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A Swedish culture of advocacy? Civil society organisations' strategies for political influence

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Abstract

This article sets out to identify a culture of advocacy that has come to characterise Swedish civil society, formed around a long-standing tradition of close and cordial relations between civil society organisations, popular movements, and state and government officials. We argue that Swedish civil society organisations (CSOs) have been *allowed* to voice critique against public actors and policies and are *expected* to do so. Based on a large survey of Swedish CSOs, this study contributes unique data on what *type* of advocacy strategies CSOs practise, and the *range* of advocacy strategies that organisations employ. The analysis also explores norm-breaking behaviour, such as holding back criticism of public authorities. The results reveal a complex picture of a culture of advocacy: we find patterns of intense political activity among organisations that admit they hold back in their criticism of public authorities and the use of a wide range of advocacy strategies. The article contributes to and challenges established advocacy research and analyses established patterns of organisations' advocacy activities with the symbolic acts of breaking norms, as an analytical approach for the study of advocacy strategies in general and advocacy culture in particular.

Keywords: advocacy strategies, advocacy culture, civil society organizations, critical voice function, political influence

Introduction

Central to many theories on civil society is the idea that it fills a democratic function as its actors articulate the ideas and interests of individuals, member groups and the wider public, to whom many political platforms are not available. Citizens come together in formal organisations, networks or social movements to discuss, deliberate and try to influence the society to which they belong. The ways in which civil society actors can engage in public debates and political discussions, and the ways they seek to inform and influence the general public and decision-makers alike, can be seen as an illustration of a society's political climate (e.g. Amnå 2006). Such activities, which are a collective of concerted attempts to influence policies and politics to promote change, as carried out by civil society actors, are generally termed "advocacy activities".

While there is extensive research that outline different types of advocacy strategies (Beyers 2004; Binderkrantz & Krøyer 2012; Dür & Mateo 2013), investigate advocacy

for or by specific groups (Boris & Mosher-Williams 1998; Mosley 2012), and explore the particular traits of non-profit advocacy (e.g. Child & Grønbjerg 2007) in relation to national political processes (e.g. Andrews & Edwards 2004; Casey 2002), we find less attention has been paid to the institutionalised norms and expectations regarding how, when and on what grounds civil society actors are expected to advocate. Advocacy research is, in other words, primarily focused on identifying organisational behaviour, rather than considering how the behaviours of individual organisations express society's expectations and norms concerning advocacy, here "culture of advocacy". The significance of studying different advocacy cultures cannot be underestimated in view of recent changes towards harsher state control over civil society. Throughout Europe, control is, for example, expressed in terms of restricted funding opportunities, qualified funding, and in terms of tacit and explicit rule changes concerning open criticism that civil society actors are expected to follow (e.g. Fundamental Rights Agency 2018).

Sweden could be portrayed as a critical case for the study of advocacy culture. In international comparison, Sweden stands out as a country marked by an extensive period of Social Democratic rule, citizens' high level of trust in state and public institutions (Trägårdh *et al.* 2013), and a civil society largely formed around the long-lasting tradition of popular movement organisations, often with close and cordial relations with state and government officials (Lundström & Svedberg 2003). Unlike in some other countries, advocacy is not regulated by the state, and civil society actors are offered extensive leeway in terms of how they can promote their issues. It is, however, important to recognise that actions are taken within a political and cultural framework dominated by a "strong state", with close connections between the Social Democratic party and key civil society organisations (Micheletti 1995). So whereas legal barriers to advocacy actions are absent, the strong patronage of the state has seemingly established norms regarding both forms and natures of advocacy behaviour.

Although the relationships between the state and civil society organisations have certainly changed, with, for example, new forms of partnerships and contract-based relations (Wijkström 2011), we may assume that state-civil society interactions remain characterised by permissive norms. Thus, civil society actors are invited to engage in advocacy activities that involve voicing criticism about policies as well as politicians and officials. Actors have been *allowed* to voice criticism against public actors and policies and are also *expected* to do so. In other words, Swedish society and its democratic system expects civil society actors to take on the responsibility of criticising the government, politicians and civil servants, for the greater good of societal development, the welfare of citizens and the quality of democracy. In a Swedish context, therefore, the act of deliberatively refraining from advocacy and voicing criticism could potentially be seen as a disruption to a norm.

This article captures the Swedish culture of advocacy by analysing what organisations do *and* what they refrain from doing. We argue that identifying such actions offers an important step towards identifying what norms and expectations provide the informal boundaries of a Swedish advocacy culture. Hence, the article presents findings on a) what type of advocacy strategies civil society organisations practice, b)

the range or diversity of advocacy strategies that organisations employ and c) the extent to which organisations purposefully refrain from criticising public institutions and actors. As mentioned, we consider "holding back criticism" as a norm-breaking act of great symbolic value in the Swedish political context since civil society organisations are expected to act as watchdogs and express concern or criticism.

Our analysis draws on a survey among a representative sample of more than 6,000 Swedish CSOs, and provides a systematic analysis across a broad spectrum of domestic CSOs. Our investigation into advocacy culture thus provides research input from one of the largest surveys addressing CSOs advocacy activities, which formed part of the research program "Beyond the welfare state: Europeanization of Swedish civil society organizations (EUROCIV)". For the purpose of the analysis conducted in this study, we adopt a broad definition of advocacy that ranges from open demonstrations and letter writing to less visible tactics such as networking and lobbying, as well as advocacy that is mainly oriented towards government or the general public, hence excluding advocacy for market actors. This dataset allows for a unique analysis into advocacy behaviour, as the sample includes organisations active at national, regional and local levels, in various policy areas and with different resources and means.

