Borchert and Stolz 2011). European political scientists frequently turn to major structural explanations as a route to understanding political phenomena, and it would indeed be foolish to ignore such aspects. It is equally foolish to abstain from studying whether and how the personal drives of politicians influence events surrounding the exercise of political power.

The struggle among political agents can be organized in various ways. Electoral systems that emphasize individual politicians rely on the existence of individuals with sufficiently strong office drives to orchestrate their own election campaigns and make themselves known to voters (Cox 1987; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Strøm 1990). In a party-centric system, it is instead the parties that collectively step forward and organize the fight for political power in both the electoral and parliamentary arenas (Duverger 1954; Katz and Mair 1994; Panebianco 1988; Sjöblom 1968). In such a system, the primary endeavor of political representatives might not be to achieve a career in politics, but they nonetheless work hard to help the party gain power and seats in parliament. Hypothetically, this might mean that even if striving to achieve prominent political positions is an important aspect of representative democracy, the task may be divided between the representative and the party in various configurations. In some systems, that the individuals who represent a party and fight for its victory also want personal influence is thus taken more as a matter of course, while in other systems that notion is more alien.

The American studies provide useful insights into the candidate-centered US system, but there is still much to be explained regarding the determinants of politicians with career ambitions in party-centered systems. In party-centered systems, politicians not only have to develop their relations with voters but also are highly dependent on the relationships within the party. As David Mayhew explained in *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (1974), there are important preconditions that distinguish an MP from a member of Congress. Mayhew pointed to the fact that MPs have a strong incentive to fall in line under the pressure of party cohesion because their careers depend on the prime minister's approval by the citizenry. In contrast, member of Congress have to build their own coalitions to win elections

and cannot rely on their parties to do much for them. Mayhew concluded that in a party system, “The arrangement of incentives and resources elevates parties over politicians” (1974:22).

Even so, we must keep in mind that American politicians are members of parties as well. Lindstädt and Vander Wielen (2014) found that members of Congress and the party leadership have a cyclic relationship. In the beginning of an electoral term, senators and representatives are “forced” to take instructions from the leadership, but during election years they have more leverage to make their own decisions. Cox and McCubbins (2007) also found that there are constant negotiations between members of Congress and the leadership within the party. Many subtleties may be at play in the American system regarding the interactions between members of Congress and their parties and the evolution of political careers.

As we look closely at party-centered systems, we will see that the proportion of ambitious MPs varies among parliaments. Ambitious politicians are, quite simply, a universal phenomenon that we would be wise to study in order to understand what kinds of individuals gain powerful positions in representative democracies. Disregarding the differences between political systems, the subjects of ambition and which politicians citizens want to be their leaders are complicated.

In the following pages I will show that there is something deeply human about feeling ambivalent toward ambitious politicians, which also affects the structure of this book.

EVOLUTION AND AMBITION

There is growing interest in political science as it relates to genetics and basic human motivations. Research in this area is preoccupied with subjects like people’s tendency to vote and the relationship between genes and political orientations (see, for example, Alford, Funk, and Hibbing 2005; Fowler and Schreiber 2008; Hatemi et al. 2007). When it comes to humans’ inherited perspectives on leadership, there is intriguing research that is relevant to studies of political career ambition: much of it suggests that humans mistrust pretenders to leadership positions and have an innate drive to preserve equality between individuals. Experimental studies also show that people are disturbed by large differences in income and are willing to act to do something about it. “Emotional reactions towards high earners—even when the source of income is known to be purely random—cause individuals to engage in costly acts that promote equitable resource distributions” (Dawes et al. 2007:796).

Likewise, ethnographers have found distinct egalitarian elements and a strong dislike of interpersonal hierarchies in modern hunter-gatherer societies (Boehm

2008). When researchers have processed data from hunter-gatherer societies in various parts of the world, they have found few examples of individuals who try to grab power or position, or of leaders who try to “boss” others around (*ibid.*, 331). According to this research, individuals who make a bid for dominance risk being punished and shunned. “When an individual departs too far from the egalitarian ethos, the entire group either turns against him and cuts him down to size, or else it simply does away with him by means of ejection from the group or through capital punishment” (*ibid.*, 328).

