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# Is the Church of Sweden an ‘Ordinary’ Civil Society Organization?

*– The advocacy activities of the Church in comparison to other civil society organizations in Sweden*

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the advocacy activities of the Church of Sweden. The historical co-optation of the Church by the state, a Lutheran theological heritage, and a trend from “voice to service” within Swedish civil society might discourage stronger political activism by the Church. The following research questions are answered: How does the extent of the advocacy activities of the Church of Sweden, understood as trying to influence politicians and officials and as achieving changes, differ from that of other civil society organizations (CSOs)? What factors explain differences in advocacy activities between the Church of Sweden and the other types of CSOs? How do the types of issues raised by the Church of Sweden through its influence differ from those of other CSOs? The article draws on a large sample ( $N = 1,150$ ) from a national survey targeting Swedish civil society organizations. It compares the Church of Sweden with other organizations representing diffuse interests (i.e., religious congregations and solidarity organizations) and organizations representing specific interests (i.e., pensioners’ organizations). The analysis shows that the historical position of the Church has granted its organizations strength in terms of resources that make them more active in advocacy than comparable organizations representing diffuse interests. The Church of Sweden of the new millennium hence seems to be able to engage more in politics because of, rather than in spite of, its institutional role.

## Keywords:

Church of Sweden, Lutheran Theology, Advocacy, Civil Society Organizations, Religious organizations

## INTRODUCTION

The (Lutheran) Church of Sweden is a relatively new civil society organization (CSO). While the institution is one of the oldest in Sweden – some congregations date back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century – it was only in the year 2000 that the Church of Sweden was officially separated from the state. The Church of Sweden was then declared a “faith community” along with others, like the Roman Catholics, Jews, and Muslims (cf. Wijkström and Einarsson 2006). From a political perspective, this means that the Church of Sweden, after the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and up until 2000, did not represent a spiritual power in opposition to the temporal power of the state, as was often the case in Central and Southern Europe. The Reformation thus implied a co-optation of the Church by the Swedish state (Gustafsson 2003), something that might still discourage stronger political activism by the Church of Sweden, after the separation from the state.

However, recent statements by the Church of Sweden, for instance on the right to asylum for refugees, suggest that the Church is politically active. The Church of Sweden seems to be using its position to critically scrutinize public policy from an ethical/religious normative perspective and to advocate for the rights of marginalized groups. This article explores the advocacy activities of the Church of Sweden through the following three research questions:

- 1) How does the extent of the advocacy activities of the Church of Sweden, understood as trying to influence politicians and officials and as achieving changes, differ from that of other CSOs?
- 2) What factors explain differences in advocacy activities between the Church of Sweden and other types of CSOs?
- 3) How do the types of issues raised by the Church of Sweden through its influence differ from those of other types of CSOs?

This article draws on a large sample of 1,150 CSOs from a national survey targeting Swedish organizations in civil society. The article compares the Church of Sweden with other religious congregations (Christian and non-Christian faiths), solidarity organizations (e.g., the Red Cross and Save the Children), and interest organizations (here those CSOs representing pensioners) based on their self-reported activities. We argue that the special position upheld by the Church of Sweden vis-à-vis the state might affect the extent and the way in which advocacy activities are used by organizations that are part of the Church of Sweden and, more specifically, that the Church of Sweden is not as active as other comparable CSOs, and that it is even less active compared to interest organizations such as pensioners' organizations.

We ground this premise in three separate but partly overlapping discussions that will be presented in the following sections. First, we focus on the institutional role of the Church of Sweden and in particular its relation with the state; second, we discuss the theological dimension of political activism in the Lutheran doctrine; and third, we address the role of civil society in Sweden and the ongoing shift from “voice” to “service.” These three dimen-

sions contribute to the understanding of the position of the Church of Sweden as a faith-based organization, as the former state church, and as a welfare-oriented CSO. After this, we will describe the method and the data used, followed by the analysis of the data and the conclusions.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL ROLE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SWEDEN

After the Reformation, the Lutheran faith was defined as the faith of the Swedish state. Religious freedom was not declared legal until 1951. “Nobody was henceforth forced to belong to the Church of Sweden against his or her own free will, and withdrawal from membership was made free and uncomplicated” (Gustafsson 2003, 55).

The Church of Sweden is an Evangelical Lutheran church with 6.2 million members (almost 65 percent of the Swedish population as of Jan. 1, 2016). In every one of the 1,360 parishes there is a parish council that, together with the rector (vicar), is responsible for the liturgy and for the educational, social, and evangelistic work. There are persons employed in every parish – at least a clergyman and a musician. According to the needs of the parish, other church workers can be employed, including deacons, teachers, administrative staff, youth leaders, cleaners, and so on. In the smaller, often rural, settings, these officers are responsible for services and pastoral care in several parishes. On the national level, the Church of Sweden is represented by the Archbishop of Uppsala. She is not superior to the other bishops, but is called “*primus inter pares*,” which means formally equal to other bishops but accorded a certain respect. In the media logic, the archbishop is the one who is expected to act as spokesperson for the Church. The national decision-making body, the Church Assembly, consists of 251 members and decides on all matters concerning the regulation of church life. Still, the Church of Sweden is a “flat organization,” and since medieval times the local parishes have enjoyed considerable autonomy.