A Swedish culture of advocacy?

The concept of culture is, of course, a widely used and debated concept and carries different meanings. The notion of an advocacy culture generally rests on the values embedded in relations between state and civil society actors, including the roles, expectations and action repertoires ascribed to CSOs. As such, we interpret the concept of culture based on two perspectives. Firstly, advocacy culture can be analysed in relation to the regulations, expectations, roles and facilitating or obstructive structures as given by the organisation's environment. Secondly, advocacy culture can also be linked to and seen as an expression of organisational culture and organisations' advocacy activities. For example, an organisation that chooses public and confrontational advocacy tactics may perceive advocacy work as part of an identity that signifies independence and autonomy (cf. Arvidson, Johansson & Scaramuzzino 2017). An organisation that opts for non-confrontational tactics, and aims to negotiate with opposing stakeholders, may see advocacy as a pragmatic way of dealing with situations where collaborating parties represent different interests (see also Garrow & Hasenfeld 2012). It is on the basis of these two perspectives we seek to identify a Swedish civil society advocacy culture.

Considering the roles, expectations and action repertoires ascribed to CSOs, a Swedish system of interest representation is by tradition characterised by "corporatism", i.e. a system of institutionalised contact, negotiation and joint decision-making between the state and CSOs (Hermansson, Lund, Svensson *et al.* 1999; Lundberg 2017; Gavelin 2018). The system has been built on close collaboration between the state and major interest organisations in the preparation as well as the implementation of public policies (Micheletti 1995). Throughout history, relations between the Swedish

state and civil society are in this respect coloured by Sweden's corporatist historical legacy. Governments at various levels has invited civil society representatives to join public committees and public boards in order to discuss and implement policies, and political parties have "created coalitions" (ibid.:154) with civil society organisations, granting them power to influence the political agenda (Lundåsen 2010). In fact, the collaboration between the government and CSOs has at times been criticised for being too close (ibid.). Nevertheless, the Swedish corporatist model has also earned strong support in the court of public opinion and within the civil society sector itself (Olsson, Nordfeldt, Larsson *et al.* 2009; see also Lundström & Svedberg 2003).

Possibly as an expression thereof, governments have refrained from limiting the actions of CSOs through legislation (Micheletti 1995). Hence, there is an absence of regulation and legislation that details the "do's and don't's" of civil society associations (Trägårdh *et al.* 2013). In practice, however, opportunities to influence policy-making do not apply to everyone. Large CSOs, such as senior-citizen organisations, women's groups, disability-movement organisations, and immigrant and ethnic organisations, have benefitted from this system, since they participate in closed forms of consultation (Feltenius 2008; Scaramuzzino 2012). This suggests that a Swedish culture of advocacy has elements of inclusive and cordial relations between politicians and civil society actors, but we cannot assume that this applies to all civil society actors. Moreover, while there is a strong emphasis in principle on organisational independence, some authors argue that "government patronage involves very complex and confusing practices and principles" (Micheletti 1995:160). The principle of "free associations" does not simply mean that the state has not been active in directing civil society and their roles in political deliberations of various kinds (Trägårdh *et al.* 2013).

This system of corporatist relations has undergone changes, and relations are now increasingly marked by competition between a wider sets of actors that try to influence policy and politics from inside and outside policy-making processes. These are processes that invite for more informal, personal contacts and networks (like in more "liberal" systems, as, for example, the US) at the expense of arranged consultation (Garsten *et al.* 2015). To some extent, this has also implied changes for civil society actors, yet at the same time Swedish government policies with regard to state-civil society relations have continued to follow corporatist traits. During the last decade, central governments have, for instance, initiated compact models (in Sweden called "agreements") to guide relations between state and civil society at various levels of government. The agreement has been established between the central government, national CSOs, and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Region, and includes common principles that build on "independence", "dialogue", "transparency", "quality" and "diversity" (Överenskommelsen 2008, see also Johansson and Johansson 2012). The agreement was initiated by the centre-conservative government in 2008 and was recently updated by the left-green government in 2018.

These combined principles illustrate the idea that the relations between state and civil society are governable; yet, they are also in need to be codified and regulated, including the underpinning values. Rather than directly trying to interfere with civil

society "internal" business, the agreement can be seen as an illustration of soft gover-
nance. This tradition of a permissive, soft-controlling relationship becomes even clearer
as we compare Sweden to other countries such as the US and the UK, where we find
detailed regulations regarding what type of advocacy behaviour is allowed in order for
organisations to retain their charitable status (Charity Commission for England and
Wales 2008/2017; IRS 2018). Arguably, the relationship between the state and CSOs
can be described as dynamic and interactive, rather than oppositional and fraught
with conflict.

Swedish civil society is at the same time largely defined by a Scandinavian "popular
movement" tradition, and Swedish CSOs have, in this respect, primarily played the
role as political agents in that they have fulfilled a voice function, advocating for their
respective constituencies and membership groups (Trägårdh 2010:236). The above-
mentioned agreement illustrates such a codified social position, as CSOs are expected
to act as "… critical reviewers, advocates and opinion makers. They should be able to
uphold this role without jeopardizing cooperation with or economic support from the
public sector" (Överenskommelsen 2008:22). The conventional role for CSOs is to
be critical, and to scrutinise government policies as they seek to represent citizens and
develop the political project of the modern welfare state, and to contribute towards
the implementation of public policies. While the formal execution of this role has
been placed on official organisations, some argue that this tradition forms a "popular
movement contract" that characterises the general citizen's relationship to the state, i.e.
opportunities to voice criticism and concerns, can be seen as responsibilities that fall
on individuals and organisations, alike, to actively engage in society's pressing issues
(Wijkström 2012). From this perspective, we may interpret an organisation's decision
to deliberately hold back criticism of public authorities as a norm-breaking act.

