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# Turnout Drop in Times of Crisis?

## An enigma of the electoral turnout change in the 2022 parliamentary election in Sweden

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The Swedish elections in 2022 made international headlines first because of the breakthrough of the Swedish Democrat. This far-right populist party is now the second largest party, but also because of the 3 per cent drop in the 2022 elections compared to the previous parliamentary election of 2018. Voter turnout is a strong indicator of functional democracy and essential for the legitimacy of the democratic system. Therefore, from a normative perspective, a small drop should be the cause of concern. The article, therefore, aims to explain this surprising drop. By relying on descriptive and exploratory statistics, our preliminary analysis confirms in times of crises, turnout became lower because of the negative impact of uncertainty and degenerated life conditions.

**Key Words:** Sweden, voter turnout, 2022 parliamentary elections, crisis, immigrants

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## 1. Introduction

The result of the Swedish national elections held on September 11 made international headlines,<sup>1)</sup> as the results were surprising on many accounts. For one, the election witnessed the electoral breakthrough of the Swedish Democrat. This far-right party gained 20.5% of the votes, thus becoming the second-largest party in the country. In addition, the 2022 election experience a sudden drop in voter turnout. This result was unexpected because the turnout has increased four times since the 2002 election. The turnout in 2022 was 84.2 percent, while it recorded 87.2 percent in 2018 (see **Figure 1**). Three percent of voters, approximately 233,000 registered voters, decided not to go to polls in the 2022 election.

From an international point of view, observers may wonder why the three-per-cent drop would be an issue, partly because it was only a small drop, and the turnout rate remained relatively higher in Sweden than in other comparable cases of western democracies.<sup>2)</sup> While we admit drop in voter turnout in the Swedish 2022 elections is not that substantial when Sweden is compared to the Western European democracies. Still, prior studies long concur voter turnout is generally considered an indicator of the state of democracy and a useful gauge for measuring democratic health conditions (Barber, 1974; Franklin, 2002; Lutz & Marsh, 2007; Pateman, 1970). Along this line, higher turnout is assumed to give legitimacy to the democratic system (LeDuc et al., 1996; Lanning, 2008; Diwakar, 2008). What this therefore implies is that the legitimacy of democracy is undermined when many citizens abstain from elections (Cavanagh, 1981: 62; Salisbury, 1975: 326). Putting this into perspective, we, therefore, contend at a normative level even a slight decline or drop in voter turnout should be a cause for concern.

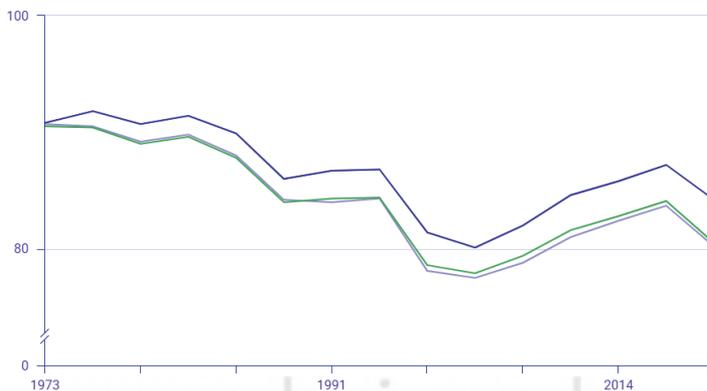
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1) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-62913356> (Accessed 2022-11-01).

2) Plummeting voter turnout has been a new trend in many established democracies (Solijonov 2016: 26; SCB, Valdeltagande i Sverige).

Thus, the focus of this article is to address what caused the sudden fall in turnout in Sweden. To address the issue that interests here, we stand on theories and studies that seek to understand voter turnout in times of crisis. Analysts proposed two types of answer and approach that is useful for our purpose. The first strand of research posits that ongoing crises would make voters vigilant to social issues, making them more likely to get more actively involved in political participation. In a crisis, electoral turnout increases because of an expanded feeling of civic duty (Blais, 2000; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968). In contrast, the second strand of research suggests that citizens would vote less because of individualised voting styles and the sociodemographic context of economic crisis (Blondel, Sinnott, & Svensson, 1997; Bréchon, 2002; Delwit, 2013; Pacek & Radcliff, 1995; Purdam, Fieldhouse, Kalra, & Russell, 2002: 19; Van Egmond, de Graaf & Van Der Eijk, 1998). In a crisis, electoral turnout drops because of the economic hardships of the marginal people (Galais & Blais 2019; Rosenstone 1982). In this article, we adhere more to the second explanation and posit the slight drop in voter turnout in Sweden's elections could be understood in the context of ongoing crises before the election.