From 1930, the democratic evolution opened up the ecclesiastical decision-making structures to political parties in a system of proportional representation (Gustafsson 2003). Since 2000, the relation between the Church of Sweden and the state has changed. The Church is now more or less separated institutionally from the state, but it retains some societal responsibilities, such as burials. Despite this official separation, its role and position is still regulated by the state through a law from 1998 stating that the Church of Sweden has to a) be Lutheran, b) have a democratic organization, and c) cover the whole country through the ministry of the Church (SFS 1998, 1591). Hence, the institutional role of the majority church, still embedded in the state, might hamper a strong advocacy role for the Church of Sweden.

## THE LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

Lutheran theology is another factor for understanding the willingness of the Church of Sweden to engage in political action and advocacy. The Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms states that God has to deal with humanity in two ways. In a sinful world with too much evil, God must shape order. Through *the realm of the world* and the law, God regu-

lates society and maintains his creation. Through *the realm of the Christian community*, with the church as the herald of the gospel, God grants salvation and restores the broken relation to humanity. This is God's twofold way of ruling the world.

The doctrine of the two kingdoms can be interpreted to imply that the church should not speak out on public issues. Behind what the Swedish theologian Thomas Ekstrand (2011) calls a "quietist-passive model" is a view that those who "carry the sword" do this on God's behalf. Thus, the church should "leave the care of politics to the worldly kingdom" (Ekstrand 2011, 125).

Lutheran churches are described as often "apolitical, at least in praxis" (Blåder 2015, 154). The discussion of this interpretation of the church's role in society intensified after World War II, during which the Lutheran churches were passive with regards to the Nazi authorities in Germany. This was not the case in Norway, where the bishop of Oslo, Eivind Berggrav, rejected the Nazi state's demand to be head of the Christian community because it violated God's will (Tønnessen 2011, 201). Berggrav's interpretation represents, then, another ideal-typical model of the two kingdoms doctrine. Ekstrand (2011) calls it "The Political Model."

Lutheran theologians today push for a more socially committed church. Its role is to remind governments of their God-given task to exercise "public stewardship of the common good" (LWF 2004, 3). One example is the Finnish Lutheran bishops' statement in 1999 about the welfare crisis in which the bishops describe the welfare state as a moral obligation based on Lutheran social ethics (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland 1999). Another example is the Swedish bishops engaging in the environmental debate (Church of Sweden 2014).

From a theological perspective, there is thus some space, at least in some interpretations, for a more assertive role of the Church of Sweden in engaging in advocacy activities.

## THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN BETWEEN SERVICE PROVISION AND CRITICAL VOICE

The institutional separation of the Church of Sweden from the state has been marked by its inclusion in the sphere of civil society (cf. Wijkström and Einarsson 2006; SCB 2010). As a sector, Swedish civil society has always been engaged in politics and in trying to achieve political influence, rather than providing services, especially in the social welfare arena (Olsson et al. 2009). Swedish civil society is described as mostly made up of popular mass movements with an emphasis on membership, volunteering, fostering citizenship and social relations, and strengthening democracy (e.g. Lundström and Wijkström 1997). Becoming part of a social sphere characterized by a strong advocacy function might have contributed to the eventual strengthening of the critical voice of the Church of Sweden.

The Church of Sweden, however, entered civil society at a time of important restructuring of the welfare system and a redefinition of the role that civil society is expected to play. In fact, a shift from "voice to service" has been highlighted in previous research about CSOs' roles in the Swedish welfare state (e.g. Lundström and Wijkström 2012). In the last two decades, the state has transferred responsibility for many social services to the market and to civil society through privatization and systems of contracting out services. Publicly

financed services provided by subcontracted private enterprises and CSOs have increased substantially in every welfare sector (Hartman 2011). Such development has highlighted a shift from the advocacy function of CSOs to the service function, and from the organizational input in terms of membership to the output in terms of what they can produce. Such development might thus have challenged the Church of Sweden when it comes to taking a more assertive role in public debate and policy-making.

The Church of Sweden has always been a service-providing institution. The parishes celebrate Sunday masses and offer liturgical services such as baptisms, funerals, and weddings. The diaconal (social) work is also a given task for a parish, but such work is decentralized and is coordinated neither at the national nor at the regional level. The parishes have been unwilling to establish themselves as “entrepreneurs” in the welfare services market that has been opened in recent decades.

