Building Electoral Legitimacy Through Poll Worker Recruitment

The guiding ideas of Swedish electoral management bodies

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Abstract

Recruitment is a determinant of well-run elections. Through interaction with voters, poll workers affect public confidence in electoral integrity and legitimacy. This thesis studies poll worker recruitment as electoral legitimation strategies. Interviews conducted with Swedish local election administrators are analysed using discourse analytic methods buttressed by institutional and electoral management theory. By asking what ideas underpin poll worker recruitment, three complementary foci are identified: seeing the voter, being seen by the voter and keeping from view, grounded in the values of efficiency, equality and neutrality respectively. The first focus conceptualizes poll workers as part of a machinery requiring a diverse set of competences to serve voters (pro)actively. The second focus is on poll workers as canvasses for voters' affective projections. This requires poll workers to reflect society in terms of different social groups. The third focus is on what should be outside voters' scope of attention, e.g. partisanship and friends and family. This thesis identifies several legitimation strategies and in so doing showcases the importance of recruiters and institutional expectations in the delivery of high-quality elections. It contributes to the emerging literature on Swedish electoral management, with implications for electoral policy and our understanding of recruitment as legitimacy-building.

Key words: descriptive representation, electoral integrity, institutional theory, public administration, voter confidence
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1 Introduction

This thesis addresses recruitment as a means of contributing to electoral integrity and legitimacy. Focus is on what might at first sight seem a negligible aspect of the complex machinery that is public elections: the ideas underpinning poll worker recruitment. However, as street-level bureaucrats with significant discretion in implementing electoral legislation (Hall et al., 2009), poll workers lend a human face to the electoral machinery. Through interaction with voters, poll workers contribute to shaping public perceptions of electoral integrity and legitimacy by assuring voters that their votes and all other aspects of the electoral process are handled correctly. Electoral management literature therefore identifies recruitment as one of the organizational determinants of well-run elections (e.g. James et al., 2019).

The last two decades have seen an increased academic interest in poll workers' impact on voters' perceptions of electoral integrity. To recruiters, the literature offers a kaleidoscopic range of recruitment-related considerations expected to increase voters' confidence in the electoral process and thus confer legitimacy on the electoral system. This includes amongst other things an emphasis on poll worker training (Hall et al., 2009; James et al., 2023), recruitment of poll workers with experience (Burden et al., 2017), certain key abilities (Atkeson & Saunders, 2007), or civic attitudes (Atkeson et al., 2014), but also the involvement of poll workers as representatives of social groups (King & Barnes, 2019; Partheymüeller, 2022), local communities (Suttmann-Lea, 2020) or political parties (Goerres & Funk, 2019). When these considerations guide recruitment, they can be understood as legitimation strategies, deployed to confer legitimacy on the electoral process.

In practice, legitimation strategies are configured in myriad constellations, some of which may prove successful while others result in tension or incongruous rationalities. No single poll worker ticks all boxes, but different considerations might also be hard to reconcile on an aggregate level due to demographics, local norms, budgetary vicissitudes or the recruiter's personal preferences. Nevertheless, recruiters must decide on how to recruit.

This thesis studies poll worker recruitment as legitimation processes (Bexell et al., 2021). Legitimacy is understood here as a quality of the electoral system based on voters' beliefs in its proper running. Legitimation strategies are those attempts by actors to positively impact legitimacy beliefs through practices (recruitment) drawing on different forms of justifications (e.g. the need for descriptive representation or training) aimed at an audience (the voters). To study an example of these dynamics, this thesis asks the question: What ideas underpin Swedish local electoral management bodies' (EMB) recruitment of poll workers? In doing so, it identifies what types of poll workers Swedish recruiters prefer, but also how

they manage potential tensions between different legitimation strategies. Sweden provides an exciting case study for investigating electoral legitimation processes as it has a decentralized system of electoral management (and thus potentially a diverse set of legitimation strategies) but also a central election agency which in recent years has begun to steer electoral practices in an isomorphic direction.

In answering the research question, this thesis contributes to the emerging literature on Swedish electoral management. As the role of Swedish poll workers is currently undergoing a transformation, this research has implications for electoral policy. More broadly, the study contributes to our understanding of how recruitment can be used as a tool to build electoral legitimacy.

Research giving advice on poll worker recruitment typically draws on quantitative analyses on survey data. These studies have been instrumental in explaining the effect that certain poll worker qualities have on voter confidence. However, it is likely, as Burden & Milyo (2015) argue, that we would learn more about what makes a good poll worker, and that research would make more sense to practitioners, by going beyond "easy to measure 'outputs'" (p. 45f). Previous studies making use of qualitative interviews with poll workers (e.g. Suttmann-Lea, 2020), local election officials (James, 2017) and (non-)voters (Coleman, 2013) have shown how useful qualitative interviews can be in capturing the complexities of electoral management.

To capture this complexity, this thesis conducts semi-structured interviews with Swedish local election administrators during the recruitment process preceding the 2024 European Parliament election. As this practice takes place in institutional settings, and as the ideas underpinning it are mediated discursively, this paper finds it fruitful to analyse the interview data using methods of discourse analysis buttressed by institutional theory and electoral management theory. It identifies several legitimation strategies and suggests that these can be subsumed under three complementary foci of attention: seeing the voter, being seen by the voter, and keeping from view, grounded in the values of efficiency, equality and neutrality respectively.

The next section offers background information about the roles of poll workers and their importance for electoral legitimacy, focusing especially on the Swedish context. Discussion then moves on to review literature on poll workers and legitimation strategies. Section 3 presents the analytical framework. The subsequent sections present methodological considerations, the analysis and conclusions in turn.

2 Poll Workers and Electoral Administration

This section defines the duties of (Swedish) poll workers, briefly outlines the organization of Swedish EMBs and explains how poll workers might impact voters' perceptions of elections (2.1). It also reviews literature on recruitment as legitimation strategies (2.2).

2.1 The Role of (Swedish) Poll Workers

Poll worker recruitment is part of a wider set of organizational features (including for example organizational capacity, use of technology and reliance on other organizations) assumed to affect EMB performance and voters' perceptions of it (James et al., 2019). Recruitment matters because, as argued by Claassen et al. (2008), "[w]hen voters feel good about their interactions with poll workers, they feel better about their voting experience and more confident about the electoral system" (p. 612). Voting, they argue, "is in many ways comparable to service encounters more generally" (p. 628).

Qualifying this claim, Hall et al. (2009) argue that poll workers are *street-level bureaucrats*. Coined by Lipsky (2010), the term refers to those members of a bureaucracy with whom citizens have direct interactions, and who are thus on the receiving end of public sentiment. These bureaucrats have significant discretion in implementing legislation, and their comportment contributes to shaping public confidence. Hall et al. (2009) argue that, despite the irregularity of the job, poll workers match this description. Through their management of polling stations and interaction with voters, poll workers are responsible for the quality of elections and thus contribute to voters' confidence in the integrity of the electoral process. Poorly run polling stations risk undermining this confidence but may also have wider ramifications. As Atkeson et al. (2015) argue, "[i]f voters do not have faith in this most basic component of a democratic society – the election process and the counting of votes – then the legitimacy of representative government might be at risk" (p. 208). Put metaphorically, "[s]tates die when their internal machinery ceases to function. It is this machinery that is designed to keep people believing in the state" (Runciman, 2023, p. 34).

Swedish electoral management is "[g]overnmental in form, local in practice" (Brogren, n.d.). Nationally, the Election Authority (*Valmyndigheten*) is responsible for the overall planning and coordination of elections, overseeing lower-level bodies, issuing recommendations and developing training material.

Regionally, the county administrative boards (*länsstyrelse*) support municipal administrations and perform the final count. Locally, there are 290 municipalities, each one with a political electoral committee (*valnämnd*) and a non-political administration. Their responsibilities include all practical matters pertaining to the electoral cycle, including recruitment and training.

