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David Arter

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Personal representation or party representation? Elections in the autonomous Åland Islands

David Arter

Faculty of Management, Tampere University, Tampereen yliopisto, Finland

ABSTRACT

For an electorate numbering under 21,000 persons, voters in the autonomous Åland islands are remarkably well represented. They vote in Finnish general elections, presidential elections and European Parliament elections; they vote for a 30-seat regional assembly, the *Lagting*; and they vote for one of the 16 municipal councils on the islands. For *Lagting* elections there is one MP for barely seven-hundred voters. This low MP-voter ratio, when taken together with open-list PR electoral rules enabling citizens to cast a personal vote, and a broad consensus over Åland's self-governing status, would appear to militate against the need for party representation. Yet Ålanders are today served by an institutionalised party system which, while reflecting Scandinavian influences, is distinctive in its own right. Accordingly, this report poses three basic questions: (i) When and why did an Åland party system emerge? (ii) To what extent does it resemble the classical 'Scandinavian party system model'? (iii) What does the most recent 2019 *Lagting* election indicate about the balance between personal representation and party representation?

KEYWORDS Åland; Finland; party systems; personal vote; micro-polity

Introduction

From a League of Nations ruling in 1921, Åland has been an autonomous, neutral and demilitarised region of Finland, which has Swedish as its official language. The 1922 Autonomy Act, revised in 1951 and 1991, states that Finland undertakes to guarantee Åland's language, culture and Swedish traditions. Strict land acquisition legislation, moreover, has been designed to allay the Ålanders' fears of 'denationalisation' and a loss of identity at the hands of Finnish migration to the islands (Williams 2018). An amendment to the 1951 Autonomy Act added an extra criterion to the existing requirements of Finnish nationality and a five-year residency period for the 'right of

CONTACT David Arter  david.arter@tuni.fi  Faculty of Management, Tampere University, Pinni A 4054, 33104 Tampereen yliopisto, Finland

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domicile' (*åländsk hembygdsrätt*), a type of Åland citizenship. There should also be an adequate knowledge of the Swedish language. Historically, the Swedish connection has been strong. Sweden conceded Åland (along with Finland) to Russia after the 1808–1809 war, but the collapse of Czarism led the Ålanders in August 1917 to seek a reunion with Sweden, a move later opposed by the newly-independent Finland. The dispute was taken up by the League of Nations which ultimately came down in favour of Finland. Swedish influence, however, remains strong. Ålanders frequently watch Swedish television whilst young Ålanders may well study in Sweden in preference to a university or college on the Finnish mainland. Yet a survey in 2020 revealed that only 4 per cent on the islands wanted Åland to become part of Sweden, whilst in an Åland Gallup poll the previous year, 80.4 per cent of respondents said they would support Finland and 19.6 per Sweden, if and when Finland and Sweden met in an ice-hockey match.¹

Since 1984 Åland has boasted many of the symbols of sovereignty – its own flag, its own stamps and its own police force and it even organised its own referendum in 1994 in connection with Finland's application for European Union membership (as well as participating in the EU membership referendum organised by the Finnish government). Åland is also an independent member of the 87-strong consultative Nordic Council. Importantly, Åland has its own legislature and unique party system. Between the two world wars the Home Rule movement dominated Åland politics and Julius Sundblom, its leader and the so-called 'King of Åland', was strongly opposed to political parties. It was not until 1979 that the Lagting Speaker was elected from the largest party group and there developed the practice of party spokespersons making statements in the budget debate. The following year the Lagting amended its work procedures so that seating in plenary sessions was organised on a party basis rather than alphabetically as earlier. It is the 'whys' and 'wherefores' of this party politicisation of the Lagting – and the elections to it – that is the focus of this report. Three basic questions are addressed: (i) when and why did a party system emerge in Åland? (ii) to what extent did/does it resemble the classical five-party 'Scandinavian party system model'? (Berglund and Lindström 1978); (iii) what does the most recent 2019 Lagting election indicate about the balance between personal representation and party representation (Colomer 2011)?

The structure of the paper is as follows. The opening section describes the electoral context of multi-level Åland representation. The following section traces the contours of party system institutionalisation and offers brief profiles of the party actors. The focus then shifts to the 2019 Lagting election campaign, an analysis of the election result and a discussion of how personal

representation co-exists alongside party representation. The conclusion brings together the main points.

