

The extent of corruption in Sweden may be underestimated

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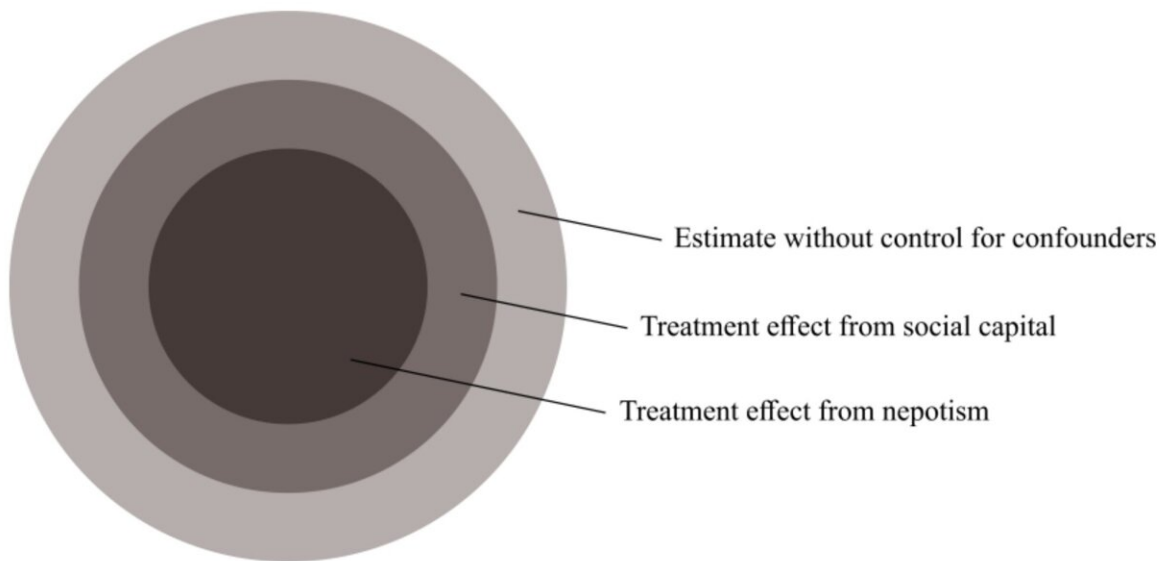


Illustration of the principle underlying ‘corruption risk’, as applied to nepotism. A measured treatment effect at the tie level can either be explained by pure nepotism or by other uses of social capital such as the dissemination of information. Credit: Corruption risks in a mature democracy: Mechanisms of social advantage and danger zones for corruption (2023). DOI: 10.3384/9789180750073

There is a risk that individuals may benefit from having relatives in important posts in the public sector. This is shown in a doctoral thesis at Linköping University that investigates corruption in a mature

democracy. The conclusion is that nepotism may be an underestimated problem that deserves more attention in Sweden.

Sweden is usually classed as a country with a low degree of corruption. This is correct when looking at, for instance, the number of bribery convictions.

However, critics claim that the extent of corruption may still be underestimated, as rankings may miss forms of corruption that are harder to detect and have a less obvious impact on people's daily lives. One example of this is when politicians or [public officials](#) make decisions that unlawfully benefit their friends or relatives, i.e., what is known as nepotism or friendship corruption.

To investigate this, Emanuel Wittberg, in his [doctoral thesis](#), has analyzed records data for the entire Swedish population, relating to for instance workplace, educational level and family relationships.

The results show that individuals whose parents or siblings work for public agencies or public landlords have a greater chance of getting a job or a flat. There are also indications that [local businesses](#) may be favored in public procurements.

"Both when it comes to housing owned by any given municipal landlord and jobs in any given municipality or [government agency](#), we're talking about a 2 to 4 percent increased chance," says Emanuel Wittberg, a doctoral student at the Institute for Analytical Sociology and the Centre for Local Government Studies at Linköping University.

According to Emanuel Wittberg, this difference is statistically significant.

There may of course be many explanations for this other than nepotism.

Individuals may differ in backgrounds, drives, preferences and knowledge about how society functions, and this may affect the results. To weed out such factors, Emanuel Wittberg has compared individuals who are similar but some of whom have contacts and others not.

In spite of this, it is not possible to eliminate uncertainty, as the records data do not contain all information. He therefore points out that the results show where there may be a risk of nepotism, although it is not possible to determine that nepotism is involved in each individual case.

"My thesis indicates that this is a problem that is relevant to study and keep your eyes on, also in a mature democracy like Sweden."

There is a risk that corruption may erode citizens' confidence in public agencies. In Emanuel Wittberg's opinion, this can be avoided by ensuring transparency, so that decisions can be reviewed. There may also be a need for more awareness training and better procedures, such as anonymizing job applications to a greater extent.

Emanuel Wittberg says that what is special about his thesis is not only that it investigates [corruption](#) in a mature democracy but also the method used: analysis of large-scale data. His investigation includes many individuals, organizations and businesses, analyzed over a long period of time. According to him, the results are a first step towards getting an idea of the risk of large-scale [nepotism](#).

More information: Emanuel Wittberg, Corruption risks in a mature democracy: Mechanisms of social advantage and danger zones for corruption, (2023). [DOI: 10.3384/9789180750073](https://doi.org/10.3384/9789180750073)

www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/.../36370/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Provided by Linköping University

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