<Figure 1> Electoral turnout in the Swedish national elections



## Context

### *The Swedish Party System*

To interrogate the *raison d'être* for Sweden's sudden decline in voter turnout, we must understand the Swedish party system, parties' policy positions, and the context (i.e., in times of crisis) before the election. Sweden's multiparty system comprises seven political parties: the Left Party, the Social Democrats, The Greens, the Liberals, the Moderate party, Christian Democrats, and the Swedish Democrats. While traditionally, the seven parties differ along the economic dimension (left-right scale), However, in recent times, we note two changes. First, the parties have tended to moderate their stance on economic position, evident from the declining support of the workers for left bloc parties. Second, the parties polarise on the cultural dimension. Polarisation has attracted attention in the Swedish political debate (Oscarsson et al., 2021; Hagavi, 2022; Tambe, 2021). Proponents of this debate argue that Sweden has become more polarised and offers a wide range of evidence that captures the traditional left-right and the new cultural dimension. Besides the left-right spectrum, scholars have incorporated cultural dimensions (measured through the GAL-TAN scale) to depict a country's level of polarisation. For example, Oscarsson and colleagues (2021) argue that the cultural dimension that deals with integration, religion, culture, and immigration are more salient in Swedish politics, with elites, parties, and even voters being more polarised on these issues. Specifically, Oscarsson and colleagues (2021) reveal an increasing ideological distance between the parties, notably multiculturalism, migration globalisation, and ethnic identity. For instance, the report reveals parties, notably the Left Party, Green and Center Party, have become more generous in the case of the current refugee influx. In contrast, other parties, such as the Liberals, Moderates, and Christian Democrats, have become more

restrictive.

### ***Bloc Politics, Electoral Alliance and Competition.***

The structure of the political competition is very important for the Swedish party system. The Swedish two-bloc system describes the two main alliances between the parties, the left-wing “Red-Green” Bloc and the right-wing Alliansen (The Alliance). The Red-Green Bloc was formed due to an agreement signed in 2008 when the left-wing parties were in opposition (Aylott, 2016). It comprises the Social Democratic Party, the Left Party, and the Green Party. The Alliance is a formal compromise formed in 2004 between the Moderate party, Centre Party, Liberal Party, and Christian Democrats. The compromise means that Alliance parties agree on policy and will compromise if they can form a majority in the Riksdag. It is not, however, an electoral coalition. The Sweden Democrats are excluded from the bloc system due to the parties’ radical right-wing views – particularly regarding immigration (Aylott & Bolin, 2019). However, as this populist party has grown in strength, it now means that both blocs cannot control a majority of seats in the Riksdag (Henley, 2018). This presents a serious challenge to the bloc system yet to be resolved.

Also, another key element of the Swedish party system is how competition occurs between political parties. As a result of the bloc system, political parties within the same bloc avoid competing with each other and focus on cooperation. They still contest each election to hold more control within the alliances. However, since it is highly improbable that a party will achieve a majority on their own, they agree to cooperate in the formation of a government. Inter-bloc cooperation is exceedingly rare; therefore, most political competition happens between the two blocs. This makes forming a stable government difficult, as they have to make agreements with several

oppositional parties after the elections. This poses a difficulty for the parties as they are torn between pleading for their ideologies and preserving a safe political state. Therefore, adapting to the rival parties to form or maintain a stable government is hampered. (Müller, König, 2021).

### ***The context of the 2022 Parliamentary election***

Finally, regarding the context in which the election took place, which is our sole focus in explaining the decline in voter turnout, it is important to note the parliamentary elections were highly contested around several salient issues – violent crime, law and order, and social segregation. Moreover, the election occurred in the context of the covid-19 pandemic, high inflation, and rising food and electricity prices caused by the Russian-Ukraine war. In this unique context, we contend voter turnout will be depressed, and crises tend to disproportionately affect already marginalised social groups who are often less likely to vote. In the following section, we outline our theoretical explanation for the sudden decline in voter turnout focusing on the issue of turnout change in times of crisis.