Swedish poll workers are either involved with early voting or Election Day voting (they require different training). The Election Law (SFS 2005:837, 3 kap. 4/6 §) stipulates that each polling station be staffed by at least four poll workers (three of those must be present as long as votes are being received and handled), but in practice the workforce is bigger. Every ward has its own chairperson and vice chairperson who are responsible for the running of the polling station. Poll workers perform practical and interactional tasks such as helping disabled and elderly voters, determining voter eligibility and handling lines.

The Swedish electoral process has been described as a minutely regulated set of administrative procedures (SOU 2013:24, p. 121), yet important aspects of it remain unregulated to grant local EMBs wiggle room to adapt election implementation to local conditions. Poll worker recruitment is part of this municipal wiggle room competence. Municipal electoral committees are free to appoint and train poll workers as they deem appropriate, and thus decide themselves what qualities and professional experiences are required.

Despite poll workers being at the heart of the democratic system, the Swedish Election Authority has until recently had a *laissez-aller* approach to poll worker recruitment, officially stating that anyone can be a poll worker (Valmyndigheten, 2018, p. 51). The Swedish electoral system and the Election Authority enjoy a great deal of trust among Swedes. A survey conducted in connection to the 2022 general elections shows that, when asked about their trust in the Election Authority, 88 % of voters ranked themselves as trustful or strongly trustful (see Cederholm Lager et al., 2023 for a longitudinal overview of support for the Swedish electoral system and related institutions). However, the 2018 and 2022 general elections generated many public complaints to the Election Review Board (*Valprövningsnämnden*) of mismanagement and even electoral fraud, bringing poll worker recruitment to the fore. While most of these complaints of mismanagement were minor administrative inaccuracies (Högström & Jerhov, 2023a), a majority pertained to problems at the polling stations, for which poll workers are responsible. In 2022, the Election Authority partly abandoned its permissive approach by urging municipalities to institute recruitment principles (Valmyndigheten, 2022a, p. 77f), giving examples of principles that draw on ideas of professional abilities, descriptive representation and non-partisanship, reflecting the broad lines found in the literature on poll worker recruitment, which is the focus of the next section.

2.2   Legitimation Strategies

This section reviews electoral management literature concerned with poll worker recruitment and electoral integrity and legitimacy. It is structured around three salient themes with multifaceted semantic ambits: representation (2.2.1), professionalism (2.2.2) and (non-)partisanship (2.2.3).

2.2.1   Representation

Representation refers to the conviction that the legitimacy of the electoral system requires work forces to be representative of society in terms of ethnicity, sex, gender, age and other social categories. This form of descriptive representation "contributes to minority citizens believing that they belong, are welcome, and their interests supported" (King, 2020, p. 169). Applied to electoral management, it is a "symbolic mechanism" intended to contribute to minority voter confidence in the correct handling of votes (King, 2020, p. 181).

Representation as legitimation strategies entails a conceptualization of poll workers as surfaces for voters' affective projections. Studies on poll workers and representation typically focus on the American context, hence perhaps the great focus on race as a determinant of poll worker appraisal. For example, King & Barnes (2019) find that black and Hispanic voters feel more confident that their votes have been correctly counted after having interacted with black and Hispanic poll workers respectively. Age also seems to impact voters' impression of the running of polling stations, as Hall (2009, April) finds that American voters tend to rate the youngest poll workers the highest and the oldest the lowest. In an Austrian context, Partheymüeller et al. (2022) find that younger voters have less confidence in election administration than older age groups, and they therefore propose targeted recruitment schemes to involve more young people as volunteers.

Another aspect that can be inscribed in the representative model is that of electoral work forces as micro-community representatives. Drawing on American nationwide survey data, Hall (2009, April) and Hall & Stewart (2013, April 11-14) find that, although only a minority of the respondents stated that the poll workers with whom they interacted at the polling stations were acquaintances, knowing those persons affected those voters' evaluations of poll worker performance positively. Suttmann-Lea's (2020) study of poll worker satisfaction in Illinois finds that poll workers are motivated by a desire to integrate more with their local community. By working in their own constituencies during multiple elections, Suttmann-Lea finds that poll workers interact and establish rapports with people who are also their neighbours but with whom they have had little or no previous interaction.

To recruit a representative work force, countries like Mexico, Spain, and Germany have a system, akin to jury duty in Anglophone countries, where citizens are randomly selected and asked to volunteer (Cantú & Ley, 2017; Clark

& James, 2021). In Sweden, a preponderance of women and pensioners among the poll workers entails that workforces are far from representative of the country as a whole (Högström & Jerhov, 2023b).

2.2.2 Professionalism

With professionalism, focus is on poll workers as active agents. It comprises aspects such as electoral training, education, work experience, poll worker experience, abilities and attitudes. The most foregrounded aspect, which election management scholars widely agree is key to voter confidence, is training. Having showed the significant impact poll workers have on voters' perceptions of the quality of elections, Hall et al. (2009) highlight the importance of poll worker training and concludes that "[v]oter confidence in the electoral process depends on it" (p. 520). The extent to which staff training is institutionalized, i.e. embedded in electoral practices, tends to be higher in liberal democracies than in autocracies, although the amount of training offered varies considerably also between politically and socioeconomically similar countries. In Sweden, poll worker training was only made mandatory in 2021, and Swedish electoral administration is still characterized by a low extent of election staff training institutionalization (James et al., 2023, p. 430).

Related to the question of training is that of experience. Practice makes perfect, Burden et al. (2017) argue as they find that in an American context, incident rates go down when polling stations are staffed with older and more experienced poll workers.

Professional experience is also sought after by election administrations across the world. In India, poll workers are state employees designated to work with elections (James, 2020, pp. 127-131). In the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, election administrators may request personnel information from state bodies to facilitate recruitment (Goerres & Funk, 2019, p. 65). Older surveys of recruitment in Swedish municipalities (e.g. SOU 2013:24, p. 119) show that they recruit internally (people with administrative experience, teachers, janitors), as well as externally. When recruiting externally, municipalities look for people who have administrative experience, speak different languages, have good job references or who are interested in elections.

Because poll workers constitute an intermittent work force, Atkeson et al. (2014) argue that steps usually taken when hiring civil servants, such as inculcation of shared norms, training, and formal education, are not applicable to poll workers. Instead, election administrations should recruit people who exhibit suitable, public-spirited attitudes. Burden & Milyo (2015) note that recruiters look for qualities that could be summarized as conscientiousness (e.g. ability to follow guidelines or opening and closing the polling station on time) while Atkeson & Saunders (2007) foreground the importance of helpfulness and competence.

Scholars have also noted the tension between professional and local norms. Brown & Hale (2020) argue that when local government organizations adopt new professional standards, it is at the expense of locally rooted norms and practices

(which is, they add, a two-edged sword). While professionalism may instil a sense of duty, its concomitant adherence to rules may also make the administration rigid and unresponsive to local needs.

2.2.3 (Non-)Partisanship

The underlying presumption of the partisanship strategy is that politicians, *qua* democratically elected representatives, legitimize the electoral system by taking active part in election implementation. It is an institutionalization of distrust which, if correctly configured, functions as a form of checks and balances (as encapsulated in Italo Calvino's short story *The Watcher*). In contrast, legitimation claims premised on neutrality imply that partisanship should not even be within voters' scope of attention. While an independent administration might be considered the norm (James et al., 2019), the partisanship model is still widely used, either because legislation demands it or because political parties are a reliable source of personnel (Burden & Milyo, 2015; Goerres & Funk, 2019).

While Atkeson & Saunders (2007) attribute the same deontological status to non-partisanship as to competence and helpfulness, Partheymüeller et al. (2022) note that the evidence that party involvement increases or decreases public trust in election administrations is mixed. In the US, election officials are often directly elected. Despite this overt partisanship, Ferrer et al. (2024) do not find evidence that party loyalty affects the outcome of close elections, although they warn that there are no guarantees that future generations of election officials are immune to the affective polarization characterizing contemporary American politics.

Since 2022, the Swedish Election Authority strongly advises against involving active politicians in the administration (Valmyndigheten, 2022b), however, no legal obstacles exist. Surveys made prior to the 2022 general elections (e.g. SOU 2013:24, p. 119) indicate that some municipalities involve politicians to ease the workload of election administrators. This practice was still in place in some smaller municipalities also during the 2022 general elections and 2024 European Parliament election.