One should perhaps remember that these are situations in which everyone is basically equal and leadership is voluntary on the part of the led. What makes these societies interesting in this context is that humans have been living as hunter-gatherers for 50,000 years—almost 2,000 generations. It has been estimated that it takes at least 1,000 generations to introduce a new trait (*ibid.*, 325). This might also be one explanation of why neuroscientists studying the brains of contemporary humans find that inequality-averse social preferences are innate (Tricomi et al. 2010). Thus, it is possible that the traits that are important under these circumstances are still found in us today. Studies that underscore the human genetic propensity toward egalitarian values are relatively comprehensive (Fehr, Fischbacher, and Gächter 2002). To put it another way, there are biological reasons ambitious people should watch their tongues.

An overview of research on leadership from an evolutionary perspective points out that there is a recurring theme when it comes to the type of leadership we human beings dislike. The conclusion is that leadership that relies on dominance is bound to be problematic. It seems that “people who have the desire to lead must rely on tactics other than sheer dominance to attract followers” (Van Vugt 2006:359). In other studies where people were asked to rank various attributes in politicians, the character trait people liked the least was that of being power-hungry (Kinder et al. 1980:319). Experiments also show that people are quite adept at “exposing” ambitious people and that this process is virtually innate (Smith et al. 2007:59). There is also a gender aspect; researchers timed how long it took for subjects to connect the craving for power to gender. The subjects needed only a second or two to associate high ambition with male behavior, while there was not the same intuitive association between ambition and female behavior (*ibid.*, 64). Overall, women were perceived as less self-interested and less ambitious than men (*ibid.*, 67).²

In light of this research, it seems that leaders should not overtly express a “craving for power.” It is, however, obvious that the relationship between leadership and self-interest is complex. Leadership per se may draw out a person’s more selfish tendencies. Abraham Lincoln is supposed to have once said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.” The

problem with Lincoln's observation is that one must first give a person power in order to judge whether he or she is fit. To Lincoln's credit, there is now research indicating that there is some truth to what he said.

In social psychology, people are categorized as “proselfs” and “prosocials” (Messick and McClintock 1968). The division comes from how individuals allocate resources based on what they consider most important—themselves, others, or both. People in the proself category are primarily interested in making sure resource allocation benefits themselves, whereas the prosocials value equality and thus allocate resources differently (Stouten, De Cremer, and Van Dijk 2005). According to these studies, the differences between proselfs and prosocials do not manifest until they are allocated a leadership role; otherwise, no systematic differences can be shown. It is thus the leadership itself that induces self-benefiting behavior in some people, and it is in these situations that proselfs set themselves apart. “Indeed, the current findings now suggest that the reported increase in self-benefiting allocations should primarily be ascribed to proself leaders” (Van Dijk and De Cremer 2006:1358). *Who* becomes a leader is therefore very important. Still, there is something of a paradox here: why have we humans created hierarchical societies and invested certain offices with great power, when we mistrust people who are willing to assume these offices?³ One answer might be that ambition is one thing, and career ambition is something else entirely. Career ambition need not be problematic, as long as the circumstances surrounding a person intent on making it to the top are the right ones.⁴

AMBITION AND LEGITIMACY

How to choose leaders has been a topic of discussion going back to ancient Greece. Plato, for example, stated that a politician with personal ambitions is the least suitable individual to govern a city (Plato 1987). Later, important thinkers such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine viewed ambition as a vice, a powerful force that might make individuals search for glory and in so doing forsake God (Houser 2002; Weststeijn 2010). Thomas More, influenced by ancient philosophers, imagined a model society—Utopia—in which the institutions created by the Utopians “extirpated the roots of ambition and factionalism along with all other vices” (as quoted in White 1982:347).

Other philosophers have been less skeptical toward individuals with ambitions. According to Aristotle, politics is not an exact science, which is why goodness of character is an absolute necessity. He believed there are a number of critical factors to consider when evaluating candidates for leadership positions. When someone declares interest in a representative position, take note of *when* they say

they want to be a leader, when they *announce* their candidacy, *why* they say they want to be a leader, what they intend to *achieve* by their leadership, and *how* they intend to fulfill their intentions (Aristotle 2009). Aristotle's criteria caution against automatically rejecting those who seek leadership; we should instead ask *why* the person wants to be a leader.⁵ His ideas continue to be relevant with regard to the attitudes of modern individuals toward politicians and their personal motivators. Thus, the ambition to lead need not be inherently problematic. People, at least in experimental studies, make a distinction between individuals whose ambition is based on their competence, including the ability to promote the collective good, and those whose ambition is based on individualistic craving for power (Larimer, Hannagan, and Smith 2007). How citizens perceive the ambition of their leaders has consequences for how they judge the ability of representatives to make wise decisions. Being able to display altruism—or at least to give the impression of being non-self-interested—may thus be advantageous to those who want to be leaders (Hardy and Van Vugt 2006). Charitable giving, for example, has been shown to strengthen the reputations of politicians (Milinski, Semmann, and Krambeck 2002). Self-sacrificing leaders also motivate others to behave in a similar way (De Cremer and Van Knippenberg 2004).⁶ The important thing is to avoid the appearance of self-interest.