The electoral context

For an electorate numbering under 21,000 persons, Ålanders are remarkably well represented. They are entitled to cast a ballot in Finnish general elections, Finnish presidential elections and Finnish elections to the European Parliament; they vote in regional elections to the 30-seat Lagting and at the same time they vote for one of the sixteen municipal councils on the islands. Since 1948 Åland has constituted a single member constituency for the 200-seat Finnish Eduskunta, the elections to which take place in April every four years. Contesting Finnish parliamentary elections can serve as a useful way in which Åland parties can profile their candidates and programmes before the Lagting election in October the same year. Turnout at general elections on Åland has been generally substantially lower than for Finland as a whole (Sundberg and Sjöblom 2021). In 2019 59.7 per cent of Ålanders voted compared with 72.1 per cent of all Finns living in Finland.

In the same way as for Eduskunta elections, Åland functions as a single constituency for Lagting elections. All those who are 18 years on the election date and have the 'right of domicile' have the right to vote. For both Finnish general elections and Åland regional elections, an open-list PR voting system is employed. Citizens [are obliged to] cast a ballot for a single candidate on one of the party lists; the aggregate list poll determines the allocation of seats to the list; and the seats are then assigned on the basis of individual preference votes.

Party system institutionalisation: From the 'Åland party' to Åland parties

The overriding concern in Åland from the 1920s onwards has been to promote and protect the self-government of the islands, something over which there has been a broad political consensus. At Finnish parliamentary elections in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, only the small radical leftist People's Democrats stood outside the pro-autonomy electoral alliance, the Åland Coalition (*Åländsk Samling* -ÅS), which in turn was dominated by the non-socialists. Their candidates regularly polled over 90 per cent of the regional vote and in practice held a 'safe seat' in the Eduskunta (Törnudd 1968). However, with Åland's home rule not threatened, the 'Åland Party', the ÅS, gave way in the late 1960s and 1970s to an embryonic system of cleavage-based Åland parties (Wrede and Wrede 1982, 128).

Until the late 1970s, Åland politics was predominantly personalised – centred on a few prominent individuals – within the Åland Coalition, albeit

that this contained two sections, ÅS 1 for the non-socialists, and ÅS 2 for the Social Democrats. Anckar and Anckar (2000) found that democracy can function smoothly without parties in the six microstates they studied. Why, then, when the electorate in 1979 comprised only 15,907 voters, did a distinct Åland party system develop?

The motor of party system institutionalisation in Åland was rapid social structural change. Accelerated urbanisation led to a substantial growth in the capital Mariehamn. In 1921 Mariehamn made up 6 per cent of Åland's population whereas by the early 1980s it accounted for 42 per cent. There was a corresponding process of out-migration from the archipelago as a rural society became increasingly service-based. By the early 1980s 82 per cent of Åland's regional product was generated by services (Mattsson 1983). Economic development became more uneven and geographic and social mobility increased. Trade unions had developed after the Second World War but, along with a range of interest groups, became much stronger in the 1970s. Mass tourism increased contacts with neighbouring countries, particularly Sweden. Through television, moreover, Swedish society and politics were transmitted into Åland homes.

All in all, personality-based politics gave way to party politics and by the late 1970s there emerged an Åland variant of the standard five-party 'Scandinavian party system' model (Berglund and Lindström 1978), that is, a bifurcated left and a fragmented non-socialist bloc. Table 1 presents the Åland party system model, 1979-2019. There were none the less distinctive differences in the relative strengths of the parties compared with Åland's neighbours.

First, unlike Sweden and mainland Finland, a non-socialist party, either the Centre or Liberals, and not the Social Democrats, has consistently been the largest Åland party. The Åland Centre (*Åländsk centern*), founded in 1976, was modelled on the Agrarian-Centre parties in the other Nordic countries

Table 1. The Åland party system model, 1979-2019%.