Further changes can be noted, however, in the relations between CSOs and the
government that affect the way roles and expectations regarding CSO behaviour are
formed. A "productivist" function has become more pronounced in government poli-
cies (Hartman 2011; Wijkström 2011). As in many European countries, the delivery of
public goods is dispersed across a range of actors and sectors, including CSOs, as they
are invited and/or expected to step in when the welfare state "fails" to deliver (Brand-
sen, Trommel & Vershuere 2014; Boivard 2014; De Corte & Versheure 2014). Research
suggests that with this comes changes to internal characteristics of organisations and
their approach to advocacy activities. Along with government contracts and subsidies,
organisations become subordinate to public management models, control measures
and performance indicators with regard to efficiency, effectiveness and quality. These
changes raise central questions concerning the possibility of combining the functions
of offering a critical voice as well as that of being service providers based on public
contracts (Arvidson, Johansson & Scaramuzzino 2017).

Swedish advocacy has thus been formed by the presence of large membership-based
collective action organisations, often with a close connection to the labour movement
and the Social Democratic party. However, more recently we can identify a growing
diversity of civil society organisations engaging with government, and with that follow

changes to norms of advocacy activities. Forms of NGOisation, bureaucratisation and professionalisation among civil society actors challenge the established meaning and value of Swedish CSOs as membership based organisations (Papakostas 2011). Swedish CSOs increasingly employ professional policy strategists, public relations advisors, communication experts and campaign managers as they engage in advocacy activities. This suggests a more professional and strategic position on how to engage in advocacy activities where particular types of activities are less linked to the ethos and identity of an organisation – and more subordinated to the particular policy issue or the tactical game of seeking political influence.

CSOs and advocacy strategies: a review of research

Research on CSOs and advocacy form an extensive research field (Arvidson, Johansson & Scaramuzzino 2017), and in this section we limit our discussion to a focus on different categorisations of advocacy strategies and the meanings ascribed to different types of strategies. The notion of strategy, as a form of deliberative behaviour, where groups or organisations use their means to try to influence policies and politics according to certain goals, very much underlies this strand of research (Jaspers 2013).

A classic typology of advocacy strategies can be found in interest group studies where a distinction is made between insider and outsider strategies (Maloney, Jordan & McLaughlin 1994; Grant 2001, 2004). Interest group studies have primarily been occupied with analysing and measuring access to and participation in public consultation and decision-making procedures, often with an ambition to analyse political influence of advocacy activities (Andrews & Edwards 2004; Jenkins 2006). The insider/outsider typology has framed such analyses, where insiders are those who have been "recognised by government as legitimate spokespersons for particular interests or causes" (Grant 2004:408). Insider positions are usually linked to institutionalised advocacy strategies, such as contacting politicians and civil servants, to make them aware and try to convince them on particular issues, that is, to get engaged in consultation and policy monitoring. This might imply participating in detailed negotiations on legislative proposals or taking part in general debates and discussions on policy developments. The typology is engrained by a proposition that having an insider position is more beneficial, as it is assumed that such a position allows organisations to gain real influence. Outsider positions are in this respect less prestigious, less appealing. Outsiders are those who want to be included in consultation yet lacking skills, resources or acceptance to gain such a position (outsiders by necessity or exclusion) or outsiders by choice, that due to ideological considerations choose not to be included (Grant 2004:409).

Scholars have come to question whether the insider/outsider typology actually matches present advocacy activities as more modern organisations of today tend to utilise a mix of advocacy strategies, combining both insider and outsider strategies. Cisár (2013) suggests that social movement organisations nowadays deploy lobbying activities, and highly institutionalised actors can use protest strategies. (Binderkrantz & Krøyer 2012:117; see also Beyers 2004; Eising 2007). Such blurred (or integrated)

action repertoires are particularly evident in relation to the use of social media (Van der Graaf, Otjes & Rasmussen 2016; Scaramuzzino & Scaramuzzino 2017).

Another categorisation of advocacy includes a distinction between direct and indirect strategies (e.g. Binderkrantz 2005; see also Binderkrantz & Krøyer 2012). Direct strategies here include *parliamentary strategies*, which include contacting members of parliament, elected ministers and parliamentary committees, political parties and party organisations. It also includes *administrative strategies* such as contacting civil servants, using public committees, responding to requests for comments on public investigations and reports, etc. Indirect strategies include activities aimed to influence decision-makers and policies by deploying *media strategies*, e.g. activities directed towards reporters, writing letters to newspaper media, issuing press releases of holding press conferences and publicising various reports. Indirect strategies also include *mobilisation strategies*, ranging from arranging public meetings and conferences, conducting petition drives and organising various forms of campaigns to engage in more confrontational activities such as organising strikes, demonstrations and forms of civil disobedience. This fourfold distinction partly overlaps other similar conceptual suggestions. Beyers (2004), for instance, highlights differences between *access politics*, *information politics* and *protest politics*. Access politics is in this respect a form of direct strategy, while information and protest politics can instead be considered indirect strategies (Dür & Mateo 2013:662–663).