Preschools, however, belong to a service category that exists in several (around 90) of the country’s congregations (SKU 2009, 2, 73). Investigations have made the assessment that “congregations should not go into heavier welfare tasks” (SKU 2009, 2, 154). The reason for this is organizational rather than normative. Accordingly, while a particular welfare task in itself may be relevant to the Church of Sweden, the congregations as organizations do not have a structure suitable for the demands that are placed on such activities. The task of contributing to the local reception of refugees has instead proven to be more suitable. During the period between autumn of 2015 and autumn 2016, according to surveys, eight out of ten parishes had pastoral activities for and with asylum seekers and newly arrived immigrants. More than 20,000 asylum seekers are estimated to have participated in the social gatherings of the parishes per month, and 8,000 volunteers have contributed to the implementation of wide-ranging activities (Hellqvist and Sandberg, 2017).

When it comes to the “voice” function of the Church of Sweden, previous research in Sweden has identified a tension between what people expect and the low profile and rather quiet voice of the Church (Bäckström 2001). In a questionnaire sent out after the separation of the Church of Sweden from the state, 1,200 people in a Swedish town were asked about the importance of the Church in the public debate and about the social issues in which it was involved (Yeung 2006a, 63). The results show that a majority of the respondents found it important that the Church of Sweden took part in the debate concerning the needs of people who had special forms of need and were especially vulnerable.

The problem was mentioned, however, that the Church of Sweden does not have *one* single voice in the public debate. The pluralistic character of the Church makes it difficult for its voice to be distinct, and a polemic role on the part of the Church of Sweden is difficult when the majority of the population are members because this means that the Church itself contains a variety of ideological and political views. The question, therefore, is which view should be represented as the voice of the Church of Sweden. In contrast, representatives of the public authorities who were interviewed articulated that they wanted the Church to be “more open and active in action as well as in the public debate” (Yeung 2006a, 50).



## THE CRITICAL VOICE OF MAJORITY CHURCHES IN A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

In comparative studies of majority churches in Europe as agents of welfare (Yeung 2006a, 2006b), we can also see similar ambiguities, but also different nuances. One question is about the issues the majority churches (are supposed to) elevate in public debate.

In Nordic countries, the Church is expected to take part in public debate on welfare issues, “as long as it does not interfere with party politics” (Edgardh and Pettersson 2010, 49; cf. Passi 2010, 87). In a case study from Norway, interviewees wanted the Church of Norway to be “the voice of the voiceless,” but the view is also held that the Church is relatively invisible in the public discourse, in spite of the positive ambitions of interviewed Church representatives (Angell and Wyller 2006, 111). A similar trend is evident in studies from Finland, England, and Germany (Yeung 2006c; Middlemiss 2009; Leis-Peters 2006). A slightly different pattern shows up in France with the internalized principles of *laïcité*. As one interviewee stated: “Religion has no place in politics” (Valasic 2006, 154).

The scope of legitimate issues for churches to advocate for is an interesting question. In an article about the changing shape of Catholicism in Europe, Enzo Pace (2007) elaborates a thesis that the Catholic Church communicates better in certain areas of social life than others. In a modern and increasingly individualistic society, it is difficult to raise a voice in political, economic, or sexual spheres. Joining in on the debate on welfare issues is tolerated better, and Pace mentions the case of vulnerable categories such as immigrants (Pace 2007, 44).

A Norwegian study of the leaders of religious and faith communities at the national and local level focused on these leaders’ attempts to influence politicians and officials (in the years 2008–2010) (Furseth 2015). The authors identified three types of question that were addresses in these “lobbying activities.” The first was the case of “religious policy” that could apply to the relationship between states and churches, including religious expressions such as circumcision or prayer rooms, as well as the terms of private schools. The second concerned organizational and administrative issues such as building permits and membership issues. The third identified question went beyond their own community organization and concerned immigration and refugee policies (Furseth 2015, 158). Local leaders also conducted lobbying aimed at decision makers. Here, it was about activities in the local community regarding economic conditions and subsidies for social activities (Furseth 2015, 163). Support for independent schools was another issue where local and national levels met.

Because the Church of Sweden shares its historical position vis-à-vis the state with the other Nordic countries, the results of this study might also apply to other Nordic countries. Along with other majority-based faiths, the Church of Sweden also shares the challenge of finding a new role (cf. Jeppsson Grassman 2001) in a more secularized society, but also in a multi-cultural society where other faiths have increasingly become the norm. In a sense, this study addresses the political role of religious organizations that have, as is often the case in many European countries, had an institutional role and a monopoly over the religious domain in society.

## METHOD AND DATA

The present study is based on a large quantitative dataset resulting from a national survey that received responses from 2,791 Swedish CSOs. The survey was carried out in 2012–2013 as part of the research program “Beyond the welfare state: Europeanization of Swedish civil society organizations (EUROCIV)” funded by the Swedish Research Council. While this study focuses on four specific categories of organizations in the data (the Church of Sweden, other religious organizations, solidarity organizations, and pensioners’ organizations), we will give a brief presentation of a few key methodological aspects of the whole survey study (for a more thorough description of the methodological aspects of the study, see Scaramuzzino and Wennerhag 2013).