Year	Social Democrats	Centre	Liberals	Freeminded Cooperation/ Moderates	Non-Aligned Coalition	Total %
1979	12.1	42.3	29.6	13.9	–	97.9
1983	16.5	35.6	28.9	16.6	–	97.6
1987	14.0	28.7	23.7	17.3	7.0	90.7
1991	14.6	30.2	22.9	19.8	9.7	97.2
1995	15.3	27.8	26.6	20.6	9.8	100.0
1999	11.8	27.3	28.7	14.5	12.8	95.1
2003	19.0	24.1	24.1	13.6	9.4	90.2
2007	11.8	24.2	22.6	11.4	12.3	82.3
2011	18.5	23.7	20.3	14.0*	12.6	89.1
2015	15.8	21.6	23.3	17.9**	9.6	88.2
2019	9.2	27.8	19.7	13.8	13.6	84.1
Average	14.4	28.5	24.6	15.8	10.8	94.1

*Moderates, **Moderate Coalition

and it was launched at a time when the Centre was the largest non-socialist party in Sweden and held the post of prime minister. Most of the early activists had been involved in the Rural and Archipelago Electoral Alliance (*landsbygdens och skärgårdens valförbund* – LOS) within the ÅS but there were also those not previously involved in politics. An Åland 'Young Centre' was created in 1977 and a Women's Organisation in 1988. The Åland Centre gained 42.3 per cent at its first election in 1979² and it has been the largest party in eight of the eleven Lagting elections between 1979 and 2019, averaging 28.5 per cent over the period.

Second, the Åland Liberals (*Liberalerna på Åland*), founded in 1978, was the largest party in 1999 and 2015 and it has been substantially and consistently stronger than its Swedish counterpart – averaging 24.6 per cent between 1979 and 2019. In contrast, on the Finnish mainland the Liberals disappeared as a parliamentary party in the early 1980s. The Åland Liberals profile themselves as a centrist party and their strength has been in the capital Mariehamn where they have claimed approaching one-quarter of the vote.

Next, unlike Sweden and Finland, Åland has been represented by not one, but two mainstream parties on the political right – Free-minded Co-operation (*Frisinnad Samverkan*), founded in 1967, which changed its name to Moderates in 2011, and the Non-Aligned Coalition (*Obunden Samling*) which was formed in 1987. The two parties merged before the 2015 Lagting election. However, the Non-Aligned Coalition resurfaced when one of its founder-members, Bert Häggblom, returned to recreate the party with new members.

Finally, the political left on Åland has been notably weak in Nordic perspective. The grounds for political discontent were weaker on the small fishing boats than in the large factories on the Finnish and Swedish mainland; the proportion of Åland blue-collar workers was much smaller than elsewhere in Scandinavia; and class differences were insignificant. Since 1979 the Social Democrats (*Ålands Socialdemokrater*), Åland's oldest party, has never managed as much as one-fifth of the popular vote, less than half that of its illustrious Swedish sister party in its heyday in the 1960s. The Åland party's roots date back to the creation of a Workers' Association in Mariehamn in January 1906 although in its modern guise the Social Democratic Party was founded in 1971.

Immediately after the Second World War, the Communist-dominated People's Democrats (*Folkdemokraterna*) on Åland outpolled the Social Democrats. At the Lagting election in 1948 the People's Democrats gained 6.0 per cent of the vote compared with 3.5 per cent for the Social Democrats. By 1960 the tables were turned and the Social Democrats within the Åland Coalition (*Åländsk Samling 2*) stood on 19.9 per cent as against 4.7 per cent for the People's Democrats. The People's Democrats fell to 2.4 per cent in 1983 and have not contested Lagting elections since. The demise of the radical left, however, has not materially boosted the Social Democrats' vote-share,

which has averaged 14.4 per cent over the eleven Lagting elections between 1979 and 2019.

A GAL-TAN party system dimension

The Åland variant of the Scandinavian party system model described above – that is, parties ranged on a left-right continuum from a relatively weak Social Democratic Party to two dominant centrist parties and a fragmented right – has remained a core feature of the Lagting party system. However, mirroring the advance of so-called ‘new politics’ parties in Finland and Sweden in the late 1980s, the Åland party system has incorporated post-materialist and nationalist parties best located along a GAL (Green-Alternative-Libertarian) – TAN (Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist) axis. The result has been a number of high volatility elections when measured by the Pedersen index (the percentage gains of the winning parties) (Pedersen 1979). For example, this stood at 17 per cent in 1987 when three new parties gained 16.3 per cent of the vote (Söderlund 2008). Certainly by the turn of the new millennium, the Åland party system had become less unidimensional and more polarised. Since 2003 two nationalist parties, Ålands Future and Åland Democracy, have averaged a combined 8.7 per cent of the poll.