3   A Model of Institutional Discourse

Poll worker recruitment is an institutional practice. While it is a cardinal insight of neo-institutional theory that "organizations are fundamentally concerned to secure legitimacy from relevant actors" (Boswell, 2009, p. 11), Schmidt (e.g. 2010) accentuates the role played by ideas in these legitimation processes. Values, norms, rules and practices permeate institutions and are key to upholding their legitimacy. As Schmidt argues, these ideas are exchanged discursively, and as discourses are both content and process, they can be studied to ascertain how institutions build legitimacy.

Studying the ideas underpinning poll worker recruitment requires sensitivity to its discursive and institutional aspects, and it is therefore heuristically fruitful to conceptualize institutional discourse as having three analytic dimensions: the text-specific content of specific texts, an aggregate level where broader themes emerge, and an institutional frame relating ideas to institutional expectations. A recursive movement between these dimensions affords the identification of specific utterances that can be used to exemplify prevalent ways of thinking about poll worker recruitment, which can then be interpreted with an institutional frame drawing on theoretical insights from the reviewed literature.

Linguistically, constructions of groups typically entail attribution of different names, qualities and actions to actors, typically (but not always explicitly) embedded in wider, argumentative and justificatory structures (KhosraviNik, 2010). At the *aggregate level*, broader themes emerge. These are recurring constellations of analytical categories centred around or pertaining to legitimation strategies which tell a story about the phenomenon (how recruiters recruit), and thus contribute to its theorization.

In addition to aforementioned substantive content, discourses are indexical of processes, tracking the origin and subsequent development of institutional ideas and providing information about institutional expectations and actors' attitudes towards them. The presumption of themes is premised on what Schmidt (2010) calls *coordinative discourses*; attempts by actors in the same sphere to reach unanimity on policy issues. Some ideas are of course more stable (for example because of their programmatic function) while others are more open to renegotiation. Swedish EMBs are part of a common legal environment, but coordinative discourses may emerge as the result of attempts to enhance an organization's legitimacy which simultaneously increases its resemblance to other organizations in the same field. This homogenization process, known as institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), entails either a purposeful mimicking of organizations perceived as exemplars of best practice or an imposition of regulations by another organization. Linguistically, this might entail instances of recontextualization, i.e. verbatim or reformulated reuse of language

from a source text to a target text, giving the transposed language a new context and meaning (Connolly, 2014).

When the interviewees discuss the ideas guiding their recruitment, they relate to the institutional *milieu* in which they operate, articulating the "awareness among participants … that they are involved in a common enterprise" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148). In this thesis, participants' institutional awareness, i.e. the extent to which they refer to and embed institutional expectations in their discourse, are conceptualized as a *scalar institutional frame* encompassing formal and informal institutions.

Expectations emanating from formal bodies such as local, regional and national EMBs and other contributing institutions are typically codified and officially adopted by their respective organizations. When recruiters justify decisions, they may therefore be able to refer to a concrete organization or a concrete document (absence of guidelines may also be invoked).

However, not all institutional expectations are codified. Coleman (2013) notes that elections themselves may be construed as "institutionalised acts" (p. 5), which is a looser, folk-psychological understanding of institution as a set of well-established practices exerting power over voters and electoral administrations. For example, elections may invite voters to dress up or it might put pressure on recruiters to allow certain individuals to work together at a particular polling station for fear of upsetting what has become, for the poll workers, a cherished ritual.

The analysis seamlessly integrates these three dimensions, using text-specific content to exemplify recurring themes whilst also explaining how they relate to institutional expectations. Having reviewed the theories used to frame the analysis, attention now turns to methodological and ethical considerations.

4 Methods and Material

This section details the method of data access (4.1) and data analysis (4.2).

4.1 Interviews

Data were accessed through interviews; an established practice of seeking verbalized explanations in institutional settings (Zurnić, 2014). The semi-structured nature of the interviews afforded interviewees time to elaborate on the complexities of electoral management, letting the researcher tap into their unique knowledge and the meaning they attach to different ideas. The "semi" in "semi-structured" implies that there is room for further exploration based on interviewees' responses, while the "structured" element entails that interviews may be compared to discern recurring patterns.

Interviews were conducted with electoral administrators in thirteen Swedish municipalities (amounting to 4,48 % of Swedish local EMBs), totalling fifteen participants (including two "double" interviews). The single most important selection criterion was the number of wards as this directly affects the number of poll workers needed, which might have a bearing on how EMBs think about and plan their recruitment. The decision was made to select municipalities on different points on the spectrum, ranging from those with less than ten wards to those with several hundreds. Municipalities with less than five wards were not considered as there were indications that many of these primarily make use of existing personnel (or elected representatives) rather than recruiting externally.

Concordant with Swedish legislation, interviewees were informed about the purpose of the interview, how the audio-recorded material would be used and stored, that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to cancel their participation at any time before being asked to sign a consent form. The interviewees were informed that they were expected to answer questions in their roles as poll worker recruiters, and that this was the ground for their inclusion in the study.

The interviews were conducted face to face at the interviewees' workplaces between January and March 2024, on average for 52 minutes (excluding pre- and post-recording chats). The interviews coincided with the recruitment process for the 2024 European Parliament election, so the interviewees were in an excellent position to reflect on their work. Twice (first upon booking and again during the pre-recording chat), the interviewees were informed that the researcher has a background in electoral administration, a form of self-presentation that positioned the interviewer and interviewees within a shared professional frame and thus

contributed to a flow unimpeded by explanations of jargon or technical aspects of electoral administration. It also decreased interviewees' reliance on official scripts and other meaning-construction techniques that risk undermining the reliability of the interviews, increasing instead interviewees' willingness to talk about the difficulties and challenges their municipalities face. The interviews therefore allowed the researcher, as Coleman (2013) puts it, "to hear what the interviewee had not come to say" (p. 101) but also (hopefully) gave the interviews an air of a "collaborative process … through which all participants can learn" (Morris, 2009, p. 215).

Further steps suggested to enhance the quality of interview data (Roulston, 2010) were also taken. These included the use of an interview guide (see Appendix I) and a pilot to improve the structure and phrasing of the questions. The questions are sorted under three thematic rubrics: background questions, questions about poll worker features and questions about the practicalities of recruitment. The interviewer kept steering to a minimum to allow interviewees to talk freely but made sure that all questions were covered.

4.2 Coding

The annotation of the interviews follows suggestions offered for thematic abductive analysis (Thompson, 2022) consisting of a series of reiterative coding rounds. Theory, in this understanding, has a guiding function and leaves room for explorative, qualitative analysis. The sound files were manually transcribed to enhance familiarity with the material. Text-specific language used to construct poll workers and to warrant their recruitment was identified and assigned concise, descriptive category names and subsequently organized thematically and hierarchically by recursively comparing instances of annotated language. Instances were also coded in which interviewees related to institutions and/or institutional expectations. This was followed by construction of themes; constellations of categories focused on or related to recruitment as legitimation strategies, and which tell a wider story of how recruiters recruit. As James (2017) reflects on in an analysis of interviews with local election officials, themes are identified "on the basis of the literal wording of the transcripts" as well as through "read[ing] across the dataset to identify underlying phenomena that are not always explicitly stated by the respondents" (p. 137). Examples of themes include recruitment of administrators to increase efficiency or recruitment of ethnic minority groups to increase trust in the handling of votes. These themes are presented in the next section as part of three complementary foci (or macro themes), illustrating their interrelatedness and different intended functions.

Excerpts from the interviews chosen for publication were translated from Swedish to English by a native-English speaker with full professional proficiency who is not formally associated with the project. Although the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the translator was instructed not to translate idiosyncratic features like grammatical errors or truncated words but rather to aim for idiomatic

English (the Swedish excerpts are attached in Appendix III). To preserve the interviewees' anonymity, codes have been substituted for names throughout the analysis (see Appendix II for details about the interviewees).