## **Theoretical framework and hypotheses**

### **Crisis and electoral participation**

When a crisis comes, we demonstrate two types of reactions. The first reaction is related to inborn nature. We get afraid of what the crisis can make negatively. All activities in crisis shrink, seek shelter and think about survival. For example, we consume less when an economic crisis strikes us. When a hurricane sweeps over the nearby areas, we prepare for the worst scenario to

keep our safety, life and happiness. Thus, our activities will be confined and reduced if necessary during a crisis. In an economic recession, looming war, or rampant consumer price, electoral turnout will drop because people, especially economically marginal people, are negatively affected by the effects of the crisis. Rosenstone found, as Galais and Blais did that because of economic hardships, people would be more concerned and worried about uncertain future and life conditions (Galais & Blais, 2019; Rosenstone, 1982). In a crisis, an election is not but a second-level issue. Consequently, hypothesis 1 read as follows:

*H1: In a crisis, voter turnout becomes lower because of the negative impact of uncertainty and degenerated life conditions.*

The second reaction contains the opposite scenario. Individuals especially learned and enlightened groups, are more likely vigilant and concerned about the collectiveness and the marginal group of people. Collective action dilemma is much lower among those with a feeling of duty. Riker and Ordeshook point out that voter turnout increases in crisis because of an expanded feeling of civic duty among those who have higher education (Blais 2000; Riker & Ordeshook 1968). The opposite scenario is also possible within this family. Individualised lifestyles among the less affluent and minority groups in society will lead to lower voter turnout because of economic and social hardships (Blondel, Sinnott, & Svensson, 1997; Bréchon, 2002; Delwit, 2013; Pacek & Radcliff, 1995; Purdam, Fieldhouse, Kalra, & Russell, 2002: 19; Van Egmond, de Graaf & Van Der Eijk, 1998).

*H2-1: Electoral turnout increases in crisis because of an expanded feeling of civic duty among those with higher education.*

*H2-2: Individualised lifestyle among the less affluent and minority groups will lead to lower voter turnout in crisis because of economic and social hardships.*

## **Unemployment and turnout**

Unemployment is one of the most analysed aspects in the analysis of voter turnout. A wide range of studies supports that a high unemployment rate in general, and among the youth in particular, relates to lower levels of electoral participation since it has a close relationship to decreased political interest and trust (Anderson, 2001; Bay and Blekesaune, 2002; De Witte, 1992). Yet this literature is far from consensual.

*H3: Those with low sociodemographic status tend to abstain at higher rates than middle-class voters.*

## **Ethnic minority, citizenship and political efficacy and Voter Turnout**

People who migrate are less active because everything is new for them – new neighbours, a new way of thinking and behaviour, and new culture. They usually have lower knowledge of social norms, political rules and routines. According to Purdam et al., it is no doubt that newly acquired citizenship usually shows a low level of political knowledge, interest and self-confidence and low political efficacy (Purdam, Fieldhouse, Kalra, & Russell, 2002: 19). There is a close link between political knowledge, political efficacy and voter turnout. This pattern is a more clear case for ethnic minorities. An empirical study of electoral behaviour among ethnic minorities in New Zealand shows that the newly migrated groups are less active in social life and the social learning process. Hence, socialisation is crucial for a low level of political participation in general and electoral turnout in particular (Park, 2006). A thesis that studied patterns of participation among Chinese New Zealanders confirms that the pre-and post-migration socialisation process is a key factor in the degree to which how they participate in elections and other political

activities (Clayton, 2016). Thus, it may be argued that those who migrate from non-democratic to the democratic state are politically less active since there are so many barriers, lack of democratic knowledge, low self-confidence in democratic institutions and low level of socialisation of the democratic rule of the game. This recalls that low political efficacy usually leads to low electoral participation, as observed above. On the other hand, when political knowledge is high, internal political efficacy also increases because of high self-confidence in the potential for social influence (Reichert, 2016).

### **Immigrants and voting**

Among the foreign citizens entitled to vote, participation in elections is strikingly poor (Pierre, 2016: 240). Also, among the Swedish citizens, the foreign-born have a lower turnout. In this context, it is important to remember that immigrants are not a homogeneous group and that there are large differences in voter turnout depending on the country of origin. Nevertheless, the low turnout of immigrants in Sweden is striking and should be looked at more closely. Regarding the political interest and motivational level, one possible explanation for the low turnout is that immigrants aren't as politicised with Swedish politics as people who grew up in Sweden, and neither is their network (Pierre, 2016: 242). The Swedish-born second-generation immigrants also have a low turnout, albeit less drastic. Despite their Swedish education, a possible and probable explanation for this is the big impact parents have on their children's political participation (Pierre, 2016: 241). Another aspect of the mobilisation model could be the absence of party identification or established memberships from people who have just arrived in Sweden and might be more connected to the political parties from their home country (Pierre, 2016: 242). Although low voter turnout is a problem among this group, it is reassuring to note that participation increases with the length of the stay in Sweden (Pierre, 2016: 141).