Ålands Future (*Ålands Framtid-ÅF*) has as its long-term goal the independence of the Åland islands. Åland would become a sovereign, neutral and demilitarised microstate. The party also seeks to protect Åland’s Swedish heritage – its mother-tongue and culture – claiming, among other things, that it is no longer possible for the Åland authorities to communicate with their Finnish counterparts in Swedish (Kontro 2021) although Finland is officially bilingual. The Åland Democracy (*Åländsk Demokrati-AD*), founded before the 2015 Lagting election, shares the cultural nationalism of ÅF but has been explicitly anti-immigrant, pointing to Sweden as a negative template of the ‘multicultural society model’. In many ways ÅD is a ‘personal party’ (McDonnell 2013), the instrument of its founder and only Lagting member, Stephan Toivanen, who also ran for the Finnish Eduskunta in the Åland constituency at the April 2019 general election.

In 1987, the year the Finnish Greens gained 4 Eduskunta seats with 4 per cent of the vote, the Greens on Åland polled 6.7 per cent and claimed two Lagting seats. The following year the Swedish Greens broke into the Riksdag with 5.5 per cent of the vote. Åland in short mirrored the advance of environmental-niche parties in its near neighbours. However, the Greens on Åland lost their Lagting seats four years later and an environmental party, in the shape of the Sustainable Initiative (*Hållbart Initiativ*), did not gain parliamentary representation until 2019. Table 2 sets out the representation of minor parties in the Åland Lagting between 1979 and 2019.

Table 2. Minor party representation in the Åland Lagting, 1979-2019%.

Election Year	People's Democrats	Greens	Nationalists	Other
1979	2.2	–	–	–
1983	2.4	–	–	–
1987	–	6.7	2.6	–
1991	–	2.9	–	–
1995	–	–	–	–
1999	–	–	–	4.8*
2003	–	–	6.5	3.4*
2007	–	–	8.3	1.2
2011	–	–	9.9	1.1
2015	–	0.8**	11.0	–
2019	–	8.3**	7.6	–

*The Åland Progress Group (*ÅlandsFramstegsgrupp*), a splinter from Freeminded Co-operation. **Sustainable Initiative

The development of the Åland party system was reflected in the shift to majority parliamentarism in 1988, since this meant that voters were able better to influence the composition of the post-election executive. Before 1988 the executive (*landskapsstyrelsen*) was constituted, Swiss-style, in proportion to the strength of the Lagting parties *en bloc*. Thereafter, Government and Opposition were clearly demarcated – the Åland executive was renamed Ålands government (*landskapregering*) in 2004- and voters thus given a meaningful choice.

The 2019 Lagting election campaign

The 2019 Lagting election campaign was dominated by two main issues. First, there was the commitment of the governing Liberal-Moderates-Social Democrat coalition, which with 17 of the 30 Lagting seats had only a narrow parliamentary majority, to reform the structure of municipal administration. Second, there was the issue of the need to improve transport links to the archipelago. The latter was essentially a question of whether to build a tunnel or commission a new ferry to the island of Föglö. There were also plans for those persons with the right of domicile but located outside Åland to have the opportunity to cast an internet vote. However, on October 9, only 19 min before web-voting was due to commence, the Central Electoral Council called off the process because, it was said, the secrecy of the ballot could not be guaranteed.

On the question of municipal reform, the Centre, which lost its longstanding position as the largest party in 2015, profiled itself as opposed to the government proposal to reduce the number of municipalities from 16-4. The Social Democrats and Moderates in particular held that many municipalities were too small to provide the services legally required of them. Out of the 10 smallest municipalities in Finland, 8 were situated in Åland. Indeed, there were those who favoured creating a single municipality for the whole of

the islands. A problem was that whilst health care had been transferred from the municipalities to the regional authority in 2003, responsibility for social services, including care for the elderly, continued to rest with the municipalities, many of which struggled to meet the costs.³ The case for rationalising the municipal tier of administration was overwhelming – Sottunga municipality, for example, comprised under 100 inhabitants – but the Centre exploited what was seen as the government’s heavy-handed approach to implementing the reform. In an interview in the newspaper *Ålandstidning* during the campaign, the Centre leader Veronica Thörnroos committed her party to preventing enforced municipal mergers and also to investigating the feasibility of a tunnel to Föglö.