Unlike the insider/outsider typology, the framework of direct/indirect strategies does not presuppose a primacy of one strategy over another. Instead, each strategy comes with a different cost (e.g. Casey 2002), but also carries different symbolic values. For example, the difference between bargaining and voicing is emphasised, and Beyers (2004) argues that while access politics take place where the political bargaining occurs, voice strategies take place in the public arena. Whereas information politics imply the presentation of information in media, "protest politics is conceptually different from information politics in the sense that it implies the explicit staging of events in order to attract attention and expand conflict" (Beyers 2004:214). This suggests that the use of a particular advocacy strategy is more than a "strategic choice" made by the individual organisation based on a sense of what may serve its interest in the best way, but is also a reflection of the symbolic value and assumed identity attached to a particular advocacy strategy. For example, protest in the streets is more outspoken than is negotiations behind closed doors, and every chosen strategy plays a role in the expression and formulation of the identity of the organisation.

These different typologies and views on advocacy strategies can be criticised for being based on assumptions that actors are rational and can make informed choices. This has been debated in interest group studies and even more so in research on advocacy by civil society organisations and issues concerning organisations' access, acceptance and inclusion, depending on their resources, how well their agenda fits with the government's; and the power the organisation has to put pressure on governments to enter into consultation practises. This means that choice and organisational agency are "more constrained than the typology allows" (Grant 2004:409) and can therefore

be assumed to be an expression of specific norms and expectations rather than independent acts. Moreover, discussions on collective identity among social movement scholars reflect similar positions, albeit from a different analytical perspective. Polletta and Jaspers (2001) maintain that choices of advocacy strategies are influenced more by organisations' collective identity than by rational organisational considerations. Instead of maximising influence, identity formation is essential for what type of strategies organisations adapt (and are less likely to consider). That is, even if the repertoire of possible strategies is very broad, including demonstration, lobbying, and volunteers and/or employing professional consultants, the organisation's collective identity defines what strategic actions are more viable than others (ibid.:293–294). Advocacy can thus be perceived as an organisational strategy that hinges on organisational context, forms of identity and organisational relations. Advocacy strategy cannot only be understood as a result of internal organisational factors, such as capacity and political intent, but also reflects the characteristics of the policy field, including political opportunity structures and financial resources available to the organisation (Neumayer, Schneider & Meyer 2013).

While seeking to achieve political influence might be a key purpose, civil society advocacy is complex and varied. For organisations working in close proximity with the state, e.g. engaged in public service delivery, the style of advocacy might be less confrontational and reflect a striving to secure organisational survival. Mosley (2012), for instance, distinguishes between advocacy carried out for a political/policy issue and advocacy aimed at ascertaining financial support. She highlights the importance of assessing how/whether advocacy behaviour changes as a result of certain types of positions/relations with the public sector, and to what extent such changes are related to the purpose of organisational advocacy activities. A similar distinction is made by Garrow and Hasenfeldt (2012), who discuss advocacy aimed at achieving social benefits or advocacy aimed at ascertaining organisational benefits, linking different purposes to the underlying identity of the organisation.

In sum, research identifies outsider and insider strategies, and direct and indirect strategies. The meanings ascribed to different strategies relate to levels of influence, status and relations with surrounding stakeholders, and organisational identity. In the following, we build on these categorisations as we seek to map what types of advocacy behaviour Swedish CSOs are engaged with and the range, or diversity, of strategies organisations employ. In our analysis, we discuss how identified patterns contribute to an impression of Swedish civil society advocacy culture.

Method, data and operationalisation

The study is based on a quantitative dataset from a nationwide survey. The survey was carried out in 2012–2013, and the questionnaire was sent to 6,180 Swedish CSOs, resulting in 2,791 responses. A total of 740 CSOs were excluded from the sample due to incorrect postal addresses or the fact that they had ceased to exist, bringing the final response rate to 51.3 percent.

The survey is based on samples of categories used by Statistics Sweden (SCB) in its register of Swedish organisations (*Företagsregistret*). The sample frame was constructed to include Swedish CSOs expected to engage in social welfare issues, working with service production and/or interest representation. In line with this, we included two types of organisations: associations (*ideella föreningar*) and religious congregations (*registrerade trossamfund*). The organisational category 'association' is the most common organisational form, as it simplifies the way the organisation can engage with certain activities (e.g. to carry out limited economic transactions without being taxed). Religious congregations were chosen, as they represent an important part of organised civil society in Sweden, and they are often involved in social welfare activities and public campaigns on behalf of families living in poverty, undocumented migrants and other marginalised groups. A random sample for the survey was constructed using a combination of organisational forms and categories based on the types of activities that the organisations were primarily involved in. The organisational types and activities chosen for the survey were: 1) associations involved in "social service and care", 2) associations involved in "interest representation" and 3) religious congregations.[1] Among the organisations randomly chosen for the sample, we assumed that different types of organisations would display a large variety of resource mobilisation patterns and, hence, form different relationships with public authorities. The assumption was that a considerable number of organisations would give a high value to their advocacy function, i.e. voicing their opinion and criticism of public authorities and policies, as an integral part of their organisational activities.