## Citizenship and Country of Birth

As Sweden has a long migration history, analysing the election results by nationality and country of birth is particularly interesting. At this point, it should be noted that there are differences regarding local elections and elections to the Riksdag. First, only Swedish citizen over 18 years old is eligible to vote. Citizens of an E.U. country, Iceland or Norway, and citizens of any other country who have been listed in the Swedish Population Register for three consecutive years before election day are also allowed to vote in the municipal and regional councils (Valmyndigheten, 2012). In 2021, 20 percent of the Swedish population had a foreign country of birth (Population in Sweden by Country/Region of Birth, Citizenship and Swedish/Foreign background, 2021). Analysing the election results from 2018, Bevelander (2022) states that compared to other groups of immigrants, a higher percentage of refugees vote than family immigrants, while labour immigrants turn out at the lowest rate. The results also showed that women and those who have obtained Swedish citizenship are more likely than men and non-Swedish citizens to vote. And last, no matter what residence permit people have, the tendency to vote increases with time as they live in Sweden (Bevelander, 2022). However, there are multiple explanations for why immigrants have lower voter turnout. Bevelander & Hutcheson (2021) mention “...lower civic engagement and trust in institutions, ethnic residential concentration, where neighbours behave similarly, the varying mobilising effects of ‘bonding’ within communities and ‘bridging’ between them, differences in civic engagement between ethnic minority groups and levels of organisational membership among migrant populations”(Bevelander & Hutcheson, 2022).

*H4-1: Those who migrate and acquire citizenship are less likely to participate in elections because of their lack of socialisation and political knowledge, i.e. low level of political efficacy.*

*H4-2. Those who migrate from a non-democratic to a democratic state are less likely to vote because of low political knowledge and self-confidence in democratic institutions.*

## **Research material**

Comparative scholarship has adopted two approaches or types of materials to investigate the question that interests us here. On the one hand, studies have drawn on the individual-level explanation, focusing on individuals' or citizens' voting decisions (Tambe, 2021; Smets and van Ham, 2013). In particular, these studies rely on survey data with which researchers may ask respondents about their voting intention, behaviours and attitudes. This type of study may provide a diversity of socioeconomic and sociodemographic background variables for explaining motivation and researchers. In addition, pre- or post-election surveys deliver wide-ranging studies of voter turnout. The second approach, on the other hand, focuses on aggregate-level explanations (Franklin, 2004). This approach aims to account for differences in voter turnout across countries, within countries and across geo-political regions (i.e. why do some countries have high voter turnout rates, whereas others have rates that barely reach 50 percent?). In particular, these studies rely heavily on aggregate data with which diverse electoral bases such as municipalities, electoral districts and polling stations can be sorted out. The seeming advantage is that voter turnout is measured and compared at diverse levels. However, aggregate data often lack individual data, such as the voters' socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds.

At the same time, both perspectives are useful for our purpose. Still considering that the current paper's core objective is more explanatory, we argue for the need to combine both data as they complement each other, thus

enabling us to provide some descriptive and explanatory account of our research question. Overall the analyses of this study are based on both survey and aggregate data. The 2018 voter turnout study of Statistics Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyrån, hereafter SCB) used survey data to explain the socioeconomic patterns of voter turnout. Gender, education, age, income, citizenship and birthplace were selected as background variables for explaining the voter turnout in the 2018 election. For analysis of changing voter turnout patterns between 2018 and 2022, aggregate data collected by the national election management body (Valmyndigheten) and SCB is selected to address the discrepancies of voter turnout rates in municipalities and polling stations.

## **Patterns of electoral turnout in Sweden: Socio-demographic factors**

Extensive literature found that the highly educated are likely to vote (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Aperia, 2018; Converse, 1972; Lipset, 1960; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Emanuel Kant's idea of enlightenment is a base for the positive impact of education on active political participation (Kant, 1789: 25). According to Kant, enlightenment is an appeal to men to become adults, giving them access to self-judgment. The Swedish data supports this general enlightenment assumption. Those who reached post-high school education show a higher voter turnout than those with lower education. Among all age groups, especially older voters, the turnout reaches over 90-per cent level. Female voters are generally more active in electoral participation. The opposite patterns are observed, i.e. lower turnout rate, among those with the lowest education level.