5 Legitimation Strategies and Foci of Attention

Overall, the interviews provided many valuable insights into how electoral administrators think not just about recruitment but about a great variety of electoral questions. This section discusses the most salient themes identified under the rubrics of three qualitatively different but complementary foci of attention: seeing the voter, being seen by the voter and keeping from view. These foci are premised on a metaphor of sight: BEING A VOTER IS BEING SEEN. As Coleman (2013) notes, voting is often talked about in metaphorical terms (e.g. VOTING IS USING ONE'S VOICE or VOTING IS BEING COUNTED). But voting is, as Coleman argues, despite its formalities, all about being noticed; a desire emanating from the "tacit anxiety underlying democracy" that one's vote may be "lost, ignored or untallied" (p. 87).

The polling station is the site where voters and poll workers interact and so to speak see each other. That space, and what goes on inside it, contributes to the legitimacy of the democratic system of which the site itself is a manifestation. Several legitimation strategies coexist, but their identification depends on the focus of one's gaze. In this presentation, themes are subsumed under three foci that together capture the dynamics of voter-poll worker interaction found in the interviews. Seeing the voter, being seen by the voter and keeping from view are foci that draw attention to recruiters' simultaneous construal of poll workers as active agents and as canvasses for voters' affective projections and to what should not be within voters' scope of attention.

5.1 Seeing the Voter

Variations on the phrase "seeing the voter" features in many of the interviews, used metaphorically or metonymically. Seeing the voter entails that, if conceived of as an action-chain schema, focus is on the poll workers and their agency; poll workers are actively seeing voters. Within this conceptualization, poll workers are akin to a machinery and the voters the matter being democratically processed. The underlying principle of this perspective is efficiency presupposing complementariness and cooperation.

Seeing the voter is the first link in a metonymic chain with several pragmatic meanings. One additional meaning captures the social and phatic dimension of the job: poll workers must be able to make voters feel welcome upon arrival. Making voters feel welcome is a balancing act between sociability and efficiency that

must always tilt in favour of efficiency, as a later discussion will show. All of the interviewees stress the importance of voter-poll worker interaction. In one municipality, the two recruiters suggest that in recent years, administrations have begun to pay more attention to voters' perceptions of interaction with poll workers due to expectations from the Election Authority. On the one hand, they reason, the Election Authority expects them to "create an experience for the voter" whilst on the other hand ensuring that "the voter can recognize things from previous elections" (Rec12.1). Seeing voters also has a more symbolic meaning with connotations of recognition. As one interviewee explains: "it's important that you feel seen and respected and greeted in the right way" (Rec8).

Seeing the voter frequently means 'helping the voter' by being on the lookout for voters who might halt the machinery. This proactive help includes asking voters upon entering if they need help (Rec3), identifying "people who are walking round and look as if they have questions" (Rec9) but also being able to "help a voter who's a bit confused or dejected" (Rec4), as three different recruiters explain. A recruiter working in one of the bigger municipalities expands on this proactive help (Rec13):

> I think the most important thing is to see the voter. Because we have a system where you don't vote very often in Sweden. It can basically be every four or five years that you vote and just the whole procedure can be challenging for a voter. That you actually see this person … that you actually feel welcome when you come as a voter… Many people feel vulnerable when they come to vote.

Rec13 thinks that being a voter is being in a vulnerable position, and the theme of safety recurs throughout the interviews. When asked with what feeling the recruiters want voters to leave the polling station, the answer is unequivocal: the voters should feel safe, and they should feel that their votes are being handled correctly (only a minority also add that they want voters to feel that they have done their democratic duty or that they want voters to be in a celebratory mood). In informal chats, a couple of worried recruiters suggest that voters need increasingly more help to cast their votes.

To help voters, and to keep the democratic processing of voters running, a set of diverse poll workers is needed in every polling station. In its advice to municipalities, the Election Authority suggests that poll workers should "mirror the local population in terms of age, sex and ethnic origin" (Valmyndigheten, 2022a, p. 78, author's translation). However, when this piece of advice is recontextualized in municipal recruitment, it frequently takes on an additional meaning that coexists with the understanding of diversity as representation of social groups. This additional understanding of diversity is not anchored in the value of equality but in the value of efficiency. Rec9 gives their understanding of diversity when expanding on the necessary characteristics of a poll worker:

I think it's very important, there shouldn't be more to the electoral committee's work than conducting elections democratically, but I think, if you're going to think big, we should be able to have a democracy with transparency, it's really important that we don't make things so difficult so that the average man in the street cannot understand what to do. … Some people are very meticulous, some are really good at handling conflicts. We put people together later [in wards]. … If they're all cast in the exact same mould there will be conflicts straight away. Everyone wants to do the same thing, everyone wants to decide, everyone wants to be the driving force. The important thing is that you have diversity.

Rec9 describes a form of diversity anchored in efficiency that presupposes cooperation between poll workers with distinct qualities, with a concomitant instrumentalization of representation. The recruiter falls back on the adage that everyone is good at something, the recruiter just needs to know what that thing is and then place the candidates accordingly. This approach entails a great deal of micromanagement, and several interviewees report spending considerable time on getting the mix right. "I'm always looking for the ultimate line-up of competence, skills so that it's good", one recruiter explains (Rec3).

To perfect this mix, all of the interviewees report that they begin by contacting those who worked in the last election; experience of elections is without comparison the most sought-after qualification and the safest strategy to minimize inaccuracies. In new recruits, the interviewees look for two sets of attitudes, abilities and experiences that they identify as essential. The first is process-oriented in that it is concerned with qualities linked to specific stages or tasks of the process. From this perspective, poll workers must be effective, loyal, conscientious (*noggrann*, a word used by ten of the interviewees) and have a proper understanding of the importance of their job. Consequently, many recruiters prefer candidates with administrative experience. While all the interviewees recruit within their own organizations, only two state that they would prefer all recruitments to be made in-house. In-house recruitment is popular because, as one interviewee put it "they're exercising authority" (Rec12.1), which requires knowledge about formal rules and practices, but also, as Rec10 who prefers in-house recruits points out, because it makes it easier to run background checks. The second set of qualities is voter-oriented as it is concerned with abilities linked to interactions with voters, abilities that can be summed up as service-mindedness and social competence. Professions mentioned by the interviewees that fall into the former category include civic servants and bankers, and examples of professions falling into the latter category include people in healthcare and nursing, or teachers.

These process-oriented and voter-oriented qualities are two of the variables considered when recruiters configure their "ultimate mix" of poll workers. Rec9, who was quoted earlier stressing the need for complementary qualities, suggests that achieving the "ultimate mix" requires the coupling of "that guy who works in banking", and who is therefore meticulous and good with numbers, with someone in the health profession who is therefore "really great at handling people". While

individual recruiters may rank one higher than the other, they all place great importance on having a combination of the two. It is a form of strategic thinking echoing and blending previously discussed characterizations of poll workers as service providers (Claasen et al., 2008) and bureaucrats (Hall et al., 2009).

Chairpersons are instrumental in keeping the machinery running, and they are treasured by the recruiters. They contribute to the perfecting of "the ultimate mix" by (informally) performing evaluations of their co-workers which recruiters then rely on for future recruitments. Chairpersons may also be recruiters in their own rights. Especially in smaller municipalities, the EMBs are dependent on chairpersons for finding (and sometimes training) new recruits. In some cases, these delegated responsibilities have not been formally approved by the local electoral committees. One recruiter said that "we don't review the chairperson's recruitment at all" (Rec4).

Although diversity has come to be recontextualized as diversity of competence, inclusion of social groups based on attributes such as age, sex and ethnicity also enable poll workers to see voters, but it entails an instrumentalization of representation. All interviewees have an instrumentalist understanding of representation that coexists with an understanding of representation as an intrinsic value (discussed in the next section). Regarding gender, two interviewees mention that women must always be present in all wards should a voter wearing religious head coverings such as a niqab show up. One interviewee's justification of age diversity, which the recruiter believes contributes to a good work environment, resembles a balancing of humours: "Some older people are calm and quiet in certain situations, but you can also get a little tired when you get older, and there you can have young people who might have extra energy and a little more stamina" (Rec6). Municipalities cannot legally store information about candidates' ethnicity, yet many recruiters claim to consider ethnicity when placing poll workers in wards. "We don't ask about ethnic origin and things like that, we ask for language skills" (Rec7), one recruiter says. In fact, most interviewees seem to equate ethnicity with the ability to speak another language than Swedish. A local connection also has an instrumental value. For those recruiters who insist that poll workers must live close to the polling stations where they work, a local connection is not primarily a means of achieving local representation. Rather, hiring locals is reported as a strategy to ensure the efficient running of polling stations by obviating the need to check voter ID or by ensuring that poll workers show up on time.