### Sampling

The sample for the whole survey was based on the categories used by Statistics Sweden (SCB) in their register of Swedish organizations (Företagsregistret) that was used to obtain contact information and register data for Swedish CSOs. The original sample included two organizational forms – associations (*ideella föreningar*) and religious congregations (*registrerade trossamfund*). Among associations, only those registered as involved primarily in “social service and care” or “interest representation” were included.

Through these choices, the total population of CSOs included 80,015 associations, which can be said to represent approximately 40% of formally organized Swedish civil society because Swedish civil society includes about 217,000 formal organizations (SCB 2010).

Because the actual numbers of organizations differed significantly between the three categories constituting the study population, we decided to make a stratified sample so as not to end up with insufficient numbers of cases for some of the smaller categories. With this stratified sampling procedure, we gave the CSO categories different weights during the analysis so that the presented results of univariate and bivariate analyses would be the same as if we had analyzed a non-stratified sample.

The survey questionnaire was sent by mail to 6,180 randomly chosen Swedish CSOs, and 2,791 questionnaires were returned. Due to incorrect postal addresses and because some organizations had ceased to exist or had changed their associational form, some CSOs were excluded from the sample because they no longer belonged to the population, and the final response rate was 51.3%.

### Operationalization

The data analysis below includes only cases from the CSOs that are included in the four categories shown in table 1 and that had had any activities at all during 2012.



**Table 1.** Composition of the sample (non-weighted).

Categories	Frequency	Percent
The Church of Sweden	315	27.4
Other religious organizations	205	17.8
Solidarity organizations	551	47.9
Pensioners' organizations	79	6.9
Total	1,150	100.0

The categories follow a typology inspired by the one used by SCB in previous studies about associational life in Sweden (Vogel et al. 2003). The organizations have been classified by assessing the main focus of activity on the basis of the organization's name, information given in the survey about the organization's main goals and activities, and information found on the Internet (mostly the organizations' own websites).

The organizations included in the category *Church of Sweden* consist of local parishes, regional dioceses, and a central office at the national level. Comparing organizations belonging to the Church of Sweden with other CSOs is important in order to answer our research questions. *Other religious organizations* share with the Church of Sweden the function of organizing worship and include many different Christian and non-Christian faiths, such as Baptist, Catholic, Evangelical, Islamic, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodist, and Pentecostal organizations. *Solidarity organizations* in many ways belong to the same tradition as many religious organizations, with a focus on charity work and a broad engagement in social welfare issues. They are mostly engaged in diffuse interests (children, poverty, homelessness, etc.) and among these we find Amnesty International, Emmaus, Lions, the Red Cross, and Save the Children. *Pensioners' organizations* are instead part of the social movements that expanded with the development of the welfare state (cf. Feltenius 2008) together with, for instance, the disability movement. Their aim is to organize pensioners and represent them vis-à-vis the state on issues that matter to them such as pensions, elderly care, health care, and so on. They also offer a space for community and several activities for pensioners. The largest organizations are the Swedish National Pensioners' Organization and the Federation of Swedish Pensioners.

The first three types of organizations represent diffuse interests and are, in general, not built on the principle of self-organization. This means that they do not directly represent the interests of their constituencies. Diffuse interests are often considered more "... difficult to mobilise because individual constituents are randomly scattered in society and do not necessarily share a common social situation defined outside their control" (Beyers 2002, 589). Pensioners' organizations instead tend to organize pensioners in order to represent their specific interests as pensioners (cf. Beyers 2002). Pensioners' organizations have been chosen as a case of Swedish interest organizations because they are welfare-oriented, distributed over the entire country, present at all administrative levels, and have a strong critical voice function, but also a service function towards their members.

The comparison is presented in three parts addressing the three research questions. The first part of the analysis quantitatively addresses the first research question (RQ1) exploring

the extent of advocacy activities aiming at a) influencing politicians and officials and b) achieving changes. Advocacy is a concept that has received much attention in research (Neumayer, Schneider and Mayer 2013) and can be defined as "... activities that aim at influencing public opinion and policy processes or regulations, often on behalf of specific groups or interests" (Arvidson, Johansson and Scaramuzzino 2017, 5; see also Salamon, Sokolowski and List 2004; Mosley 2013). Advocacy activities can range from street protests to less contentious tactics such as lobbying. In the analysis, we compare advocacy activities, regardless of specific tactics used, between the four types of organization through the following two questions:

- a) "How often do you try to influence politicians or officials at the following levels of decision-making regarding issues that are central for your organization?" The sub-questions considered the local or municipal level and the national level. The alternatives presented were "Often," "Sometimes," "Seldom," "Never," and "Don't know." For the purpose of assessing to what extent the organizations have tried at all to influence these actors, we have dichotomized the responses by counting the first three alternatives as positive.
- b) "If your organization has tried to influence politicians or officials, how often have these efforts led to concrete changes at the following levels?" Here we considered the local and the national levels. The alternatives presented were "Often," "Sometimes," "Seldom," "Never," and "Don't know." This variable was also dichotomized following the same rationale.