&lt;Table 1&gt; Voter turnout by education and age (2018)

Education		Turnout rate		
	Age	Male	Female	All voters
<b>Up to middle school</b>				
	18-29	76,8	83,4	79,8
	30-49	72,1	72,8	72,4
	50-64	80,9	78,8	80,1
	65-74	86,2	84,3	85,3
	<b>18-74</b>	<b>79,3</b>	<b>80,5</b>	<b>79,8</b>
<b>High school</b>				
	18-29	83,1	87,6	85,1
	30-49	87,2	88,1	87,6
	50-64	88,8	91,1	89,9
	65-74	90,6	91,6	91,1
	<b>18-74</b>	<b>87,2</b>	<b>89,5</b>	<b>88,3</b>
<b>Post-high school</b>				
	18-29	92,8	95,6	94,4
	30-49	94,1	95,4	94,8
	50-64	94,4	95,8	95,2
	65-74	94,9	96,0	95,5
	<b>18-74</b>	<b>94,1</b>	<b>95,6</b>	<b>94,9</b>
<b>All</b>				
	18-29	83,3	88,9	86,0
	30-49	88,2	90,8	89,5
	50-64	89,2	91,5	90,4
	65-74	90,6	91,3	91,0
	<b>18-74</b>	<b>87,8</b>	<b>90,7</b>	<b>89,3</b>

Source: SCB Electoral Turnout Statistics 2018.

Socio-demographic factors, including income and age, are also striking evidence for a positive relationship with higher voter turnout. Research hypothesis H2, supported by Wolfinger & Rosenstone and Verba & Nye, can be confirmed. The prospect for active participation in an election gets higher when the income level increases. Table 2 depicts that female voters with an income level of 41-60% and higher are extremely active in electoral participation. Evidently, voter turnout over 90 percent can be witnessed among voters with 80-100% of income level. All age groups within this group show a strong tendency to vote. The income data supports that Swedish female voters are generally more active in voting. The reverse tendency is more evident among those who have lower incomes. Unemployed groups (or those who refused to reply) show the lowest voter turnout at 71,3%. Compared to the group with the highest income (96,1%), the difference is 24,8%. It can be said that income difference matters in Sweden's variation of turnout rate.

<Table 2> Voter turnout by income and age (2018)

Income	Age	Turnout rate		
		Male	Female	All voters
<b>No income or no information</b>				
	18-29	74,1	78,5	75,9
	30-49	61,9	66,7	64,2
	50-64	66,9	71,7	69,1
	65-	66,4	63,3	64,7
	<b>18-</b>	<b>69,7</b>	<b>73,4</b>	<b>71,3</b>
<b>0-20% (1-144 kr)</b>				
	18-29	74,1	89,2	86,6
	30-49	61,9	80,6	77,6
	50-64	66,9	77,3	74,6
	65-	66,4	75,0	73,8
	<b>18-</b>	<b>78,0</b>	<b>81,5</b>	<b>80,1</b>

Income		Turnout rate		
Age	Male	Female	All voters	
<b>21-40% (144 924-232 099 kr)</b>				
18-29	82,9	89,7	86,8	
30-49	79,0	88,0	85,0	
50-64	80,4	86,5	84,1	
65-	84,0	85,3	84,8	
<b>18-</b>	<b>82,6</b>	<b>86,6</b>	<b>85,0</b>	
<b>41-60% (232 100-321 194 kr)</b>				
18-29	84,5	91,3	87,9	
30-49	85,2	91,8	89,3	
50-64	86,3	91,7	89,7	
65-	91,1	92,7	91,7	
<b>18-</b>	<b>87,4</b>	<b>91,9</b>	<b>89,9</b>	
<b>61-80% (321 195-423 276 kr)</b>				
18-29	88,3	94,1	90,2	
30-49	90,9	95,2	92,9	
50-64	91,2	95,3	93,3	
65-	94,6	95,5	94,9	
<b>18-</b>	<b>91,3</b>	<b>95,2</b>	<b>93,1</b>	
<b>81-100% (423 277 kr eller mer)</b>				
18-29	90,3	93,9	91,0	
30-49	95,3	97,2	95,9	
50-64	95,9	97,4	96,5	
65-	96,7	96,7	96,7	
<b>18-</b>	<b>95,6</b>	<b>97,2</b>	<b>96,1</b>	

Source: SCB Electoral Turnout Statistics 2018.