Unlike 2015 immigration was not a central campaign theme. There was a recognition among the mainstream parties that Åland was experiencing a labour shortage and that foreign workers were necessary. Equally, the mix of Estonians, Latvians, Romanians and Belarussians employed in Åland offered some scope for the nationalist parties, particularly when they could note that there were no less than 64 different languages in use on the islands. On the eve of polling, an article produced by the Finnish broadcasting company, YLE (Hertzberg 2019) noted that in the agricultural municipality of Vårdö in the archipelago, the population had increased by 4.2 per cent as a consequence of immigration and that 9 per cent of the population had Latvian as its mother-tongue.

The manifestos of the mainstream Åland parties were available on modern websites – along with a gallery of candidates –and, typically, they were rich in generalities rather than specifics. ‘We work for a strong Åland with the maximum amount of self-determination’ (Moderates); a prosperous Åland whether you live in the archipelago, countryside or Mariehamn (Centre, Non-Aligned Coalition); a sustainable Åland based on innovative environmental technology (Sustainable Initiative); an Åland that supports enterprise as the basis for job creation and good quality care (all parties). The Moderates were clear that large municipalities could provide for better services whilst the Non-Aligned Coalition sought to attract more tourists and eek out the tourist season. Perhaps the most detailed manifesto came from the Liberals which advocated, among other things, support for the construction of social housing for seniors, e-health provision and the need for a supply of persons fluent in Finnish and other languages in order, if necessary, to speak to patients and children in their mother-tongue.⁴

For voters with GAL inclinations – much anticipation surrounded the prospects of the Sustainable Initiative (HI) which registered as a political party only four months before the 2019 Lagting election. Its election manifesto entitled ‘The Time for Fine Words is Over’ contained a set of ten pledges including action to reduce Baltic Sea pollution, to develop a sustainable

Table 3. The 2019 Lagting election result.

Party	Vote	%	Seats	2015 +/- %	2015 +/- seats
C	3970	27.8	9	+6.1	+2
L	2803	19.7	6	-3.6	-1
M	1967	13.8	4	+4.0	-1
Ob	1935	13.6	4	+4.0	+1
S	1312	9.2	3	-8.2	-2
ÅF	666	4.7	1	-2.7	-1
HI	1187	8.3	2	+7.5	+2
ÅD	418	2.9	1	-0.7	+/-0
Total	14,258	100	30	-	-

Source: ÅSUB 2019, 7: 5

transport system and to make Åland a more inclusive society.⁵ In pride of place was the proposal for a new climate law to reduce direct and indirect emissions and this, it was insisted, should be as ambitious as the Paris Agreement.

The result

The 2019 Lagting election represented a resounding victory for the opposition parties and a comprehensive defeat for the governing coalition (Table 3). The Centre gained two seats, the Non-Aligned Coalition one seat whilst the Sustainable Initiative broke into the Lagting with two members. All the coalition parties lost ground – the Liberals and Moderates surrendered one seat each and the Social Democrats two seats. The nationalist parties remained relatively minor players. Ålands Future lost one of its two seats whilst Åland Democracy managed to hold on to its solitary mandate.

The Centre, with 27.8 per cent, achieved its best result since 1995, the Non-Aligned Coalition polled its best-ever result with nearly one-seventh of the vote and the Sustainable Initiative, with just under one-twelfth of the active electorate, advanced by 7.5 percentage points compared with four years earlier, when it was not yet organised as a political party. In contrast, the Liberals fell below one-fifth of the vote for the first time in the period 1979–2019 to record its worst result, the Moderates fell back by over four percentage points, and the Social Democrats sank to under one-tenth of the vote for the first time in its history. The two nationalist parties managed only a combined 7.6 per cent. The net electoral volatility [Pedersen] index was a high 18.6 per cent, placing the 2019 Lagting election firmly into the category of ‘protest election’. There was a marginal decline in turnout from 70.4 per cent in 2015–69.7 per cent in 2019.

The pace of social structural change, and the marked out-migration from the archipelago to the mainland and capital Mariehamn in particular, was clearly reflected in the percentage distribution of the vote by municipality and party at the 2019 Lagting election (Table 4). Only 8.4 per cent of the

Table 4. The percentage poll in the 2019 Lagting election by municipality and political party.