The data on advocacy activities used in this article are based on the self-reporting of the organizations themselves through the survey. While this introduces an element of subjectivity to the study, it also allows us to address a large number of actors at different policy levels and in different policy fields.

The second part of the analysis aims at answering the second research question (RQ2) about the factors explaining differences in advocacy activities. Attempts to influence politicians or officials at the national and local level are the two dependent variables that are used in a binary logistic regression in which we test whether differences in advocacy behavior are explained by the type of organizations, or by a set of independent variables that might be relevant when explaining advocacy activities (see Arvidson, Johansson and Scaramuzzino 2017 for an overview of the factors). The regression analysis is preceded by a comparison of the four types of organizations based on the following independent factors:

*Organizational level* is studied through a variable defining the geographic level on which the organization is based.

*Membership base* is measured by the respondents' answer to the question, "How many members does your organization have?" The organizations, which are all membership-based associations, stated the number of individual members and organizational members

separately. We will consider the number of individual members and will present organizations with other organizations as members as “meta-organizations.”

*Employed staff* is measured by the question, “How many full-time employees does your organization have?” where the organizations stated the number of employees converted into full-time equivalents, i.e., the hours worked by one employee on a full-time basis. The concept is used to convert the hours worked by several part-time employees into the hours worked by full-time employees.

*Public financing* was measured by the question, “What share of your organization’s annual income comes from the state, region, or municipality?” The alternatives presented were “We do not get any support from these,” “1–25 percent,” “26–50 percent,” “51–75 percent,” “76–100 percent,” and “Don’t know.”

*Geographic position* is studied through the city in which the organization is based, and is understood to be in a big city if the organization is based in a city with more than 200,000 inhabitants.

The following third part of the analysis is qualitative and aims at answering the third research question (RQ3) on the types of issues raised and the changes achieved by the CSOs. To answer this question, we used the open-ended question asking: “In what ways has your influencing of politicians and officials led to concrete changes? Give examples.”

## ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES COMPARED

In Table 2, we compare the extent to which the four categories of CSOs have attempted to influence politicians and public officials at the local and national level (RQ1).

**Table 2.** CSOs that have tried to influence politicians and public officials (often, sometimes, or seldom) at the local and national levels (percentages).

Level	Church of Sweden	Other religious organizations	Solidarity organizations	Pensioners’ organizations	Total	Cramer’s V	
Local	80.0	60.9	59.3	91.9	70.9	.308	***
National	59.0	32.9	34.1	39.0	38.2	.173	**
Total N of analyzed cases	296	194–197	512–528	74–78	1,079–1,096		

† = 10% \* = 5%, \*\* = 1%, and \*\*\* = 0.1% significance

The table shows significant differences between the organizations. At the local level, more than 70 percent of the organizations have tried to influence politicians or public officials. Only pensioners’ organizations show a higher degree of political activity than the Church of Sweden. At the national level, the differences are smaller, and the Church of Sweden shows the highest level of activity (59%).

Another important measure of advocacy activity is the way in which such attempts have been deemed successful. Table 3 shows the extent to which the organizations perceive that such activities have led to concrete changes (RQ2).

**Table 3.** The attempt to influence has led to concrete changes (often, sometimes, or seldom) among those that have tried to exert influence (percentages).

Level	Church of Sweden	Other religious organizations	Solidarity organizations	Pensioners' organizations	Total	Cramer's V	
Local	92.9	67.6	87.3	84	82.2	.228	**
National	77.4	48.7	58.3	65.7	61.7	.214	†
Total N of analyzed cases	152–212	50–83	148–289	28–63	378–647		

† = 10% \* = 5%, \*\* = 1%, and \*\*\* = 0.1% significance

A majority of the organizations that have tried to influence at the local level have often, sometimes, or seldom achieved concrete changes. It is, however, striking that more than 90 percent of the organizations in the Church of Sweden perceive that they have done so. At the national level, the “success rates” are smaller, but they still show a quite high level of perceived success, especially for the organizations in the Church of Sweden.

This brief preliminary analysis suggests that the Church is more active in advocacy than other religious organizations and solidarity organizations. The advocacy activities of the Church of Sweden are comparable with those of an interest group organization such as a pensioners' organization at the local level. At the national level, the Church of Sweden is much more active than all three other categories. Furthermore, the organizations belonging to the Church perceive themselves as being more successful in achieving change than all the other categories.

## DIFFERENT RESOURCE BASES

Resources are often considered to be relevant for organizations' abilities to engage in advocacy and political strategies. Hence, we will compare the four categories of organizations when it comes to key features such as organizational level, membership base, paid staff, and public financing (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Some basic characteristics of the four categories of CSOs (percentages).