5.2   Being Seen by the Voter

Being seen by the voter necessitates a reversal of the aforementioned action-chain. In being seen by voters, focus is on poll workers as surfaces on which voters may project their own ideas. Poll workers are thus also judged based on what is beyond their control. If seeing the voter is grounded in the value of efficiency, being seen by the voter is grounded in the value of equality. In the previous section,

representation was analysed as a legitimation strategy with instrumentalist flavours, but the interviewees also see an intrinsic value to representation, more akin to how the concept is used in the literature. Rec4, who works in a small municipality, exemplifies this understanding of representation as an intrinsic value:

> This is also the kind of thing we get from the Election Authority as well of course, but it's clear that it's about the legitimacy of the work, not least that here in our country there are many different people with regards to background, ethnicity and so on. So it's also important that these people are included in the work involved in taking in and counting votes. It's about legitimacy, that's why it's important.

Rec4 paints a picture of a diverse society and sees it as self-evident that workforces should reflect this diversity, even explicitly connecting it to the question of legitimacy. In justifying this position, Rec4 also refers to expectations from the Election Authority. That poll workers ought to mirror society was one of the Electoral Authority's suggestions for municipal recruitment principles (Valmyndigheten, 2022a, p. 78), and variations on the phrase "mirror society" features in almost all interviews. Yet not all of the recruiters feel that the Election Authority has prioritized representation. Rec7, who works in a medium-large municipality where the local electoral committee expects recruiters to consider representation, elaborates on this view:

> But I don't think that the Election Authority has focused so much on recruitment either, because they don't see it as something that the voters think about. They focus on the things that the voters want to look and be the same everywhere. …
> But I don't think they think that recruitment has anything to do with it.

Rec7 might have had the Election Authority's new graphic profile in mind. This graphic profile was developed in 2022, and the Election Authority strongly encouraged local EMBs to use it to ensure that "the public gets as uniform an impression as possible" (Valmyndigheten, 2022a, p. 28, author's translation). However, Rec7 thinks that representation has somehow flown under the agency's radar. But why does representation matter to the interviewees? A previously quoted recruiter suggested that representation is directly linked to the question of legitimacy. Rec9, who works in a small municipality, elaborates on their understanding of the mechanisms of representation:

> I think that there somehow needs to be diversity when you meet people. …It's always better to meet somebody based on your expectations. Yes, but a young guy might be able to meet somebody on a certain wavelength, an older woman with this background might meet somebody else on another wavelength, and then you can help each other. …The voters also come with preconceived ideas about exactly everybody sitting in the room "it's only colourless old biddies sitting here".

All voters, Rec9 says, have preconceptions about those who work at the polling stations. One of those preconceptions, and one which Rec9 and many other recruiters are eager to contest, is that polling stations are staffed exclusively by elderly women (or "old hags" as Rec5 puts it). While experienced poll workers are treasured by the recruiters, they are to some extent seen as an image problem, similar to how they are often perceived in American elections (see Hall & Stewart, 2013, April 11-14). But why would it be a problem if a polling station is staffed by older women? A clue is given in this recruiter's descriptions of social groups. Rec9 assumes that young men, *qua* young and male, have a special connection with other young men, and the same reasoning applies to older women. This line of reasoning is discernible in other interviews and applied to different social groups. For example, Rec6 says that they have focused on ensuring that the chairpersons and vice chairpersons consist of an equal number of men and women to signal that the job is for everyone. Rec11 thinks that representation is key to increasing voter confidence among immigrant voters and suggests that:

> …if you only see Swedes and you were born abroad, you might think "is my vote treated equally and can I trust these people?" and then we think that if we mirror those who come and vote, that they recognize a person who has the same background or something like that, then it can increase their trust in the whole system.

The recruiter fears that immigrant groups might suspect that their votes are not handled correctly if they are unable to identify with the poll workers. To pre-empt such negative sentiment, the recruiter uses representation as a legitimation strategy. Representation thus articulated resembles how the strategy typically is used in American studies on voter confidence (e.g. King & Barnes, 2019).

Despite the importance recruiters attribute to representation, no recruiter targets underrepresented groups. In fact, recruiters do not seem to pay as much attention to candidates' age, sex, ethnicity or other social attributes during the recruitment stage as they do when they place them in wards. Rec13 wants poll workers to mirror society "as much as possible" but concedes that "we don't recruit actively based on that, but we work with the people we get in. But the goal is to do it". Similarly, Rec5 does not want wards to be staffed exclusively by "fifty-year-old female administrators" but adds that "if I had only had them, it would have been like that". The placement of poll workers in different wards becomes somewhat of a puzzle for some recruiters, especially when it comes to ensure linguistic competence in areas with minority populations. Poll workers with linguistic competence are thus reserved for areas with large immigrant communities. Rec4, who was quoted earlier linking representation to the legitimacy of the electoral system, draws attention to the discrepancy between aims and action:

> We don't have a system where we think that we have to have a representation like "now here in our municipality there is a certain ethnic group that is 5% and so some of the poll workers need to come from the same group". But that's not how we work, and you can think about if it would be a good system. We are not there yet, and there is nothing like that coming from the state or from the Election Authority. … I think we maybe need to talk about it in any case partly from the question of legitimacy that deals with diversity…

Rec4, like so many of the recruiters working in small municipalities, finds it hard to recruit people from minority groups (in contrast, recruiters in the biggest municipalities claim to have, and in some cases also pride themselves on having, workforces that mirror society). The above excerpt draws attention to the importance of institutional expectations. The interviewee does not believe that the Election Authority regards representation as an indispensable prerequisite, but rather something that all involved parties need to discuss. On a related note, the question of national guidelines divides the recruiters; roughly half of the interviewees would like the Election Authority to move in a more isomorphic direction while the other half thinks it would be difficult to adhere to them given the variegated local conditions.

The interviews also show that to some extent, recruiters have beliefs about legitimacy that they cannot act on. "We have poll workers with different nationalities", Rec12.1 says. "We probably don't match the population, though. But we haven't had any targeted recruitment". The colleague 12.2 immediately inserts: "We would have liked to be a little more representative". In 5.1, Rec9 was quoted as saying that an electoral committee's work is limited to conducting elections. Although exceptions exist, most Swedish electoral committees do not have a democratic mission beyond ensuring the safe reception and counting of votes; working to increase representativity or turnout is beyond their remit. This is an arbitrary distinction; electoral management can directly affect turnout through its choice of venues, opening hours and arguably through their recruitment of poll workers, which some recruiters readily concede. Rec9 hints at the tension arising from the confrontation between legitimacy beliefs and institutional reality. Optimally, the recruiter says, they would "find people who maybe aren't very interested and educate them about how an election is done". Rec9 believes that, as a result, "we will gain a lot", but concludes that it is up to the individual to sign up.

5.3   Keeping from View

As the heading suggests, this section focuses on what should not be seen by voters. Considerations pertaining to this focus are grounded in the value of neutrality and aim to prevent suspicion. The recruiters have inchoate understandings of exactly what should be kept from view. Important to note is that keeping certain aspects of poll workers from view are precautionary measures,

and with very few exceptions, those aspects identified by recruiters as undesirable have not caused any real harm to the safe delivery of elections.