Political representatives who appear selfish also risk undermining the legitimacy of the political system. This conclusion was found in a study in which participants were asked to react to various types of decisions based upon information about who the decision makers were and why they decided as they did. The study showed that participants found it more difficult to accept decisions made by ambitious decision makers, regardless of the outcome. The researchers recommend that in order to strengthen the legitimacy of the political system, measures should be taken to ensure that citizens do not believe their representatives are driven solely by a desire to lead. "Those who wish to improve citizens' perceptions of governmental decisions and of decision makers, as well as increase the willingness of citizens to accept those decisions, should take steps to make it so that people believe elected officials are not in office because of a desire for authority but rather because they have earned or otherwise acquired authority without making any conscious effort to do so" (Smith et al. 2007:296).

The authors of the study actually go so far as to advocate a political system in which politicians refuse to acknowledge any career ambitions they may have, which obviously would be very different from the current situation in the United States, where candidates do not shy away from telling potential voters about their ambitions to lead. A note of interest in connection to this is that in the early US presidential elections it was considered poor taste for candidates themselves to campaign (Troy 1996). For example, William Henry Harrison refused to partic-

ipate in any campaign activities before his election as president in 1840 (ibid). Earlier, the Founding Fathers stressed the importance of individual ambition while also championing the idea of egalitarianism (Reichley 2000). As they debated the nascent country's constitution, they found inspiration in the work of English republicans, including James Harrington (Sullivan 2006). In the preceding century, Harrington presented his ideas of the importance of curbing political ambition by balancing powers.

To summarize the observations: career ambition is a loaded subject. People seem to have an innate aversion to those whom they associate with ambition for power. This aversion may also contribute to undermining the legitimacy of the entire political system. In addition, ambition often is at play during legitimate power struggles both within and between political parties, further complicating the emotional charge surrounding career ambition. Personal career ambition should therefore be handled with care when studied in empirical studies.

Next, we move our attention to the Swedish context, which is well suited to the discussion of the pressure of collective norms on personal ambition.

THE “UNAMBITIOUS” SWEDISH POLITICIAN

Researchers interested in politicians with few personal driving forces and high collective party aims tend to look at Sweden. The Swedish government's *Democracy Report* doubted the very existence of politicians with career ambition, because such ambitions do not align with “the extremely party-centric political culture that still prevails in Swedish politics, where ‘careerists’ ... [are] ... strange birds” (Gidlund and Möller 1999:140). Sweden has strong and influential political parties that function in a parliamentary system with a low degree of separation of powers. Elections in Sweden are proportional and are held every four years using multi-member districts.⁷ Turnout is relatively high, and parties organize themselves fairly consistently on a left-right scale that is known to voters (Pierre 2016). The traditional party families are Agrarians, Conservatives, Christian Democrats, Greens, Liberals, and Socialists/Social Democrats. (For an overview of Swedish politics, see Pierre 2016).

In the parliament there is an institutional arrangement that may be disadvantageous to those with personal career ambitions. In this arrangement, usually referred to as the *seniority principle*, the MPs who have sat the longest in the parliament are first in line when various posts are to be filled (Hagevi 2010). The seniority principle may be interpreted as a way of constraining MPs' career ambitions, lessening the need to compete for various positions and offices. With its strong party cohesion, emphasis on the seniority principle, and a political culture that

repudiates political ambition, Sweden's parliament is a good basis for exploring the idea of personal career ambition as a motivator in political life.

Depictions of politicians unsullied by ambition are common in the Swedish memoir literature. Many high-ranking Swedish politicians have written memoirs that attest to the fact that they did not personally struggle to gain elected positions. Alf Svensson, former chair of the Christian Democrats, is one example. Svensson refuted the notion that he had any personal ambition to become the party leader. "People around the country had been urging and pushing me to do it. If the party wanted to entrust me with the position, I should put myself at the party's service. I took on this unglamorous task out of loyalty, not careerism" (Svensson 2001:6).