Bevelander observed that the tendency to vote increases with time as the immigrants live in Sweden (Bevelander, 2022). Table 3 provides evidence of what Bevelander witnessed. The longer your stay in Sweden as an immigrant,

the higher your propensity for voting in elections is expected. Among the immigrants who acquired citizenship before 1980 (who lived longer than 38 years) turnout rate reaches the highest level at over 80%. The propensity to vote decreases as the time of citizenship acquisition gets shorter—the voter turnout rate decreases at every drop by the ten-year interval. The lowest turnout reaches 68,6% among those who acquired Swedish citizenship in 2011 or later. All immigrant citizens have a lower turnout than those of Swedish origin by a 13,2% margin.

<Table 3> Electoral turnout by periods of Swedish citizenship acquisition

Periods of Swedish citizenship acquisition	Turnout rate		
	Male	Female	All voters
-1970	81,2	79,6	80,3
1971-1980	80,9	82,2	81,6
1981-1990	77,6	80,8	79,3
1991-2000	73,7	76,7	75,2
2001-2010	70,0	74,0	72,2
2011-	66,9	70,1	68,6
All new citizens	72,5	75,3	74,0
Swedish voters	86,5	87,8	87,2

Source: SCB Electoral Turnout Statistics 2018.

Both birthplace and ethnic identity are other clues to voter discrepancies detected among Swedish voters. For example, the highest turnout (91%) is more evident among those born in Sweden with Swedish parents, while the lowest (74%) is among those born outside Sweden.

&lt;Table 4&gt; Electoral turnout by birthplace and ethnic background

Swedish or non-Swedish background	Turnout rate		
	Male	Female	All voters
<b>Swedish background</b>			
Born in Sweden with two Swedish parents	90,4	91,5	91,0
Born in Sweden by mixed parents (one with foreign origin)	87,1	91,0	89,0
<b>Non-Swedish background</b>			
Born outside of Sweden	72,5	75,3	74,0
Born in Sweden by two foreign parents	79,3	85,2	82,2
<b>All voters</b>	<b>87,5</b>	<b>88,9</b>	<b>88,2</b>

Source: SCB Electoral Turnout Statistics 2018.

### Explaining the fall of electoral turnout between 2018 and 2022

The aggregate data provides a plausible answer to the fall in voter turnout between 2018 and 2022. The voter turnout in 2022 fell in all municipalities except for two (Sotenäs and Sorsele, see Table 5). In ten municipalities with the lowest voter turnout in 2018, the fall continued even in 2022 at the lowest level of -4,4 (Gnosjö) and the highest level of -7,0 (Södertälje). Another data based on the polling station study shows why the drop in voter turnout was inevitable in 2022 (see Table 6).

<Table 5> Ten municipalities with the largest falls in electoral turnout  
between 2018 and 2022

	2022	Change (2018-2022)
Södertälje	70,6	-7,0
Järfälla	79,4	-6,9
Botkyrka	71,3	-6,9
Burlöv	74,5	-6,3
Haninge	79,0	-6,0
Sigtuna	77,4	-5,5
Upplands-Bro	81,3	-5,5
Upplands Väsby	79,5	-5,2
Malmö	77,2	-4,8
Gnosjö	81,6	-4,4
Sotenäs	88,3	+0,1
Sorsele	81,3	+0,5
Sweden total	84,2	-3,0

Note: Source data were reorganised by the authors.

Source: SCB. <https://www.scb.se/nyhet/valdeltagandet-sjonk-i-288-kommuner/>

At the polling station level, the three largest cities – Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö, have the lowest turnout across Sweden. As depicted in Table 6, except for three polling stations, voter turnout fell anew in the polling stations with the already extremely low turnout rates. For example, at a polling station such as Södertälje 55 Ronna Norra, the voter turnout fell from 48,7 percent in 2018 to a record low level of 39,9 percent in 2022 (-8,8). Similarly, Spånga 22 Rinkebysvängen Ö marked a drop of -12,0 between 2018 and 2022. This tendency continues in Kista 10 Nordkapskatan with a drop of 11,3 per cent. All these polling stations are located in Stockholm. In these polling stations, the voter turnout rate is two times lower than average polling stations.