Something that must not be seen at a polling station are political manifestations of any sort. All of the interviewees report no longer recruiting new politicians to work at polling stations. However, two recruiters (both small municipalities) concede that politicians may be used as a last resort, and in one medium-sized municipality, those politicians who have already been recruited are permitted to work in upcoming elections. While ridding workforces of politicians has been a long-term strategy for some recruiters, most municipalities have had this ban for less than ten years, and for a handful of municipalities, the 2024 European Parliament election is the first where politicians are not allowed to staff polling stations or otherwise handle votes (due to generally low turnout, Swedish EMBs regard European Parliament elections as an opportunity to rehearse for the Swedish general elections, giving them an opportunity to evaluate new practices). 2022, the year when the Election Authority first issued a recommendation against recruitment of politicians (Valmyndigheten, 2022b), marks a watershed moment for many recruiters, who now had a concrete document to refer to in order to justify a ban of political poll workers. However, the agency's choice of modal verb (*bör inte* 'ought not to') annoys many recruiters who would rather see an outright ban.

While the vagueness of the Election Authority's recommendation leaves local EMBs some latitude in retaining elected politicians in the workforce, it has mainly been used by local EMBs to head in a more restrictive direction. Two recruiters report that retired politicians will not be allowed to become poll workers if they are widely known by the public, and in one municipality, retired politicians must be in "quarantine" for four years (corresponding to a term of office) before being allowed to volunteer. One municipality does not admit lay judges (who are politically appointed). Most municipalities have also phased out politicians from election-related tasks outside the polling station, such as transporting votes or partaking in the local EMB's final tally. It is the fear of voters' negative reactions rather than actual incidents that motivate recruiters to take these steps. As Rec6 says, it is about the "worry that the voters have, that they might suspect that politicians have a special agenda of their own that might mean that perhaps their vote is not interpreted in the right way or counted in the right way. You have lost if there's such a lack of trust".

Several recruiters were also pondering whether members of electoral committees (who are politicians) should be allowed to campaign for their respective parties. Through formal and informal networks, recruiters have become aware that some municipalities have a more laxed attitude to the use of political poll workers, and this worries those interviewees who would rather see nationwide, uniform practices. It is worth noting that, while several recruiters believe that voters will react negatively, or even hesitate to vote if they encounter politicians at the polling stations, most of the interviewees state that their local EMBs encourage politicians to visit polling stations in order to cheer on the poll workers and/or to deliver coffee and snacks.

Avoiding close relationships between poll workers is also a widely adopted strategy, but its exact implementation varies. The logic is the same that underpins the ban on politicians: the mere thought of poll workers having an opportunity to manipulate the ballot is enough to undermine public trust in the electoral process. In some municipalities, couples are not allowed to work together, in others they are, provided they are not chairperson and vice chairperson. Overall, the interviewees do not want family members (or close friends) to work together, but a recurring theme in the interviews is how difficult and time-consuming it is to prevent it. For example, only one recruiter claims to actively check whether candidates have stated the same address, whilst a few encourage poll workers to disclose whether they have close connections to any of the people they have been grouped with.

In a similar vein, recruiters point out the difficulties of preventing close friends from working together. Only four recruiters say they do not want poll workers to be close friends. "My experience tells me that there are often more mistakes when you know people", Rec3 says. Friendly encounters must be avoided, the recruiter thinks, partly because it causes administrative inaccuracies, but also because it leads to "unnecessary chatting about other things than the election". That the phatic dimension of polling stations must be suppressed is a recurring theme, It is "not a place where you meet to talk", Rec6 says, "you go in and do what you have to do and then you leave". While it might be a suitable strategy to build community spirit (cf. Suttmann-Lea, 2020) it is not seen as a strategy to build electoral legitimacy.

On a final note, not all social exchanges have vanished from Swedish polling stations, though. While mature democracies, as Coleman (2013) notes, have gone through a "transition from ritual to routine" (p. 64), there is one group for whom elections are still cherished rituals: the poll workers themselves. While recruiters try their best to prevent social exchanges between voters or between poll workers and voters, the poll workers themselves often become a tight-knit gang. The recruiters are aware of this but sometimes hesitate to take action. "You don't move people around unless you have to … it's become a social activity", Rec9 says and adds: "it's super cosy". "They immediately call their friends and bring coffee and cake", Rec8 says on the same theme. Only two interviewees can be said to take a hard line of friendship in the polling station. One of them is Rec3, who has an unsentimental approach to staffing and who ignores expectations coming from the poll workers themselves: "I don't think anybody should sit safe. I won't be popular for that, but I'm not here to be popular".

6   Conclusions

This thesis set out to study poll worker recruitment as a vital component of a wider process, the point of which is to uphold or increase electoral legitimacy; the *summa bonum* of electoral administration. More concretely, it asked what ideas underpin Swedish local EMBs' recruitment of poll workers. It answered it from three complementary foci, offshoots from the visual metaphor TO VOTE IS TO BE SEEN, grounded in different values.

First, to see the voter entails a focus on poll workers as active agents reaching out to voters. In this conceptualization, grounded in the value of efficiency, poll workers are cogs in a machinery and voters the matter that they process. One strategy employed is to treat voting as a service encounter. Poll workers must be efficient yet sociable, ensuring that voters feel welcome and recognized but also that the tempo of the process is kept up. Poll workers must secure the smooth running of the machinery by identifying voters who might need help. A diverse set of people is a *sine qua non* for efficiency, but it entails a recontextualization of diversity as a plurality of competences and a concomitant instrumentalization of social groups. Consequently, administrators' strategic recruitment entails a great deal of micromanagement and a great deal of subjectivity in an otherwise tightly regulated process. The high degree of micromanagement is not surprising, however, given the high stakes. The interviews are permeated by the fear that something might go wrong, a feeling exacerbated by political polarization, which also manifests itself in local politics.

Second, being seen by the voter entails an understanding of poll workers as canvasses on which voters project their own preconceptions. Grounded in the value of equality, representation is considered an intrinsic value, and consequently, recruiters see it as self-evident that workforces should mirror society. A related idea guiding recruiters' thinking is the belief that voters need to see staff that reflect them and that this aids voter-poll worker interaction and increases trust in the correct handling of votes. There is, however, a discrepancy between recruiters' aims and actual outcomes, but little or no targeted recruitment to help municipalities align with their own recruitment principles. Whether a workforce mirrors society might depend on the size of the municipality.

Third, grounded in the value of neutrality, keeping from view refers to those aspects that must not be within voters' scope of attention. Almost all recruiters agree that partisanship undermines voters' trust, but their attempts to prevent it vary from outright bans for life to quarantine, and interpretations of who counts as a politician vary too. Family relations and close friendship are also seen as problematic by recruiters, but difficult to avoid. This is the focus where guidelines from the Election Authority have had the most effect, yet some recruiters wish for even stricter regulations.

This study has several limitations pertaining to the sample of municipalities. Besides its size, the smallest municipalities were purposefully left out. Its approach means that more research is needed to ascertain the extent to which identified themes permeate Swedish EMBs. Similarly, research into the effects of representation-based legitimation strategies on voters' perceptions of electoral integrity is also warranted. There are several interesting themes that the analysis has only treated tangentially. The question of representation has taken centre stage in the analysis, but recruiters' understandings of it and their deployment of representation as legitimation strategies merit more attention than the present thesis affords. Space restrictions also preclude discussions of other salient themes identified in the analysis, e.g. the importance of chairpersons in the electoral process and recruiters' and poll workers' understanding of local representation. While this study found that several legitimation strategies deployed by Swedish EMBs align with findings of international research, to obtain a full picture of how Swedish EMBs build legitimacy warrants more research, as Sweden is an as of yet emerging context in electoral management studies.

Electoral systems are regularly reviewed. In Sweden, the role of poll workers has come to the fore in the last few years, as exemplified by recent attempts to depoliticize electoral administration. On a fundamental level, it is reasonable to question the logic of having politically appointed committees in charge of the necessarily unpolitical delivery of elections, especially since this is incongruent with recruiters' use of non-partisanship as a legitimation strategy. However, within current institutional structures, the remit of electoral committees could be extended for them to work more actively with questions of turnout and representation, which might be needed if their targets are to be met. From the perspective of representation, there are untapped human resources that local EMBs can access through targeted recruitment. Much needed younger people could for example be recruited through outreaches to schools or sports clubs. Poll worker recruitment could potentially be used to give young people something to put on their cv but could potentially also be used to mitigate the effects of long-term unemployment.