Based on these considerations, the total population of CSOs included 80,015 associations, from which the sample (of 6,180 CSOs) were drawn. The population constitutes approximately 40 percent of Swedish formally organised civil society[2] including membership-based organisations and umbrella organisations at all administrative levels, from local to international, with an overrepresentation of organisations involved in social welfare issues and interest representation. For the purpose of this analysis, we have excluded those organisations that were inactive during 2012. Thus, the following builds on 2,678 Swedish CSOs. We present both univariate and bivariate analyses, and use Cramer's V as a measure of association.[3]

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1   Since the groups of our population were quite different in size, we decided to make a stratified sample assigning different sizes to the sub-samples for each of the categories. Each random sub-sample included a different percentage of the population, ranging from 3 to 100 percent. The aim of this sampling procedure was to avoid ending up with insufficient numbers of cases for some of the smaller categories. Due to the stratified sampling procedure, we gave the categories different weights during the analysis, so that the results of univariate and bivariate analyses presented would be the same as if we had analysed a non-stratified sample (for more detailed information about the sampling procedure, see Scaramuzzino & Wennerhag 2013).

2   According to Statistics Sweden's calculations, Swedish civil society includes about 217,000 formal organisations (SCB 2010).

3   Cramer's V is often used as an association measure in cross-tabulation between nominal variables, giving a value between 0 and 1, where the value 0 represents no association and the value 1 represents complete association. Significance is presented as follows † = 10% * = 5%, ** = 1%, and *** = 0.1%.

The research questions are operationalised through two sets of questions from our survey. First of all, we explore the use of seven different advocacy strategies, as shown in the following table (table 1). We categorise these strategies into four types according to what forms of advocacy they imply in terms of direct strategies (parliamentary and administrative) and indirect strategies (media and mobilisation). These variables all relate to the same main question: "How often does your organisation use the following ways to influence Swedish politics?" The sub-questions stated different strategies, as presented in the table.

Table 1. Strategies and form.

Advocacy strategies		
Direct strategies	Parliamentary strategy	Contacting politicians at national level
		Contacting politicians at local level
	Administrative strategy	Contacting public officials at national level
		Contacting public officials at local level
Indirect strategies	Media strategy	Using traditional media
		Using social media
	Mobilisation strategy	Using demonstrations

Each sub-question provided five options: "Often", "Sometimes", "Seldom", "Never" and "Don't know". In the analysis, the first two alternatives have been merged as positive answers, while the third and fourth have been merged as negative answers.

Secondly, we explore whether Swedish CSOs refrain from criticising public authorities by looking at the respondents' answers to the following statement: "we hold back criticism of the state and municipalities for the purpose of not jeopardising economic support". The question preceding this asked: "To what extent do the following statements describe your organisation in an accurate way?" The respondents could choose between the following alternatives: Very much, Somewhat, Not very much, Not at all, Don't know. Also in this case, we have merged the first two alternatives as positive answers, while the third and fourth have been merged as negative answers. We interpret an agreement with this statement as a strategic choice not to voice criticism of public authorities to safeguard present or future economic support.

Finally, we explore how the range of strategies used and the holding back of criticism are related.

Advocacy strategies and political activity among Swedish CSOs

The idea of a Swedish advocacy culture proposes that civil society is expected to play a democratic role through voicing concerns and opinions on behalf of citizen groups. The survey allows us to address in what ways CSOs are politically active, or, in other words, how they use advocacy strategies to influence decision-makers and policies in their respective fields of operation.

Table 2 presents percentages for the number of organisations that state that they make use of different strategies to influence Swedish policies. The first four strategies are direct strategies. They include contacting politicians and public officials at the national or local level. The following three strategies are indirect strategies and involve using traditional media (such as newspapers, television or radio) and social media. The last strategy is staging demonstrations.

Table 2. Use of different strategies for political influence by Swedish CSOs.

Type of strategy	Percent	N. of analysed cases
Parliamentary strategy		
Contacting politicians at national level	19.2	2,306
Contacting politicians at local level	40.2	2,398
Administrative strategy		
Contacting public officials at national level	15.5	2,289
Contacting public officials at local level	41.2	2,385
Media Strategy		
Using traditional media	29.3	2,378
Using social media	20.5	2,306
Mobilisation strategy		
Using demonstrations	9.0	2,304

The findings indicate that organisations appear to prefer direct strategies aimed at the local level, including both parliamentary and administrative strategies. More than 40 percent of the organisations studied state that they have used such strategies. Such focus on the local level reflects the fact that our sample includes mostly local organisations and that they have a voice function in relation to the public sector at the local level. It also possibly reflects that many Swedish CSOs have a close relationship with politicians and public officials based on direct communication, especially at the local level.

The results also show that indirect media strategies are less frequent but are still adopted by many CSOs (traditional media: one in three CSOs; social media: one in four). This suggests a relatively strong presence of Swedish CSOs in the public debate and that their voice is heard openly in society.

Considering that our sample includes mostly small organisations with no employed staff, they appear active when it comes to advocacy strategies. These results confirm that Swedish civil society and advocacy culture promotes the voice function of CSOs. It also reflects the presence of institutionalised structures that facilitate communication between CSOs and key individuals at the local municipal level. The limited use of confrontational strategies such as demonstrations is, of course, noteworthy. This possibly echoes a tradition of close and trustful relationships between public authorities and civil society actors that build on negotiations rather than open conflict.

Table 3 shows the number of strategies employed by the CSOs and hence the width of their repertoire of political strategies.

Table 3. Range of advocacy strategies used by CSOs.