&lt;Table 6&gt; Polling stations with the lowest voter turnout in 2018 and 2022

	2018	2022	Difference	Kommun
Tömrosen-Örtagården	47,5	51,2	+3,7	Malmö
Västra Göteborg, Styrsö-Köpstadsö	48,5	86,3	+40,2	Göteborg
Södertälje 55 Ronna Norra	48,7	39,9	-8,8	Södertälje, Stockholms Län
Kista 8 Nidarosgatan	52,2	44,2	-8,0	Stockholm
Spånga 22 Rinkebysvängen Ö	53,4	41,4	-12,0	Stockholm
Kista 11 Trondheimgatan	54,0	57,5	+3,5	Stockholm
Kryddgården S	54,4	47,7	-6,7	Malmö
Kista 20 Husby C	54,5	50,3	-6,8	Stockholm
Spånga 17 Rinkebysvängen N	54,8	45,5	-9,3	Stockholm
Kista 10 Nordkapsgatan	56,0	44,7	-11,3	Stockholm
Average Sweden	87,2	84,2		84,2

Note: Source data were reorganised by the authors.

Source: SCB, Statistikdatabasen

What are the plausible reasons for the unexpected drop in the polling station with a record low level of voter turnout? Labour statistics have perhaps a plausible answer to this question. Among non-European birth origin, the unemployment rate marks 45,9%, while the unemployment rate for Swedish origin born in Sweden is 5,4% (Ekonomifakta, 2022). Likewise, the unemployment rate among those who have immigrant backgrounds is 19,5% in Sweden. During the Covid-19 period, the immigrant groups' unemployment rate increased more rapidly than those with Swedish origins (SCB, 2021). During the pandemic, the quality of life has remarkably deteriorated in the housing areas where immigrants are densely gathered (Nordin, 2022). As shown in Table 7, the number of new Swedes with immigrant background are concentrated in Stockholm, Malmö and Göteborg. In 2021, the number of new Swedes with foreign origins increased drastically in Stockholm and Malmö.

The total number of immigrants who acquired Swedish citizenship during the five years between 2017 and 2021 in three metropolitan areas reached 135,096 persons. Origin countries for new Swedes at the top between 2017 and 2018 are Syria, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan (SCB, 2018). These people usually live in suburb areas where multi-storey tenement flats are the general form of residence.

<Table 7> Number of New Swedish National Citizenship with Foreign Origins by Age and Region (Län) (2017–2021)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Stockholm						
14-27	1,142	1,052	883	1,044	1,244	5,365
25-44	7,843	7,424	3,768	3,774	9,554	32,362
45-64	2,650	2,694	2,983	3,716	3,633	15,676
65-	444	475	569	626	735	2,849
total	12,079	11,645	8,203	9,160	15,166	56,252
Skåne						
14-27	713	650	545	715	973	3,596
25-44	4,191	4,085	3,973	5,424	5,738	23,411
45-64	1,496	1,496	1,756	2,226	2,467	9,441
65-	254	284	246	290	336	1,410
total	6,654	6,515	6,520	8,656	9,514	37,858
Västra Götland						
14-27	766	772	551	803	1,135	4,027
25-44	4,258	4,612	4,281	5,800	6,799	25,750
45-64	1,435	1,422	1,754	2,212	2,581	9,404
65-	278	306	330	369	522	1,805
Total	6,737	7,112	6,916	9,184	11,037	40,986
Total numbers	25,470	25,272	21,639	27,000	35,717	135,096

Note: Source data were reorganised by the authors.

Source: SCB, Statistikdatabasen. [https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START\\_\\_BE\\_\\_BE0101\\_\\_BE0101N/MedborgarByteTotK/table/tableViewLayout1/](https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START__BE__BE0101__BE0101N/MedborgarByteTotK/table/tableViewLayout1/)

## Findings and discussions

For this study, four hypotheses were selected. The first hypothesis, *H1: In a crisis, voter turnout became lower because of the negative impact of uncertainty and degenerated life conditions*, is true according to our data. During the sweeping pandemic period, the unemployment rate stoke harsher the persons with immigrant origins who received new citizenship. The uncertainty would have negatively impacted voting among those living in the flat areas in three metropolitan suburbs. The polling station study shows that voter turnout rates in these areas were extremely low at 40-50%. In these areas, voter turnout fell anew in 2022.

Two-second hypotheses, *H2-1: Electoral turnout increases in crisis because of an expanded feeling of civic duty among those who have higher education and H2-2: Individualised lifestyle among the less affluent and minority groups will lead to lower voter turnout in crisis because of economic and social hardships*, H2-2 seems arguably stronger. Our data lean clearly toward the economic hardship assumption regarding the relationship with voter turnout in crisis. Both experts and statistics supported H2-2 (Nordin, 2022; Ekonomifakta, 2022).