Some basic characteristics of the CSOs (%)	Church of Sweden	Other religious organizations	Solidarity organizations	Pensioners' organizations	Total (%)	Cramer's V	
Organizational level							
Local	98.5	88.1	80	97.6	89.5	.239	***
Regional	1.5	3.8	1.4	1.6	2.2	n.s.	
National	0	8.1	18.6	0.8	8.2	.267	***
Membership base							
Meta-organization	1.7	3.5	7.0	2.5	4	n.s.	
1–99 individuals	1.7	62.9	52.3	26.3	42.2	.429	***
100–999 individuals	11.9	28	35.9	60.2	36.6	.329	***
1000+ individuals	84.7	5.6	5.4	11	17.4	.694	***
No. of paid staff							
No paid staff	10.8	57.9	77.2	94.9	66.3	.547	***
Fewer than 5	9.4	38.8	17.9	5.1	20.5	.337	***
5 or more	80	3.8	4.9	0	13.4	.771	***
Public financing							
No public funding	53.6	63	69.3	15.3	51.5	.436	***
1–50% public funding	42.9	36.1	22.1	78.8	43.6	.440	***
51–100% public funding	3.5	0.7	8.6	5.9	4.8	.150	*
Organization in a big city (>200,000 inhabitants)	4.6	6.3	17.2	22.8	13.4	.214	***
Total N of analyzed cases	155–167	60–72	99–112	52–56	1595–1786		

†= 10% \* = 5%, \*\* = 1%, \*\*\* = 0.1% significance and n.s. = non significant

Table 4 shows significant differences between the organizations in our sample. The Church of Sweden is primarily organized at the local level in the same way as pensioners' organizations (more than 95%). Other religious organizations and solidarity organizations include more organizations at the national level (8.1% and 18.6% respectively). Most of the organizations in the sample (89.5%) are, however, locally based.

When it comes to membership, we find that the Church of Sweden has a much stronger membership base than all other organizations in the sample. Even if pensioners' organizations also have a strong membership, with more than 60 percent of organizations ranging between 100 and 999 individuals, it is striking that almost 85 percent of organizations within the Church have more than 1,000 members.

In addition, the level of professionalization differs between the types of organizations. Religious organizations are to a higher degree professionalized, while a large majority of solidarity organizations and pensioners' organizations rely on a voluntary non-paid workforce. The fact that almost 90 percent of the organizations in the Church of Sweden have employees is consistent with the way in which the Church is organized, as described earlier in this article.

The Church of Sweden seems also to be less dependent on public funding if we compare it with the pensioners' organizations, among which only a small minority (15.3%) do not receive any public funding. It is, however, more dependent on public funding than other religious organizations and solidarity organizations.

Finally, the number of organizations that are located in the three big cities in Sweden (Gothenburg, Malmö, and Stockholm) suggest a much more even geographic distribution of religious organizations, and, in particular, those of the Church, than of solidarity organizations and of pensioners' organizations. Here we find a clear connection to the requirement set by law for the Church of Sweden to be present in every part of the country.

These differences might be important for explaining different patterns of advocacy activities.

## FACTORS BEHIND DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

In this section, we will test the independent variables presented against the types of organizations so as to assess whether differences in advocacy activities are related to organizational type or to single organizational factors (RQ2). We present this analysis in a binary logistic regression (Table 5) with two models, one for each dependent variable, i.e. the CSO has tried often, sometimes, or seldom to influence politicians or public officials at the local or at the national level.

**Table 5.** Factors influencing political activities at different levels.

	Try to influence the local level		Try to influence the national level	
	S.E.	Exp(B)	S.E.	Exp(B)
<i>Category of CSO (Church of Sweden ref.)</i>				
Other religious organizations	.419	.888	.368	.818
Solidarity organizations	.401	.967	.348	.801
Pensioners' organizations	.624	3.575*	.440	.821
<i>Membership base (1–99 members ref.)</i>				
0 members or meta-organization	.476	2.100	.403	1.359
100–999 members	.194	2.160***	.200	1.601*
1,000 or more members	.358	1.952†	.316	1.728†
<i>Employed staff (no employed staff ref.)</i>				
Fewer than 5 employees	.217	1.133	.206	1.527*
5 or more employees	.368	1.975†	.316	2.786**
<i>Dependency on public support as share of the budget (no public support ref.)</i>				
Public financing 1–50 percent	.199	2.995***	.169	2.470***
Public financing 51–100 percent	.443	5.733***	.334	4.093***
<i>Organizational level (local ref.)</i>				
Regional level	.807	2.552	.546	1.647
National level	.297	.338***	.282	2.196**
<i>Geographic distribution</i>				
Organization in a big city	.316	.944	.271	1.502
Constant	.414	.846	.373	.221
Observations	922		912	
Nagelkerke R square	.235		.233	