Number of strategies employed	Percent
None	47.7
1–2	24.0
3–6	25.5
7	2.8
Total	100
Total number of analysed cases (N.)	2,135

The study shows that almost half of all CSOs did not use any of these seven strategies. It should, however, be kept in mind that, while these strategies are among the most commonly employed, they are not an exhaustive list of strategies. Some CSOs might participate in councils and dialogues, and use petitions as a means to influence policy. It is remarkable, however, that so many CSOs do not seem to be seeking political influence. Some explanation as to why this is the case may be found in the broad sample (including religious and cultural organisations) and that many CSOs might be more focused on offering direct support to individual members, the production of services, and creating spaces for community- and capacity-building among social groups. Furthermore some CSOs might delegate the advocacy work to umbrella organisations at the local, regional and national level.

Our results also show that just over half of the CSOs use at least one strategy for policy influence, and if we consider that more than 40 percent use direct strategies at the local level we can conclude that almost all organisations employing these strategies engage in direct contact with politicians and public officials at the local level. One in four CSOs employ only one or two different strategies, similar numbers use as many as three to six strategies. Only about three percent employ all seven strategies. We can assume that the organisations employing multiple-strategies are not only versatile in handling advocacy but also persistent, goal-oriented and active in trying to influence policy and politicians.

It is therefore interesting to take a closer look at the types of organisations that belong to this last category of politically active organisations. To do this, we make use of a typology used by Statistics Sweden in previous studies about associational life (Vogel, Amnå, Munck *et al.* 2003).[4] In our adaptation of the typology, we have used 52 categories that reflect organisational identities and the issues that the organisations deal with. The results are presented in table 4.

Table 4. CSOs employing multiple strategies among nine sub-categories (percentages).

Types of organisations	Number of strategies employed		N. of analysed cases
	0–6 strategies	7 strategies	
Interest organisations			
LGBT organisations	70.0	30.0	6
Women's organisations	88.0	12.0	75
Ethnic organisations	88.5	11.5	23
Trade unions	90.7	9.3	95
Pensioners' organisations	95.5	4.4	57
Temperance and drug users' organisations	95.6	4.5	53
Political organisations			
Political parties	84.3	15.7	75
Solidarity organisations			
Other solidarity organisations	75.0	25.0	16
Humanitarian organisations	96.0	4.0	372
Total number of analysed cases including categories not presented (N.)	2,068	67	2,135

Cramer's V=0.300***

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4   The organisations have been classified by assessing the main focus of activity on the basis of the organisation's name, information given in the survey about the organisation's main goals and activities, and information found on the Internet (mostly the organisations' own websites). The typology is based on six main categories: interest organisations, solidarity organisations, political organisations, lifestyle organisations, religious organisations and service organisations. Each of these categories includes a set of sub-categories, for a total amount of 52.

The table shows that many of the organisations that employ multiple strategies are interest organisations. This is consistent with previous research that suggests that organisations representing specific interest are more active in advocacy than organisations representing diffuse interests (e.g. Linde & Scaramuzzino 2018). Not surprisingly, the organisations we find in this category are associated with the staging of and participating in demonstrations: for example, LGBT organisations with the Pride parade, women's organisations with the international women's day parade, and the labour movement with the May Day parade. This is consistent with the fact that demonstrations are the least common strategy employed by the CSOs, as shown in table 3. There are also other types of interest groups such as ethnic organisations, pensioners' organisations, and temperance and drug users' organisations. Also, political parties are overrepresented among the multiple-strategy organisations along with solidarity organisations. Among these, there are particular organisations advocating for animals' rights and Save the Children. While some groups are quite small, we find significant differences between the types of organisations and that the typology used explains 30 percent of the variation when it comes to multiple-strategy organisations. In fact, the nine sub-categories (out of 52) cover 87.5 percent of all multiple-strategy CSOs.

Holding back criticism?

Research in this area has more often focused on the extent to which organisations engage in advocacy rather than on why they refrain from doing so. Therefore, we will explore the answers to the direct question of whether organisations "hold back their criticism" towards public institutions for the purpose of not risking their economic support. In the Swedish political culture, agreeing with such a statement would be rather sensational and carry serious implications for the organisations' self-image, as it suggests a failure in fulfilling the role as citizens' representatives, some of whom are vulnerable and possibly excluded from public services. Not surprisingly, the following table (table 5) shows that only a very small group states that they do hold back criticism.[5]

5　Very few of the questionnaires sent in were filled in by employees (e.g. communicators) who might potentially be trained to answer sensitive questions as this one. It might be important to mention that 85 percent of the organisations in the sample had no employed staff at all and more than 80 percent of the answers came from chairpersons, secretary generals or board members.

Table 5. Holding back criticism towards state and municipality for the purpose of not jeopardising economic support.

We hold back criticism of the state and municipalities for the purpose of not jeopardising economic support	Percent
Strongly agree	0.9
Agree	1.3
Disagree	7.0
Strongly disagree	90.8
Total	100.0
Total number of analysed cases (N)	2,384

The table shows that very few Swedish CSOs refrain from criticising public authorities (2.2 percent). As this statement clearly shows that the organisation acts in a way that breaks with norms and expectations, it may require a big leap to agree to such a strong statement. It suggests that the results show either organisations that are consciously and strategically compromising with their advocacy function, for calculated reasons, or organisations that are particularly self-critical and reflect on a position as, perhaps, dependent on and controlled by public authorities.

Further investigation into the group that reports actually holding back criticism might reveal that characteristics of the contexts in which the CSOs operate, that is, specific policy fields and relations between CSOs and public authorities, offer some explanations. In the following table, we have used the same categories as in table 5 to show which types of organisations show an overrepresentation of CSOs stating that they refrain from criticising public authorities.