Archipelago	Total	C	L	M	Ob	S	ÅF	HI	ÅD	Total
Brändö	2.0	64	10	6	3	6	1	8	2	100
Föglö	2.0	17	56	3	11	2	2	6	3	100
Kumlinge	1.2	37	31	2	3	11	2	5	9	100
Kökar	0.9	42	12	6	8	9	2	12	8	100
Sottunga	0.2	65	17	0	9	9	0	0	0	100
Vårdö	2.1	72	7	2	7	2	2	5	2	100
Total	8.4									
Rural										
Eckerö	3.5	21	7	9	28	7	21	5	2	100
Finnström	8.6	36	20	9	14	7	5	6	3	100
Geta	1.4	35	13	12	23	2	4	6	2	100
Hammarland	5.3	33	12	7	31	4	3	7	3	100
Jomala	17.0	28	17	19	11	8	5	8	3	100
Lemland	7.1	30	21	15	10	8	5	8	3	100
Lumpurland	1.5	35	10	6	14	2	23	8	2	100
Saltvik	6.5	42	14	6	21	6	1	6	3	100
Sund	3.9	32	17	8	17	6	5	9	4	100
Total	54.8									
Mariehamn	36.0	17	23	18	11	14	3	10	3	100
Total	100	28	20	14	14	9	5	8	3	100

Source: Compiled by the author based on the official statistics.

C = Centre Party; L = Liberals; M = Moderates; Ob = Nonaligned coalition; S = Social Democrats; ÅF = Ålands Future; HI = the Sustainable Initiative;

total vote was cast in the six archipelago municipalities, where the Centre has its traditional strength, compared with 54.8 per cent in the nine rural municipalities, again strong Centre territory, and no less than 36.9 per cent in Mariehamn, where the Liberals have been the largest party and the Sustainable Initiative claimed ten per cent of the poll. Concern to offset a potential radicalisation of the outlying archipelago municipalities, and boost their economy, was almost certainly at the heart of the mainstream parties' commitment during the election campaign to improve transport links to Föglö.

The new four-party governing coalition comprises the Centre, Moderates, Non-Aligned Coalition and the Sustainable Initiative, backed from opposition by Ålands Future. With 19 of the 30 seats it commands a comfortable working majority, leaving the Liberals and Social Democrats to form the main body of the opposition. The new government represents a return to the Centre with a capital 'C'. In the three decades since the adoption of the parliamentary principle in 1988, the Åland Centre has been an opposition party for only the four years – between 2015 and 2019 – and in that period it has provided four prime ministers. Of the other parties, only the Liberals (1988-1991) and Social Democrats (2011-2015) have held the post of prime minister (*lantråd*) and in late autumn 2019 the post was reclaimed by the Centre leader Veronica Thörnroos.

Whilst Åland has a female prime minister, the feminisation of the Lagting has not proceeded to anything like the extent of the Swedish and

Finnish parliaments. Whereas in Sweden after the 2018 general election 46 per cent of Riksdag members were women, and in Finland after the 2019 general election 47 per cent of the Eduskunta comprised female MPs, a substantially lower 30 per cent of Åland Lagting members were women following the 2019 regional election.

Analysis: Party representation or personal representation?

A persuasive case could be made for a dimension of *personal representation* running alongside party representation in Åland (Colomer 2011). First, there is the existence of electoral rules requiring an individual candidate vote. The Finland and Åland variant of an intraparty preference voting system is unique in Europe, although it belongs to the family of ‘personalised electoral systems’ (Renwick and Pilet 2016). Voters are obliged to opt for a candidate on one of the party lists.

Second, this creates scope for citizens to prioritise a candidate’s personal vote-earning attributes over his/her partisan credentials in their voting choice. Surveys have revealed that, typically, in the order of half of all Finns have cast this type of ‘personal vote’ and the other half a ‘party vote’ (Schultz, Järvi, and Mattila 2020). The same has been broadly true in Åland. In a post-election survey carried out one month after the 2019 Lagting election (n = 392), 53.6 per cent of respondents stated that ‘candidate’ was more important than ‘party’ in their voting choice, compared with 41.9 per cent for whom party was more important (Lindqvist 2020, 6).

Next, a low ‘effective number of candidates’ would point to personalised politics (Arter 2013; Dodeigne and Pilet 2021) and this was the case in Åland in 2019, where there was a concentration of votes on relatively few Lagting candidates. 18 candidates (n = 240) in 2019 got more than 200 personal votes and, whilst they constituted less than 8 per cent of candidates, they accounted for 43 per cent of all votes. In contrast, 45 per cent of candidates (n = 109) got less than 20 individual votes and their share represented 7 per cent of all votes. It seems reasonable to presume, therefore, that for many Lagting candidates their decision to stand was dictated by considerations other than a belief they could be elected. They might for example have used a Lagting candidacy to profile their municipal council candidacy and to use a municipal council seat to bolster a later bid to gain a Lagting seat.