†= 10% \* = 5%, \*\* = 1%, and \*\*\* = 0.1% significance

The binary logistic regression analyses above suggest that, when taking into consideration a set of background variables, organizations belonging to the Church of Sweden are not more likely to be active in advocacy at the local level than other religious organizations or solidarity organizations. Pensioners' organizations, however, are 3.5 times more likely to try to influence politicians or public servants at the local level. At the national level, there are no significant differences between the Church of Sweden and the other types of organizations. The regression shows that other variables measuring organizational features explain differences in advocacy activity. Organizations with many members are more likely to try to influence at both the local and national level. Organizations with higher levels of professionalization are also more likely to be active in advocacy, especially at the national



level. As shown previously, many organizations belonging to the Church of Sweden have a larger membership and more employed staff than organizations belonging to the other types. Large shares of public funding are also a good predictor of advocacy activity at both levels, something that we find among pensioners' organizations. Logically, organizations at the national level are less likely to influence the local level, but are more likely to influence the national level than local organizations. Organizations within the Church of Sweden are to a much larger extent local compared with the other types, as previously discussed. Geographic distribution (i.e. being an organization in a big city) does not seem to affect political activity at any level.

These results do not challenge the fact that organizations belonging to the Church of Sweden are more active in advocacy than other comparable religious organizations and solidarity organizations at the local level and are most active among the four types at the national level (as shown in Table 2). This shows, however, that such activism is more a consequence of a large membership base, employed staff, and a strong presence at the local level than of being part of the Church of Sweden as such.

### THE ISSUES RAISED

The following analysis is qualitative and is based on the answers by the organizations to an open-ended question in the questionnaire asking about what changes they have achieved and to provide examples ( $N = 336$ ). Far from all organizations chose to give examples, and it was not stated at which level these changes have been achieved. We do not know on what basis these examples have been chosen, and it is hence difficult to assess whether and to what extent these are representative for the organizations and cannot be used to explain different levels of success in achieving change. Moreover, we do not know what issues they have raised that have not led to concrete changes. We argue, however, that they still give some insight into some of the issues the different types of organizations work with and, hence, are meaningful to compare (RQ3).

In the answers from the respondents in the Church of Sweden, they specify two issues at the policy level. The most dominant is the Swedish policies on refugees and asylum seekers. Here the "Easter Call" is mentioned, which was a campaign for a general amnesty for refugees initiated by the Christian Council of Sweden in 2005 with the Lutheran Archbishop as a prominent actor (Axner 2013). Another "Easter Call" from 2011 is mentioned, and this dealt with the consequences of changes in the health insurance system. The answers relating to the local level are more diversified. For instance, "Community planning" is mentioned as well as schools, e.g., "stopped the closure of a school." Individual cases of asylum are also mentioned as "vulnerable people's rights towards authorities." Another answer mentions "help for drug abusers."

We also find answers concerning relations to other actors, with the collaboration between church and school, and the rules and conditions for preschools run by the Church of Sweden on behalf of the municipalities, being common issues in the answers from the Church's organizations. The refugee and migration issues are also made visible in this context as migration generates more diversity in terms of religious faiths present on the territory, e.g., "we work together with the local authorities on interreligious issues."

Among the answers from the Church's informants, we also find issues related to the Church of Sweden itself and to "Church Politics," e.g., "The State Church became a Free Church," "The burial task is discussed," "Transfigured churches," and the future organization and structure of the Church. Here are also answers about how to conserve and protect "historical and rich cultural places" and how "a fusion of congregations was stopped."

The free answers from other religious organizations concern, at the policy level, international questions such as the support for persecuted groups in Iran, rape victims in the Congo, and Christian minorities in the Middle East and the defense of their rights. Other human rights issues that the organizations advocate concern freedom of religion and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the local level, social interventions are mentioned and that "An asylum request was accepted." Here, too, the impacts on policies concerning the religious organization itself are mentioned, e.g. the acknowledgement of free churches as religious communities in the legislation from 2000, as well as the right to perform marriages and tax-related issues. Other issues raised concern the grants from authorities for social work activities by the organization or state contributions to salaries and adjustments for people with disabilities.

The solidarity organizations naturally show a wider variation in their answers because these actors are engaged in a variety of interests. The answers mirror the fact that these organizations act both in the global community and at the local level. International issues concern the development of peace and democracy in the Horn of Africa, Western Sahara's fishing agreement, and the situation of Christian groups in countries where they are persecuted. In local politics, the answers highlight tax rules for CSOs and improved criteria for tendering procedures. A major issue is children and their rights, which probably mirrors the fact that several local associations of Save the Children answered the questionnaire. Child poverty is an issue that is raised in several answers. One result of this activism is described as "Children will not be excluded from participating in school field trips for economic reasons." The Convention on the Rights of the Child is both brought up as a goal and as a means for influence – it is a *goal* when actors advocate the implementation of the convention at the local and national level, and it is a *means* when some organization has "given comments on children's opportunities that have been noticed in the budget process." Human rights issues are also raised in the demands for the right to health care for undocumented migrants. Other issues relate to a critical stand on the arms trade, shareholding in arms industries, international labor union relations, ethics certifications, and so on. The political activism is in many cases directed towards the local community. The establishment of a Children's Center ("barnahus") for abused children is mentioned in several answers. The reception of refugees, and especially refugee children without parents, is another prominent response. One reported result of political activism is support for the elderly in the local community with the help of volunteers. Another is increased attention to child poverty issues in the municipality.