Table 6. CSOs holding back criticism among five sub-categories (percentages).

Types of organisations	Do not hold back criticism	Do hold back criticism	N. of analysed cases
Interest organisations			
Immigrant organisations	81.3	18.8	30
Temperance and drug users' organisations	90.6	9.4	64
Women's organisations	95.8	4.2	82
Lifestyle organisations			
Cultural organisations	96.1	3.9	263
Solidarity organisations			
Humanitarian organisations	95.0	5.0	453
Total number of analysed cases including categories not presented (N)	2,298	84	2,382

Cramer's V=0.224***

As stated above, the average percent of CSOs holding back criticism is about two. Among immigrant organisations, representing non-Swedish ethnic groups, the percentage of organisations stating that they hold back criticism is nearly 19 percent – a remarkably high figure! Among organisations from the temperance and drug users' movements, the same figure is 9 percent. Also among women's organisations, cultural organisations and humanitarian organisations, the percentage of CSOs stating that they hold back criticism is higher than average. It is interesting to notice that these five organisational sub-categories include 75 percent of the organisations in our sample that are strategically choosing to hold back their criticism, and that 22 percent of the variation in the "holding back variable" is explained by the typology.

Analysing these sub-categories, we can conclude that at least the first three interest organisations (i.e. immigrant, temperance and women) are active in policy areas with a relatively high level of conflict in Swedish society: migration/integration policy, alcohol and drug policy and gender equality policy. Within these policy areas, we find particular relationships between public authorities and civil society organisations and, hence, potential advocacy cultures that might explain why these organisations are overrepresented among those stating that they hold back criticism.

Swedish integration policy is characterised by a multi-culturalist approach promoting "cultural diversity". In this context, however, immigrant organisations tend to be depicted among public authorities as potential agents of segregation rather than contributing to integration (Scaramuzzino 2012) and are expected to be concerned with culture rather than politics (Odmalm 2004). When it comes to alcohol and drug policies, Sweden is known for a restrictive "zero tolerance" approach to illegal drugs

that focuses on prevention, treatment, and control. This policy area has been formed by strong cultural norms (Örnberg 2008) that at times have been subject to vivid and polarised debates between actors (Tham 2005). Women's organisations are comprised mostly of women's shelters occupied with service provision with public financial support. These organisations try to combine help and support with lobbying, claiming a special knowledge that can be strategically used in policy change processes and for political demands (Eriksson 2010). Recent studies suggest, however, that professionalisation and bureaucratisation of these organisations comes to the detriment of their political and ideological functions (Helmersson 2017).

It is possible that there are good reasons to hold back criticism in these particular policy areas where the fragmented nature of the field may override the general principals of a otherwise generous Swedish advocacy culture.

Holding back criticism: a strategy among others?

Based on the results so far, our next question explores the extent to which organisations state that they refrain from criticising public authorities and refrain from political activity in general. We explore the ways in which the strategy of holding back criticism (table 4) correlates with the advocacy strategies aimed at influencing policy discussed previously (table 2). The figures show percentages of organisations using different strategies among those agreeing that they hold back criticism and among those who disagree. The results are shown in the following table (table 7):

Table 7. Correlation between advocacy strategies and holding back criticism (percentages).

Type of strategy	Do hold back criticism	Do not hold back criticism	N of analysed cases and Cramer's V
Parliamentary strategy			
Contacting politicians at national level	68.3	18.1	2,159 (0.186***)
Contacting politicians at local level	82.9	38.7	2,216 (0.131***)
Administrative strategy			
Contacting public officials at national level	64.1	14.1	2,148 (0.200***)
Contacting public officials at local level	87.2	39.8	2,212 (0.137***)
Media strategy			
Using traditional media	51.2	29.0	2,203 (0.071**)
Using social media	51.2	19.5	2,160 (0.115***)
Mobilisation strategy			
Using demonstrations	17.5	8.6	2,165 (0.046*)

The figures should be understood in the following way. Of the CSOs that hold back criticism, 68 percent state that they have contacted politicians at the national level. This is in stark contrast to those who do not hold back criticism, where "only" 18 percent have engaged in such a strategy. This pattern is consistent with all the strategies, including direct advocacy at the national and local levels, media strategies and mobilisation strategies. The general results show a positive correlation between holding back criticism and the use of all seven advocacy strategies.

The table below (table 8) illustrates the correlation between holding back criticism and the number of strategies employed. It suggests that organisations refraining from criticising public authorities in fact use a wider repertoire of advocacy strategies than organisations that state that they do not hold back criticism.

Table 8. Repertoire of political strategies and holding back criticism (percentages).

	Number of strategies employed	Do not hold back criticism	Do hold back criticism
Inactive	None	48.3	8.6
Low active	1–2	24.5	17.1
Medium active	3–6	24.7	62.9
Hyperactive	7	2.5	11.4
Total		100	100
Total number of analysed cases (N)		2,018	

Cramer's V=0.149***

First of all, political activity is frequent among the CSOs that state that they do hold back criticism. If those that do not employ any of the considered strategies are understood as less politically active, this would apply to a small minority of the CSOs. In fact, more than 90 percent of the CSOs stated that they hold back criticism but still employ at least one strategy to influence policy. Among the small minority that hold back criticism, the repertoire of political activity is much broader, and possibly their level of political activity is also higher than among the majority of CSOs constituted by the representative sample. It suggests that Swedish CSOs are in direct contact with public authorities at different levels and that they are present in public debates, including those stating that they hold back their criticism.