Another example is the former chair of the Conservative Party, Gösta Bohman, who quoted a colleague who was putting pressure on him when he described how he was induced to run as the opposition candidate for the position of party leader: "You have to do it. If you decline, there will be serious consequences for the party. To put it bluntly, you owe it to the party" (Bohman 1983:18).

In a similar vein, former minister of finance Anne Wibble wrote in her book, *Two Cigs and a Cup of Coffee*, that it was not herself but party strategists who put her forward as minister of finance in 1991 (Wibble 1994:12). Gunnar Sträng, who served as the Swedish minister of finance for twenty-one years, had to be asked three times by Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson before he would agree to join the Social Democratic cabinet in 1945 (Johansson 1992:400ff). As one could read in the minutes of the meeting of the board of directors of the Farm Workers Union, "The chairman of the union (Sträng), after having declined the offer to become minister of agriculture for the government, had upon being urged to do so accepted a post as a consultative member of the cabinet" (ibid., 402).

In his interviews with journalist Erik Fichtelius, former prime minister Göran Persson described how he had been in denial, refusing to understand that he would be the new party leader and prime minister. His feelings at the time were, "This is not going to work, I am going to be forced into this, you can see that, you can certainly understand that. That crystal clear insight that this is going to be an utter failure" (Fichtelius 2007:27). Other politicians are quick to point out their own shortcomings. Birger Schlaug, former Green Party spokesperson, described how he ended up in that position: "Following the 1985 election, I became the spokesperson because no one else was willing to do it. It was totally bizarre because I was not only agoraphobic, I stuttered. But I had qualifications like the beard, the jeans, and the anorak" (Schlaug 2002).

These examples do not, of course, mean that ambitious politicians are absent from the Swedish political system, but they do indicate the relative caution Swedish politicians use in forging their career paths. One book on party cultures surmised that MPs should not overtly declare their ambitions: "People believe that if

a Social Democrat were to say ‘I would love to take on that job,’ they would also instantly have declared themselves ‘politically dead.’ If you propose yourself for an office, you will not only lose that one, but also the next” (Barrling Hermansson 2004:173). As a representative of the Conservative Party noted in that same book, “Keeping a low profile works to your advantage and people who openly display ambition do not become popular in the group” (ibid., 103).

A similar argument is made in the published diaries of former Conservative Party chair Ulf Adelsohn, which cover the period during which he headed the party. He described the ins and outs surrounding who would succeed him in the position, which turned out to be Carl Bildt. Adelsohn wrote that Bildt had shown no personal interest in the job of party leader, but Anders Wijkman had. According to Adelsohn, Wijkman put himself forward and positioned himself, but in so doing demonstrated that he was not fit for the position. “All my experience [tells me] that those who are not hungry for a job are the best ones to do it. The hungry should in general not be called upon” (Adelsohn 1987:378). When Håkan Juholt took over as Social Democratic Party leader in 2011, he took Adelsohn’s tack. At the press conference when Juholt was introduced as the nominating committee’s choice, he said regarding his own career ambitions, “Anyone who has been dreaming of taking on this role would be most unsuitable” (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 11 March 2011).

The importance of maintaining a clear distinction between personal ambitions as an individual candidate and how these ambitions are expressed also emerges in one of the open-ended answers received in the 1998 Parliamentary Study.⁸ One survey respondent gave the following reason for choosing not to run a personal election campaign: “I would like to be more straightforward and more personal than the unwritten ‘tall poppy’ laws allow. [But] the old boy network would crush me if I got more attention than them” (Parliamentary Study 1998).⁹

It is said that even former prime minister Olof Palme, despite his status as the obvious heir apparent to Tage Erlander, regretted not having strongly enough repudiated the idea of becoming the head of the Social Democratic Party. “I made the mistake of saying that I would not avoid the party’s mandate to become the chair. Sträng, Rune Johansson and the others were smarter. They simply said they were not interested. That made me look like a climber” (Strand 1980:18).

The Swedish memoir literature shows that Sweden is an intriguing subject for someone who seeks to answer the question of whether personal ambition in politics is a motivator that also has impact in profoundly collectivist settings. All in all, it makes sense to see Sweden not only as an example of a party-centered system but as one where the party is very important and where politicians themselves are reluctant to talk about career ambitions. If there are ambitious MPs in the Swedish parliament, it is reasonable to presume they exist in other European parliaments as well. The Swedish case also lends perspective to American research, where am-

bition is described as the engine of representative democracy. A study of career ambition among politicians in Sweden permits analysis based on a system not previously studied while feeding the theoretical and normative discussion of what role personal ambition actually plays in representative democracy—and also how that ambition should be encouraged and constrained.