This thesis has provided insights into the thought processes of Swedish electoral administrators and how they deploy different legitimation strategies to affect voters' confidence in public elections. Whilst individual recruiters might prioritize one strategy over another, the similarities eclipse the differences. This thesis has shown the importance of institutional expectations in steering recruitment principles in an isomorphic direction. It has also shown how important recruiters are for the quality of elections. While previous literature has emphasized voter-poll worker interaction as a site of legitimacy-building, less consideration has been given to the people who make sure poll workers appear on site in the first place. The image that emerges in this thesis is of recruiters as the linchpin of electoral administration, ensuring that the right people are in the right place.

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Appendix I. Interview Guide

Background

Could you describe your role and areas of responsibility within [municipality's] electoral management body?

How many people make up the electoral management body and how have you divided the areas of responsibility between you?

Could you tell me about your educational and professional background?

Poll workers' qualifications

(For each qualification/ability/experience/attribute/et cetera mentioned, ensure that the interviewee justifies their answer.)

I'm now going to ask you questions about poll workers and what qualities you're searching for. I'm going to start with a really broad question and then move on to more thematic questions. But first the really broad question: Could you describe the perfect poll worker?

Are you looking for candidates who have specific abilities?

Are you looking for candidates with specific professional experience?

Are you looking for candidates with a specific educational background?

When you recruit, do you consider a candidate's…

…age?

…sex?

…ethnicity?

…linguistic competence?

…role in civil society?

Can a poll worker hold political office or other positions of trust?

If you think of all the answers you've given so far, which qualification do you consider to be the most important?

Are there candidates you absolutely do not want?

Operational aspects

Are there official principles for recruitment?

(*If yes:* What are your views on these?/Do they match your needs as a recruiter?)

Could you describe what your recruitment process looks like?

(If not already answered: How would you assess the chances of recruiting enough candidates for the upcoming election?

Do you target specific groups of people?)

Does a poll worker have to live in [municipality] to work here?

Can poll workers work in the same ward as they live?

Can poll workers work in the same ward in multiple elections?

Can poll workers work with friends/family members/colleagues?

How do you safeguard that candidates have those qualifications you're looking for?

(If not already answered: Do you have a feedback mechanism?)

Could you tell me about a poll worker who has not lived up to your expectations?

Could you tell me about a poll worker who you think handled a difficult situation well?

What is your position on national guidelines for recruitment?

To what extent is the electoral committee involved in the electoral process?

Do you feel that you are expected to work with recruitment in a certain way?

(If the interviewer asks about the sources of these expectations: It could be institutions such as the Electoral Authority or the electoral committee, other organizations, citizens, colleagues, anyone basically.)

(If the recruiter has experience from other municipalities): Do you think there are specific preconditions in [municipality] that you have to take into consideration when recruiting?

Once they have cast their votes, with what feeling would you like voters to leave the polling station?

Appendix II. List of Interviewees

Code	Municipality classification[1]	Local EMB and interviewees' roles/experience[2]
Rec1.1 Rec1.2	Medium-sized town with an institution of higher learning (IHL) and with >100,000 inhabitants of which at least 40,000 live in the largest urban area	Permanent EMB. The administration consists of a manager (Rec1.1) who has the overall responsibility, a coordinator and two (temporary) administrators (Rec.1.2). Rec. 1 has worked with several elections and has similar experience from a smaller municipality. Rec1.2 is doing their first election as part of an internship.
Rec2	Medium-sized town with ~50 000 inhabitants of which >40 % of the working population commute to another medium-sized town	No permanent EMB. The administration consists of a coordinator who has the overall responsibility, two administrator (Rec2) and a secretary of the electoral committee. Rec2 has more than a decade of experience working with poll worker recruitment.
Rec3	Small town with <10 000 inhabitants of which >40 % of the working population commute to a medium-sized town. IHL within commuting distance	No permanent EMB. Rec3, who has administrative experience from a bare handful of elections (also from another municipality) constitutes the entire local EMB.
Rec4	Small town with ~15 000 inhabitants of which >40 % of the working population commute to a medium-sized town. IHL within commuting distance	No permanent EMB. The administration consists of a committee secretary with the overall responsibility (Rec4), two administrators and a spokesperson (all working part-time with the election). Rec4 has worked with a bare handful of elections.
Rec5	Small town with ~20 000 inhabitants of which >40 % of the working population commute to a medium-sized town. IHL within commuting distance	No permanent EMB. Rec5, who has more than a decade of experience of electoral administration and the overall responsibility, does the bulk of the administrative work and has a handful of colleagues who help out with minor/specialized tasks.
Rec6	Large city with an IHL where at least 200,000 people live in the largest urban area	Permanent EMB consisting of 3 people, of whom Rec6 has the overall responsibility. Rec6 has administrative and supervising experience from a bare handful of elections and has worked as a poll worker in a handful of elections prior to that.
Rec7	Medium-sized town with an IHL and with ~100,000 inhabitants of which at least 40,000 live in the largest urban area	Permanent EMB. Five people do the bulk of the work and have not officially divided the task between themselves. Rec7 has administrative experience from a bare handful of elections.
Rec8	Medium-sized town with an IHL and with ~100,000 inhabitants of which at least	No permanent EMB. Two people do the bulk of the work. This is Rec8's (and the colleague's) first

[1] The phrasing of the descriptions is based on the classification of Swedish municipalities developed by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner, 2023, January 31). The author has added information about population size and institutions of higher learning.

[2] The number of employees refers to those working full-time or part-time with elections during the months/year leading up to the election but does not include people who are paid by the hour to do specific tasks (e.g. packing and distribution of material) or people from other administrations who help out on the side. The numbers should be taken with a pinch of salt as electoral administrations are notoriously amorphous; people come and go, colleagues help out (whether officially sanctioned or not), extra hands might be called-in with short notice, and so on.

	40,000 live in the largest urban area	election.
Rec9	Small town with ~30,000 inhabitants	Semi-permanent EMB. A bare handful of people have divided the work between them. Rec9 has administrative experience from a couple of elections and the overall responsibility.
Rec10	Medium-sized town with an IHL and with ~70,000 inhabitants of which at least 40,000 live in the largest urban area	Rec10 has administrative experience from a handful of elections. Rec10 states that the administration is currently under construction but appreciates the number of people involved to three.
Rec11	Commuting municipality with <10,000 inhabitants of which >30 % of the working population commute to another small town or urban area, or where >30 % of the employed day population lives in another municipality	No permanent EMB. Three people do the bulk of the administrative work. Rec11, who is new on the job but has experience as a poll worker, has the overall responsibility.
Rec12.1 Rec12.2	Commuting municipality with ~30,000 inhabitants of which >40 % of the working population commute to a large city or municipality near a large city. IHLs within commuting distance	The interviewees have divided the tasks between them. Rec12.1 has administrative experience from a couple of elections and 12.2 from more than a handful.
Rec13	Medium-sized town with >100,000 inhabitants of which at least 40,000 live in the largest urban area. IHLs within commuting distance	Permanent EMB. 5-10 people work with the elections and other related democratic questions. Rec13 has administrative experience from a bare handful of elections and a decade-long experience as a poll worker.

Appendix III. Interview Excerpts (Swedish)

The excerpts are organized according to subsection (5.1-5.3) and interviewee ID (Rec1-Rec13). If an interviewee is quoted multiple times in the same subsection, the excerpts appear in the order they were presented in the analysis. Excerpts consisting of single phrases or excerpts starting mid-sentence in the analysis are here complemented with their immediate co-text.

5.1 Seeing the Voter

Rec3:   Så jag försöker få, jag letar hela tiden efter den ultimata uppställningen av kompetens, förmågor, ja, det ska bli bra.

Rec4:   …för det är ett lagarbete när du sitter och samlar in röster, hjälper kanske en förvirrad eller möjligtvis uppriven väljare eller räkning.

Rec4:   Interviewer: Överprövar ni ordförande?
         Interviewee: Nej vi överprövar inte ordförandes rekrytering alls.