This is probably a consequence of the fact that CSOs that stated they are holding back criticism are also those who are more perceptive when it comes to identifying changes in how they behave on this particular point. These organisations are also intrinsically linked to public authorities in that they receive public funding and consider this funding to be essential, which is not the case for almost 50 percent of the CSOs, which do not receive any funding from public organisations (Arvidson, Johansson & Scaramuzzino 2017). As implied in the survey statement, holding back criticism is here linked to risk avoidance

and resource dependency, i.e. it is a strategy aimed at protecting valuable funding. Such statement clearly breaks with the norms of Swedish advocacy culture. Is it the case that the Swedish model, with a largely accepting climate that expects CSOs to be critical, also sets boundaries as to how, where and from whom this critical voice is expressed?

Conclusion

The notion of advocacy culture lies at the core of this paper, and through our investigations, we find that there is a series of activity types, as well as norm-breaking acts, that allow us to gain a better understanding of the particular form and orientation of the Swedish culture of advocacy. Existing research in this field has largely portrayed Swedish civil society as being based upon a popular movement tradition with close and cordial relations between state and civil society that has allowed, and expected, CSOs to exercise a critical voice function and thereby fulfil their role as watchdogs against states and public authorities. This paper both confirms the existence of a Swedish culture of advocacy and challenges it on central points.

Our analysis of the broad and representative sample of Swedish CSOs demonstrates that while advocacy activities might be a cornerstone of how Swedish civil society is being depicted in international research, this is only partly reflected in our analyses. A majority (only by a small margin, however) of Swedish CSOs are "politically active". Some CSOs engage in a wide range of advocacy strategies, while others use a more limited range of strategies with the aim to achieve political influence. Yet, an equally large share of CSOs are "politically inactive", seemingly without direct ambitions to influence policies and decision-makers in their respective fields. Whether this suggests two distinctive categories of Swedish CSOs, i.e. between the politically active and the politically inactive, is a topic for further discussion and analysis. The different approaches to advocacy might signify a division of labour between organisations such as larger umbrella organisations and more local organisations. Some branches of such networks or platforms engage in advocacy work, while other parts are more inclined to engage in service delivery. This might also illustrate that large parts of Swedish CSOs are not at all engaged in advocacy activities and that the advocacy culture that is based on such expectations do not include all organisations.

While one might have expected to distinguish between those CSOs using direct and indirect strategies, it is apparent that the divide lies between protest and other types of advocacy strategies. As Swedish CSOs primarily seek access to politicians and civil servants, it appears non-confrontational and bargaining solutions are highly valued. A strategy of close interaction with key policy-makers is combined with different media strategies. This can be interpreted as concerted efforts to gain leverage in political issues. It is significant that protest, in the form of staging demonstrations, is almost a non-strategy, as only a small proportion of the actors seem to consider this a reasonable way to seek political influence and promote the causes they represent.

A key to unpacking a Swedish advocacy culture is found in our analysis of when CSOs agree to "hold back criticism" against public authorities and politicians. Such behaviour, we argue, is norm-breaking and of great symbolic value, but the results are difficult to interpret. First and foremost, very few actually state that they do hold back criticism. To

what extent this statement is a socially desirable position rather than "the truth" is hard to assess. However, the low numbers agreeing to "holding back criticism" are interpreted as an expression of abiding by the social and cultural norm of the majority. The expectation of having to act as watchdogs and express criticism against politicians and civil servants seems to be highly engrained in the organisational identity of most CSOs of this study. This appears even stronger if we consider that organisations, described as politically inactive, also report not holding back criticism of the government. Thus, expressing criticism constitutes a central part of CSOs' collective identity and a deep-seated "culture of advocacy" that characterises organisations' general approach to public authorities. This is a key finding of this study.

In view of the above, how do we understand the CSOs that, nonetheless, state that they hold back criticism of public authorities? A first assumption could be that politically inactive organisations or those controlled or governed by central and local governments hold back on criticism. This is not the case, though. On the contrary, actors that express that they hold back criticism are the most politically active using a wide range of advocacy strategies. This distinguishes them from the majority of Swedish CSOs. At the same time stating that they hold back criticism against the government, they are also engaged in direct, institutionalised and non-confrontational strategies or confrontational tactics like staging demonstrations. Recognising that the question was posed as holding back criticism of public authorities for fear of jeopardising financial support, recent changes in funding arrangements and trends towards CSOs acting as service providers have therefore not put a Swedish a culture of advocacy at risk. On the contrary, engaging in criticising the government continues to be a cornerstone of the Swedish model. Our study contributes towards a more detailed understanding of the democratic nature of CSO advocacy, and their influence on setting political agendas along with other powerful stakeholders within society.

The distinct features of a Swedish culture of advocacy appear as we compare the country's regulations, structures and norms to those of other countries, such as the US and the UK, where advocacy, political activity and criticism of authorities are defined by rules and regulations and threats of reprisals. Reflecting on current debates about the shrinking European civil society, it is clear that we need more detailed comparative analyses on whether Sweden constitutes a case deviating from others in the European context. While this is of empirical and methodological concern, we show that investigations into the culture of advocacy can contribute to the mature research field of advocacy research in important ways. This article demonstrates that the notion of advocacy culture allows us to gain a new perspective into how and why actors engage in advocacy activities, and even more so, why we need to ask the question on why they refrain from engaging in advocacy activities.

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