Indeed, as in Finland (Arter and Söderlund 2022) and, to a lesser degree Sweden (Karlsson 2018), dual mandate-holding – a *cumul des mandats* – has been common practice in Åland. No less than 195 out of 240 or nearly 82 per cent of Lagting candidates in 2019 also stood in the concurrent municipal elections. In 2015 the figure was 88 per cent. Correspondingly, 34 per cent of candidates in the 2019 municipal elections were also

candidates for the Lagting. This compared with 40 per cent in 2015. 19 elected municipal councillors (*fullmäktige ledamöter*) were elected to the Lagting in 2019 compared with 28 in 2015 (ÅSUB 2019).

Finally, on the 'supply side', candidates' personal-vote-seeking strategies will elevate personalised politics over party politics and, by extension, contribute to the routine incidence of intraparty incumbency defeats. These have been commonplace both in Finnish general elections and Åland Lagting elections. Over the 15 general elections between 1966 and 2019 an average of 53.7 per cent ($n = 410$) of sitting Finnish MPs have lost to a candidate from the same party rather than a rival party (Arter and Söderlund 2022). Of the 30 members in the 2015–2019 Lagting, 46.7 per cent were re-elected in 2019, 33.3 per cent did not seek-re-election and 20 per cent were defeated. It took an average of only 268 votes to win a seat in 2019 and this doubtless encouraged challenger candidates and by extension intensified co-partisan competition. Of the 20 per cent of Lagting members who were defeated in 2019 all 20 per cent fell to intraparty defeats. The Social Democrat Jessy Eckerman, for example, was elected with only 102 votes and her party had a poor election losing two seats. However, Eckerman was one of two challengers who displaced incumbent Social Democrat MPs.

Conclusion

This election report has addressed three basic questions: (i) when and why did an Åland party system emerge? (ii) what were the main party system features? (iii) has the advance of party politics been at the expense of personalised politics on the islands? The case-study was the 2019 Lagting election. Until the 1960s, Åland society was insular, its economy overwhelmingly agrarian and politically the primary concern was the protection and promotion of its self-governing status, something over which there was a broad consensus. Over the last half century, however, a distinct Åland party system has become institutionalised, exponential social structural change creating the basis for cleavage-based parties in an Åland society which, through the revolution in communications, has become more open to diffusional influences from outside the islands.

Whilst the contours of the Åland party system have resembled the classical five-party Scandinavian party system model, a striking feature has been the dominance of two numerically substantial centrist parties and the relative weakness of social democracy. By the late 1970s the advance of party-based politics was reflected *inter alia* in the way the Lagting was arranged by party rather than alphabetically and the way the assembly functioned along government-opposition lines. Indeed, profiting from a discernible protest mood, the opposition parties won a resounding victory at the 2019

lagting election and the Centre Party regained its status as the perennial governing party. Yet, with a low MP-voter ratio of barely 1:700, Åland is *par excellence* a micro-polity and, at the polls in 2019, a majority of islanders prioritised candidate over party in their voting choice. Party representation in short has not been at the expense of personal representation; for Ålanders it has been a matter of ‘both and’ rather than ‘either or’.

Notes

1. Hanna Gråsten, Suomalaisten mielikuvalle täystyrmäys – kysely: Ahvenanmaalaiset eivät haluaisi kuulua Ruotsiin. *Ilta-lehti* 30.1.2020
2. This followed a joint meeting with its Swedish sister party addressed by the Swedish foreign secretary Karin Söder. See Ragner Erlandsson, Den politiska aktiviteten i början av 1970-talet. <https://centern.ax/historik/>
3. Kimmo Lundén, Ahvenanmaa teki oman sotensa jo 15 vuotta sitten: Lasku olisi vielä suurempi jos terveydenhoitoa ei olisi keskitetty *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* 22.9.2018
4. For the party manifestos, see <https://centern.ax>; <https://moderatsamling.ax>; <https://liberalerna.ax>; <https://obs.ax/valprogram>.
5. Åland är Redo. www.hallbartinitiativ.ax

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