SOURCE MATERIAL

To enable this study of career ambition among Swedish members of parliament, I have used material from the Parliamentary Studies collected by the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg. From an international perspective, the Parliamentary Studies are an extraordinary source.¹⁰ Surveys have gone out after each parliamentary election since 1985 (with the exception of 1991). They are based on a long-standing tradition of the election study program in Sweden. Swedish MPs are unusually acquiescent about responding to these surveys. The Parliamentary Studies carried out in Gothenburg manage to achieve a response rate among MPs of above 90 percent, which makes Sweden a virtually unique case to study.

Even though the Parliamentary Studies have asked MPs hundreds of questions over the years, only once has a question dealt with MPs' career ambitions (which presumably reflects the general view on the significance of personal ambition among MPs). This occurred in 1996, an aptly chosen occasion. The 1996 Parliamentary Study was part of a European project that covered eleven European countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden. This data offers an opportunity not only to study ambition among Swedish MPs but also to compare the state of affairs in the Swedish parliament to the situation elsewhere in Europe. The MPs who participated in the 1996 survey answered questions that had to do with their aspirations in ten years, which provided an opportunity to meticulously track what had happened in these MPs' careers a decade later.

I augmented the survey material from 1996 with the 1994 Parliamentary Study in which "my" respondents participated. Thanks to generous colleagues, I also had access to the material collected in the *Exit Riksdagen* study undertaken by Shirin Ahlbäck Öberg, Jörgen Hermansson, and Lena Wängnerud. *Exit Riksdagen* studied the reasons such a large proportion of the MPs in office during the 1994–1998 term did not remain in parliament for another term.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

My research focused on two general questions, one empirical and the second methodological. The first was whether ambition is an effective motivator in the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag. The second concerned the difficulties of studying personal ambition in collective settings: am I really studying what I am interested in—ambitious politicians?

First Level of Analysis

There are four main empirical questions that will be addressed at the first level of my research:

Who are the MPs that state they have career ambitions? This question will focus mainly on the relationship between the MPs' socioeconomic resources and ambition, a subject that will be dealt with in Chapter 4.

How do MPs with career ambitions act in the parliament? In Chapter 5 the aim is to see how MPs orient in the parliament and to what extent they cultivate a personal profile.

Do ambitions further MPs' careers? Because Swedish MPs declare that politicians with career ambitions do not have a place in politics, this claim is scrutinized in Chapter 6, where the parliamentarians' careers are followed for a period of ten years.

Does the share of MPs with career ambitions vary between European parliaments? In Chapter 7 Swedish MPs will be compared to other European parliamentarians. This chapter will also serve as a test of the assumption that Sweden is an interesting case because ambitious politicians are a less prevalent phenomenon. For the book to make valid claims to generalizability there should be fewer ambitious MPs in the Swedish parliament than there are in other European parliaments.

Second Level of Analysis

The desire to pursue a career in politics is something found “in the heads of MPs.” As having career ambition is a controversial issue, I cannot presume that politicians will answer truthfully to questions concerning future positions. Therefore, my research strategy at the second level is focused on methodology, where the query is: *Do the survey questions identify genuinely career-minded politicians?*

A number of tests are performed to confirm the validity of the survey material with respect to the MPs' ambitions. More specifically, I establish a criterion that must be met to characterize a politician as ambitious. In short, an ambitious

politician must be someone who is: (1) committed over the long term, (2) goal-oriented, (3) working toward something difficult to attain, and (4) acting to achieve the object of ambition. These criteria are presented in more detail in Chapter 2.

Each of the empirical chapters engages in the question of to what extent the survey material and the MPs' responses correspond to the demands imposed by criteria. In Chapter 3 I test the survey data to make sure that they meet the criteria I use when defining ambitious politicians. The chapter can therefore conclude that a number of Swedish politicians report having career ambition according to the definitions that I will outline in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 examines whether these MPs are in earnest about their ambitions for high-ranking positions. I do this by studying whether there are circumstances that systematically indicate that MPs who want to attain high positions differ from their colleagues in terms of prior experience. The validity test then proceeds and is concluded in Chapter 5. This is done on the basis of the criterion that to be considered ambitious, MPs must be acting to achieve their goals.

Before this work commences, I will present in the next chapter a brief summary of the conclusions of prior research on political ambition. Thereafter, I present the criteria for characterizing individual politicians as ambitious.