Rec6:   Sedan tror jag också att det blir ett bättre arbetsklimat när det är både äldre och yngre. En del äldre är lugna och stilla i vissa situationer men kan också bli lite trötta när man kommer upp i åldern och där är unga kanske har extra energi och orkar lite mer och så. Så jag tror den kombinationen är bra…

Rec7:   Och i övrigt är det ju, vi frågar ju inte efter etniska härkomst och såna här saker. Vi frågar ju efter språkkunskaper, att det är en alltså, alltså vi frågar efter det, språkkunskaper.

Rec8:   Som sagt tycker det är viktigt att man känner sig sedd och respekterad och bemött på rätt sätt när man kommer in.

Rec9:   Jag behöver inte erbjuda liksom alla i kön kaffe och fråga hur dagen har varit, men att man liksom hjälper till om någon frågar något, om man se någon som går runt och ser frågande ut ifall man kan hjälpa dem.

Rec9:   Jag tror det är jätteviktigt, nu ska inte valnämnden ha ett demokratiskt synsätt mer än att genomföra val, men jag tror om man ska tänka stort ska vi kunna ha en demokrati med insyn så är det

otroligt viktigt att vi inte gör saker så svåra så att inte gemene man kan förstå vad man ska göra. … Någon är jättenoggrann, någon är superbra på att hantera konflikter. För vi sätter ihop folk sen [i distrikt]. … Alla är liksom stöpta i exakt samma form. Det kommer ju bli konflikt direkt. Alla vill göra samma sak, alla vill bestämma, alla vill vara drivande. Det viktiga är ju att man har ett mångfald.

Rec9: Jag kan ju tycka det är toppen liksom ifall jag har en person som jobbar inom sjukvården eller liksom äldreomsorg. "Ja, men jag jobbar på ett stödboende". Ja, men då kanske vi har träffat den och tänkt "åh han eller hon är superduktig på att hantera människor, hantera människor varje dag med olika behov och olika förmågor". Ja, men ifall vi sätter den tillsammans med den här killen som jobbar på banken, han sitter hela dagen och bara liksom räknar och är superduperdupernoggrann och absolut inte får göra fel. Det är ju toppen, kan ju de hjälpas åt.

Rec12.1: Det är väldigt mycket tyngd på bemötande, särskilt de senaste valen från Valmyndighetens sida också. Men just det här med att skapa en upplevelse för att väljaren, dels att väljaren ska känna igen sig från tidigare val, att det ska vara så likt som möjligt möblerat i lokalen och att de ska känna sig välkomna när de kommer…

Rec12.1: Det [dokument] tog vi fram till förra valet för att ytterligare tydliggöra vilka förväntningar vi har på dem och vad lagen förväntar sig av dem. För det är ju myndighetsutövning de sysslar med det så att det blir extra tydligt för den enskilde med röstmottagaren vad som förväntas.

Rec13: Jag tror det viktigaste är att se väljaren. För att vi har ett system där man röstar väldigt sällan i Sverige. Så det kan i princip vara fjärde år eller var femte år som man röstar och då kan bara hela proceduren kan vara utmanande för en väljare. Att man faktiskt ser den här personen … att man faktiskt känner sig välkommen när man kommer som väljare… Alltså det är ett utsatt läge upplever många att komma och att vara väljare.

5.2 Beeing Seen by the Voter

Rec4: Det är också sånt vi får liksom från Valmyndigheten också naturligtvis, men det är klart, det handlar ju om legitimiteten för arbetet, inte minst att här i vårt land är vi, är det många olika människor med avseende på bakgrund, etnicitet och så vidare. Då är det också viktigt att de här personerna finns med i det här arbetet då som är med att ta emot röster och räkna röster. Det handlar om legitimiteten, det är därför det är viktigt.

Rec4:   Vi har ju ingen systematik i detta att vi sitter och tittar på att vi ska ha en representativitet i den meningen att "nu här i vår kommun så finns det en viss etnisk grupp som är 5 % och då ska vi också ha in det i röstmottagarkåren". Alltså så jobbar vi ju inte och det kan man ju fundera på om det vore ett bra system. Vi är ju inte där än, och det finns ju inget sånt heller från staten och från Valmyndigheten. … Jag tror kanske att vi behöver ha en diskussion i alla fall dels utifrån frågor om legitimitet som handlar om mångfald…

Rec5:   Rec5: Alltså så här så att det är inte bara sitter femtioåriga kvinnliga administratörer i ett valdistrikt utan försöker fördela upp det lite så att vi får så mycket olika som möjligt.

            Interviewer: Varför kan man inte bara ha femtioåriga administratörer?

            Interviewee: Nej, hade jag bara haft det att spela med så hade det ju varit så.

Rec7:   Men jag tror inte att heller att Valmyndigheten har fokuserat så mycket på rekrytering för att de ser väl inte det som en sån faktor som väljarna upplever på det sättet. De fokuserar på de sakerna som ja, men väljarna vill att ska se likadant ut för väljarna i alla lokaler. … Men jag tror inte de tänker att rekryteringen har nåt med det att göra på det sättet.

Rec9:   För att jag tänker att det någonstans behöver finnas en mångfald när man möter folk. …så kan det liksom alltid gå bättre att möta någon utifrån ens förväntningar. Ja, men en ung kille kanske liksom kan möta en person på en viss våglängd, en äldre kvinna med den här bakgrunden kanske möter en person på den här våglängden, och då kan man hjälpas åt. …för de som är väljare kommer ju också med förutfattade meningar om exakt alla som sitter i lokalen "det är ju bara beigea och gråa tanter som sitter här".

Rec9:   Kan vi hitta folk som kanske knappt ens har ett intresse och utbilda dem till hur ett val går till, alltså, vi kommer ju tjäna hur mycket som helst på det.

Rec11:   …om jag bara ser svenskar i ja, men som röstmottagare och jag själv är utlandsfödd så kan det ju bli att man funderar på "behandlas min röst likvärdigt och kan jag lita på de här" och då tänker vi att om det är lite mer speglar de som kommer och röstar, att de känner igen liksom en person som har samma bakgrund eller så, så kan det öka förtroendet för hela systemet.

Rec12.1/2: Interviewer: Och hur tycker ni att ni når upp till de här målen [om att röstmottagare ska spegla samhället]?

            Rec12.2: Inte särskilt bra.

12.1: …Vi har röstmottagare från andra nationaliteter, väldigt olika. Vi har nog inte så att vi matchar befolkningen. Sen har vi inte gjort någon riktad rekrytering utan vi rekryterar lika.

Rec12.2: Vi hade önskat lite mer representativitet.

Rec13:   Ja, men i så stor utsträckning som möjligt. Sen så har vi inte en aktiv rekrytering utifrån det utan vi jobbar ju med liksom det underlag vi har av de personer som vi får in. Men sen är ju målsättning att göra det alltså.

5.3 Keeping from View

Rec3:   Men min erfarenhet säger mig också det ofta blivit mer fel för att man har känt personer. … Så, och jag ser också att det kan bli mycket onödigt snack om annat än valet i röstlokalen.

Rec3:   Så ingen ska sitta säkert, så tänker jag. Så blir jag väl inte poppis, men jag är inte här för att bli poppis.

Rec6:   Men. jag menar ändå att det är just den här farhågan, att folk, att väljarna kan misstänka att de har en särskild agenda, ett eget intresse som gör att kanske deras röst inte blir tolkad på rätt sätt eller räknade på rätt sätt. Det är den, redan där har man förlorat när det finns en sån brist på förtroende…

Rec6:   Men inte om du tänker interagera, inte ett ställe man snackar på, för när man är klar i vallokalen då lämnar man vallokalen.

Rec8:   De liksom ringer direkt sina kompisar och väntar med kaffe och väntar med bullar.

Rec9:   Man flyttar ju inte folk i onödan, för det vet vi att man vill ju helst vara där man har varit med dem som man har varit med för det blir ju en social aktivitet att nu ses vi igen och det är supermysigt. Och vad ska vi ha för fika detta året och så.