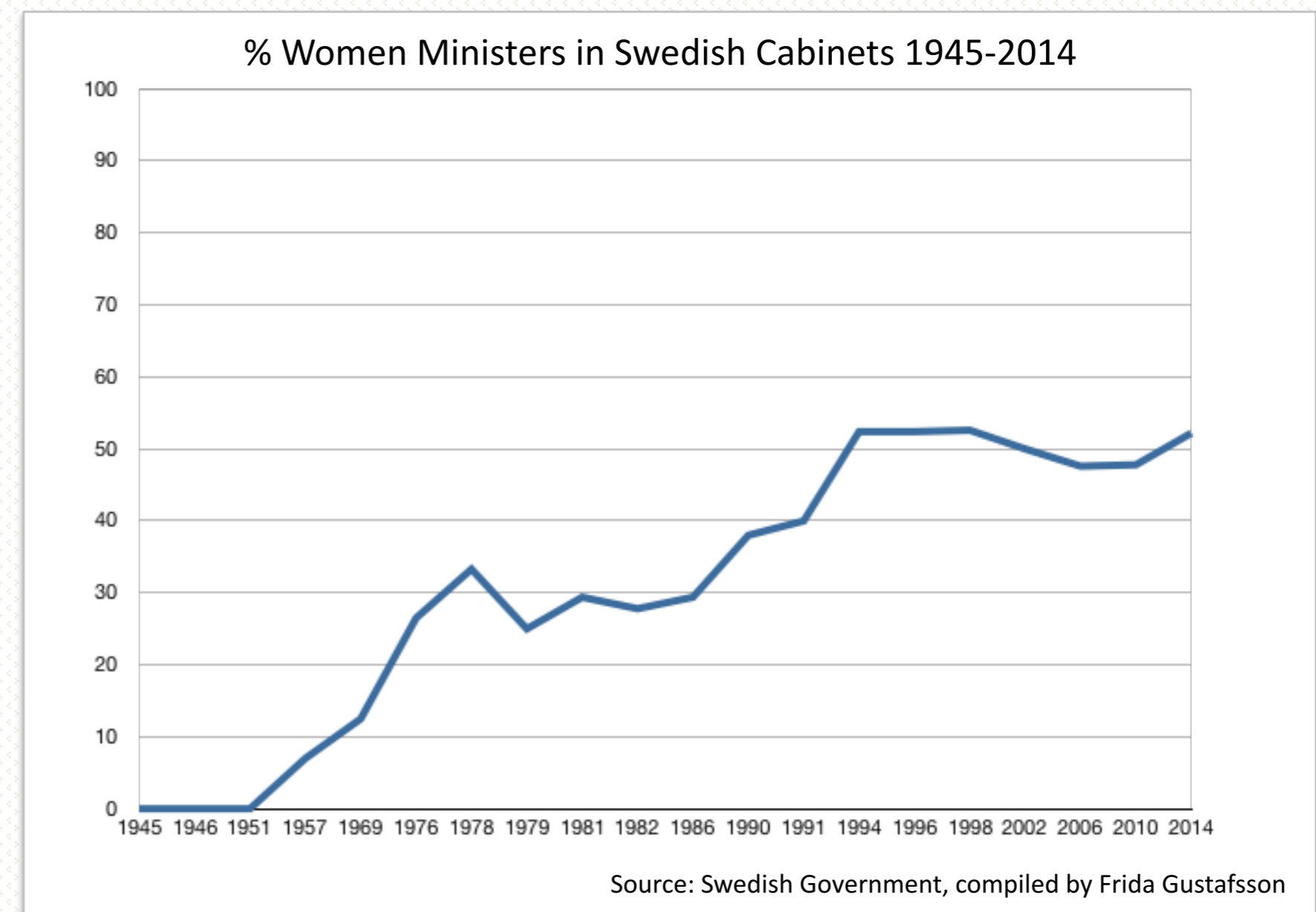


# Women's Ministerial Representation

## - Rules of Ministerial Recruitment in Sweden -

My research on the formal and informal rules of ministerial recruitment in Sweden was conducted by collecting data on the history of women ministers appointed since 1945, interviewing former Swedish ministers regarding the ministerial appointment procedure and gathering information from existing literature on the subject.