Regarding the third hypothesis, *H3: Those with low sociodemographic status tend to abstain at higher rates than middle-class voters*, which also seems true, largely supported by our data on the relationship between income, age and voter turnout. Among the group of the lowest income, the voter turnout rate was lowest at the 70-per cent level. An opposed tendency was observed among those who earn the highest income at 90 per cent. Even in the Western standard, the voter turnout level of 90 per cent is extremely unusual. It is also said that housing type matters regarding voter turnout. People usually live in suburb areas where multi-storey tenement flats are the general residence type and have lower voter turnout.

Two fourth hypotheses, *H4-1: Those who migrate and acquire citizenship are less likely to participate in elections because of their lack of socialisation and political knowledge, i.e. low level of political efficacy and H4-2. Those who migrate from a non-democratic and democratic state are less likely to vote because of low political knowledge and self-confidence in democratic institutions, which can be argued to be true.* The length of acquired citizenship has a close relationship with voter turnout rate. The longer the acquisition time of citizenship you hold, the higher voter turnout is expected. At the same time, the large group of new Swedes originated from non- or less-democratic states, including Syria, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The sudden decline in voter turnout in the 2022 Swedish parliamentary elections could have several implications for the electoral process and the functioning of democracy in Sweden more generally. For one, the decline in voter turnout may raise concerns about the electoral process's legitimacy and the elected government's representative nature. Relatedly, it could also indicate that certain groups of citizens are disengaged from the political process or feel that their voices are not being heard. The implication is that it may lead to a less inclusive and less representative government, which could have negative consequences for the proper functioning of Swedish democracy and the well-being of its citizens.

With the current global crisis of democracy, we argue there is a need to address this issue accordingly. In particular, one way of this is to consider a measure to increase voter turnout and improve the engagement of citizens in the process, such as encouraging political participation among underrepresented groups and addressing any perceived biases or barriers to participation in the electoral process. Overall, our exploratory findings provide useful insights into the factors that may affect voter turnout and inform efforts to increase participation in the election. It also is useful to consider other potential, alternative explanations or mediation variables that could impact voter turnout,

such as party system competition, bloc politics and alliance and inter-party competition.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that this study's result is mostly based on analysis of aggregate data at constituency and polling station levels, local and national levels, if needed. These aggregate data are regarded as appropriate data forms in voter turnout research. The ambition of this study was to address the sudden drop in voter turnout as a dependent variable. To extend our understanding of the motivations and reasons of voters with different economic and demographic backgrounds who failed to go to polls or decided not to go to polls, we need to collect survey data to break down into individual-level variables. This method would underpin the lack of findings based on aggregate data. In addition, the survey data would make it possible for us to address the effects of intervening variables. Undoubtedly, both aggregate and survey data would enhance explanatory power for explaining voter turnout and individual motivations for reluctance or failure to go to polls.

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<국문요약>

## 위기의 시대 속 투표율 하락? 2022년 스웨덴 총선 투표율 변화의 수수께끼

최연혁 · Elvis Bisong Tambe

2022년 스웨덴 총선은 우선 스웨덴 민주당(Sweden Democrat)의 약진으로 인해 국제 뉴스의 헤드라인을 장식했다. 이 극우 포퓰리즘 정당은 현재 스웨덴에서 두 번째로 큰 정당이다. 이번 선거는 또한 지난 2018년 총선에 비해 투표율이 3 퍼센트 하락한 사실로 인해 큰 주목을 받았다. 유권자 투표율은 원활하게 기능하는 민주주의의 강한 지표이며, 민주주의 시스템의 정당성을 위해서도 본질적으로 중요하다. 그러므로 규범적 관점에서 볼 때 작은 투표율 하락도 근심의 원인이 되어야 한다. 이 논문은 이런 맥락에서 이번 스웨덴 총선의 갑작스러운 투표율 하락을 설명하고자 한다. 묘사적(descriptive) 및 설명적 통계를 바탕으로 한 우리의 예비적 분석은 위기의 시대 속 불확실성과 후퇴하는 삶의 조건 때문에 투표율이 낮아졌음을 확인한다.

주제어: 스웨덴, 유권자 투표율, 2022 스웨덴 총선, 위기, 이민자

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