Another category of answers concerns the organizations' own affairs, including the need for building facilities, making agreements, and the benefits of membership. In relation to other actors – often the municipality – many examples of the results of collaborations are given. These include links to the homepage of the municipality, cooperation with staff in elderly care or the social services, and new agencies and facilities. A special category of

responses concerning the relation between the solidarity organization and external actors is about grants. One response states: "Better understanding of what the problem is has given [the organization] extra grants." What the problem was in this case is not presented, but it gave results. Contrary to the voices of increased understanding, one of the responses stated: "The volunteer agency of the municipality competes with us for volunteers."

The issues of elderly care and the situation of elderly people are, as expected, dominating the answers from the pensioners' organizations. They refer both to the policy level, discussing taxes and living conditions, and the local level, where we find issues related to regulations on accessibility for people with disabilities, grants to associations, and housing for elderly people. Some issues are very specific, for example, "Stopped the closing of the thermal bath after a petition," "organizing safety walks," "benches to sit on," or "the placing of public toilets and bus stops." Several answers concern *the way of* influencing policies, and the pensioner's councils in the local municipalities are indicated as an important arena for raising issues.

When reading the free answers, we can discern some themes or patterns. There are certain programs for advocacy and political activism concerning what we can call "Organization identity issues." The pensioner organizations point to the needs and status of the older population in society. Among the solidarity organizations, we can see that Save the Children has had a focus on children's rights and on a specific program for implementing "Children's Centers" in Swedish municipalities. Among the informants in the Church of Sweden, the Easter Calls have made a prominent impact. The other religious organizations are active in several issues, and many of them can be related to human rights, e.g. freedom of religion. Another theme or category relates to the environmental conditions for their own organization. Often this is about grants and other kinds of support, but it can also concern activities such as the preschools run by CSOs.

The distribution of the answers shows that pensioners' organizations have mostly achieved changes on issues that relate to their target group, i.e. on pensioners' interests. The other types seem more often to achieve changes related to their own organization than on policy issues. The pensioners' organizations seem, for instance, less engaged in advocating for better funding conditions. Also, the Church of Sweden, which has its financial base in membership fees, does not put much effort into advocating for other incomes. That said, we can read about requests from the local church to the municipality concerning a Christian preschool. All in all, we can see that public resource dependency triggers advocacy activities geared to the organizational conditions.

The answers given relate to different levels, and this probably reflects the level of the informant's position. We can read answers about advocacy on a policy level at the national and sometimes at the global level. In another answer, we read about the local baths or the placing of benches. The interaction between inter-organizational levels is a question that cannot be addressed with our data, but would be relevant for further studies.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our premise that the Church of Sweden is not as active in advocacy as other comparable CSOs finds no support in our analysis. Organizations belonging to the Church of Sweden are in general more active than organizations belonging to other religious congregations and solidarity organizations. The extent of their advocacy activities is comparable to that of interest organizations that we were assuming to be much more active. However, when we take account of relevant organizational factors, including resources, dependency on public funding, geographic level of activity, and distribution, we find that organizations belonging to the Church of Sweden are no more likely to be active in advocacy than comparable organizations.

When we also consider the issues raised by the Church of Sweden, they seem to show a pattern of advocacy activities similar to that of other religious organizations and of solidarity organization, while pensioners' organizations differ significantly. The choice of focusing on the refugees' rights issue, which is a particularly sensitive topic at present, might be seen as an expression of a new assertive role taken by the Church or as a sign of a Church still struggling to find its place in a multi-cultural and secularized society. Furthermore, the focus on issues of refugees' rights is evident also in previous research of majority churches from other countries, as discussed earlier.

Coming back to the special relationship between the Church of Sweden and the state, we would argue that this legacy is most clearly visible in the extensive organizational capacity maintained by the Church in terms of membership and staff, less dependence from public funding, and a strong local presence. Some of these factors seem to give the Church a stronger voice than comparable organizations. Hence, we might argue that the institutional role of the Church of Sweden does not hamper its advocacy activities but rather enables them. Furthermore, it is possible that a theological interpretation close to the "Political Model" (Ekstrand 2011) is accepted and supported, thus legitimizing an active role of the Church in advocacy. In addition, the trend "from voice to service" does not seem to affect the advocacy activities of the Church of Sweden, at least not more so than the other CSOs. All in all, the image of a "tamed" and co-opted Church that is more part of the state than of civil society finds no support, and the Church of Sweden of the new millennium seems to be able to use its resources and institutional role to engage in Swedish politics.

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