The first Swedish cabinet with gender parity was appointed by Ingvar Carlsson in 1994. Since then, every cabinet appointed has had at least 45% women ministers. Even before the historic 1994 cabinet the levels of women ministers in Sweden was comparatively high, with around 30% women appointed to every cabinet since the late 1970s. In comparison, the current UK cabinet under Theresa May has 38% women ministers,<sup>1</sup> the highest percentage ever appointed to a UK cabinet.

### What does a PM look for in a minister?

When putting together their cabinet, a Swedish PM isn't only recruiting individual ministers based on their professional qualifications. She's also trying to put together a socially responsible cabinet that functions as a diverse team of representatives of the Swedish citizenry at large. This task has been described as solving 'a puzzle in a tight frame, a compromise between competence and different sorts of representativeness';<sup>2</sup> essentially, to appoint a team of highly skilled, diverse and representative cabinet ministers.

### Introducing women to the political sphere

Dismantling these male networks was key to breaking down the historical precedent of recruiting male ministers in Sweden, and to increase women's access to cabinet positions. During the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, intra-party women's movements started the dismantling of a male political sphere by methodically working to introduce women into politics.<sup>3</sup> Through several independent initiatives, women's movements systematically worked to legitimize women's presence in politics by showcasing their competence, slowly increasing the levels of women's representation both in cabinet and parliament.

**'You just wouldn't get away with appointing a cabinet without gender parity. A Swedish PM today simply has to appoint 50% women ministers.'**

- Swedish Cabinet Minister in the 2000s

### The power of quotas

In 1994 the Social Democrats' national assembly voted through a national 50% quota, i.e. that half the candidates appointed to any seats have to be women, a victory that the Social Democratic women's movement had campaigned for for decades. Even though no other party has taken on a formal 50% quota, the initiative set a precedent for gender equality that most other parties felt compelled to follow. 1994 was also the first time a Swedish cabinet had achieved gender parity. Since then, all cabinets appointed have been numerically gender equal.

### Who is selected for a ministerial position?

Despite the aim to create a diverse team of representatives, Swedish cabinets – albeit numerically gender equal – are far from as diverse as the Swedish citizenry at large. Even though women are since the mid 1990s just as likely as men to be selected for a ministerial position, other social groups, like ethnic minorities, are still underrepresented. Still today, Swedish ministers are still on average more likely to be white, older and more highly educated than the Swedish citizenry at large.

**'Instead of waiting for the men to get the point of equality, we took initiative and created change'**

- Leader of an intra-party women's movement in the 1970s

### Why male, pale and stale?

There are very few formal rules that restrict who can be chosen for a ministerial position, and no real formal merits that qualifies someone for a seat in cabinet. This has left PMs essentially free to appoint any adult Swedish citizen as cabinet minister, and on their own decide what merits they think qualifies someone for a seat. This has often led to PMs recruiting ministers based on personal connections; people that they know, and know they can trust. Ministerial recruitment, then, has traditionally heavily relied on political networks the PMs have built up around them, and due to the historically gendered and exclusive nature of politics, these political networks has primarily consisted of highly educated, middle aged, and white men.

### No turning back once the precedent is set

During my interviews for this project, I asked each and every one of my interviewees why they think Sweden appoints so many women ministers, and they all replied; 'Because anything else is unfathomable'. As simple as the point is, it hits the spot. Once women were elected and appointed into politics, and proved themselves just as capable as men, PMs were unable to justify not continuing to appoint them for cabinet. A minister I interviewed said that when her cabinet was formed in the mid-2000s, 'Gender Parity was never questioned. It was just stated.' It appears that, once the precedent of gender parity was set in 1994, there was no way of justifying turning back.