Investigating Swedish Trade Unions’ Labor Market Preferences

THE ROLE OF UNION MEMBER LABOR MARKET RISK EXPOSURE AND THE WHITE-COLLAR/BLUE-COLLAR UNION DIVIDE

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Abstract

In the literature on the emergence of the welfare state, the strength of trade unions and the organized working class is often touted as the primary driving force behind the welfare state project. Furthermore, much of the previous literature has tended to assume union homogeneity across countries, federations, industries and professions. What is conspicuously lacking from the current political science literature is a systematic analysis of real-world trade unions’ choice of labor market advocacy focus. Using a qualitative approach and studying both published union material as well as conducting a number of elite interviews with high-level union officials, this thesis studies the degree to which Swedish trade unions’ labor market policy preferences are defined by the union members’ labor market risk exposure and whether the union adheres to white-collar or blue-collar unionism. While the conclusions indeed suggest that labor market risk and blue-collar/white-collar unionism do have a systematic impact on certain aspects of trade unions’ labor market advocacy, future “large N” studies utilizing alternative methodological approaches will be required to draw more easily generalizable conclusions.

Keywords: industrial relations, trade unions, labor market policy, policy preferences, union politics, employment protection legislation, solidaristic wage-setting, unemployment insurance, training rights.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ALMP</td>
<td>Active labor market policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALVA</td>
<td>Allmän visstidsanställning, Temporary employment</td>
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<td>EPL</td>
<td>Employment protection legislation</td>
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<tr>
<td>HAN</td>
<td>Handelsanställdas riksförbund/Handels, the Swedish Commercial Employees’ Union</td>
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<td>IFM</td>
<td>Industrifacket Metall/IF Metall, the Industry/Metalworking Union</td>
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<td>IKS</td>
<td>Individuellt kompetenssparande, Individual Learning Accounts</td>
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<tr>
<td>KOM</td>
<td>Kommunalarbetareförbundet/Kommunal, the Municipal Workers’ Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAS</td>
<td>Lag om anställningsskydd (SFS 1982:80), The Employment Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>Lärarförbundet, the Swedish Teachers’ Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO/LO-S</td>
<td>Landsorganisationen, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation</td>
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<td>LO-DK</td>
<td>Landsorganisationen i Danmark, the Danish Trade Union Confederation</td>
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<td>LRF</td>
<td>Lärarnas riksförbund, the National Union of Teachers of Sweden</td>
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<tr>
<td>SACO</td>
<td>Sveriges akademikers centralorganisation, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>Sveriges ingenjörer, the Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers</td>
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<tr>
<td>SJF</td>
<td>Journalistförbundet, the Swedish Union of Journalists</td>
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<td>SPES</td>
<td>Swedish public employment service</td>
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<td>SWS</td>
<td>Solidaristic wage-setting</td>
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<td>TCO</td>
<td>Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>TR</td>
<td>Training rights</td>
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<td>UI</td>
<td>Unemployment insurance</td>
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<td>UIF</td>
<td>Unemployment insurance fund</td>
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Introduction and research question

In the literature on the emergence of the welfare state, the strength of trade unions and the organized working class has often been touted as the primary driving force behind the welfare state project. Labor-oriented accounts of the emergence of state welfare have long seen the successful political mobilization of the working class through trade unions and social democratic parties as of paramount importance for the enactment of redistributive welfare policies. The power resource (PR) theory of the emergence of the welfare state as championed by Korpi (2006) is in turn one of the most notable labor-oriented accounts, seeing the enactment and maintenance of redistributive welfare policies as being the result of employee class conflict against a capital-wielding employer class.

Although influential, several authors see the PR school as too reliant on an assumption of trade union interest homogeneity. For starters, as noted by Swenson (2002:8) and Nijhuis (2009), PR theory has tended to assume union homogeneity across countries, federations, industries and professions. Nijhuis (2009:301) questions the existence of uniform trade union “compensatory” and/or “emancipatory” interests as not all employees can be argued to be in a similarly “disadvantaged” position in the wider labor market. While the PR school of welfare state emergence focuses on the relative strength of the wider labor movement, Nijhuis points out that labor-market risks can take different forms for different occupational groups and the power resources of one occupational group can often vary from that of another. In addition to labor market risks varying in type, the overall level of labor market risk exposure is argued to potentially vary from one profession to the next. As a result, Nijhuis argues that unions’ support for the redistributive welfare state will largely depend on each union membership’s redistributive preferences, with unions’ preference formation in turn be expected to vary depending on the organizational structure of the union and the specific buildup of the union membership.

What is conspicuously lacking from the current literature is a systematic analysis of real-life trade unions’ choice of advocacy focus on the topic of labor market policy. As will be further noted below, the union landscape of Sweden has changed since the heydays of the 1970s, with overall Swedish unionization rate falling and a larger share of workers becoming members of white-collar unions. Given the continued and future changes experienced in Swedish trade unionism and the wider Swedish labor market, it is becoming increasingly necessary to ground trade unions’ advocacy as relates to the changing realities of the Swedish labor market in an explicit theoretical framework. A more theoretically grounded overview of differences in Swedish trade unions’ labor market policy preferences will become even more important in times of labor market policy reform. Thus, the research question of this thesis is twofold and is as follows: to what degree is a Swedish trade union’s labor market policy preferences defined by the union members’ labor market risk exposure and whether the union adheres to white-collar or blue-collar unionism?
To answer the research question, the thesis will begin with a theoretical section in order to give an overview of the already existing literature on topics of relevance to the topic of Swedish unions preferences. Following this section, the theoretical framework of the thesis will be introduced through the definition of the two main parameters. The first parameter, labor market risk exposure, differentiates trade unions according to the degree to which their members are exposed to labor market-related risk. The second parameter differentiates “vertical” white-collar TCO and SACO unions organized by trade or profession from “horizontal” blue-collar LO unions organized by industry or sector. Beyond identifying the effects of the two mentioned parameters on trade unions’ labor market preferences, the thesis also argues for Swedish trade unions’ advocacy being primarily focused on four central labor market interests. This recurring “quartet” of union labor market interests, presented in the next section, are employment protection legislation (EPL), solidaristic wage-setting (SWS), training rights (TR), and unemployment insurance (UI).

After identifying both the two parameters dividing the Swedish trade union landscape and the trade union quartet of labor market preferences, the thesis will present a set of five hypotheses that argue for how a theoretically motivated selection of real-life Swedish trade unions should rate the importance of the four labor market interests. To test these hypotheses, the author conducted eight semi-structured elite interviews with central labor market policy-focused trade union officials as well as text analysis of a wide range of news media, union congress protocols and other open source material. The results of this study, developed in the analytical section, allows to root the hypotheses in each union’s placement on the labor market risk exposure – white-collar/blue collar union divide and thus to answer the research question. Finally, this last section leads to some concluding remarks, a recap of the thesis, and a highlight of issues that need further study.
Theory

Union members’ labor market risk exposure

If welfare policies are assumed to be motivated by a need to lessen or pool workers’ risk exposure it quickly becomes necessary to differentiate between life course and labor market risk. Jensen (2012) argues that the median voter will tend to be more positively inclined towards redistribution across the dividing line of life course risks rather than labor market risks, as the probability of experiencing life course-related risks is commonly seen as less correlated with voters’ income level. Conversely, if labor market-related risks are more likely to be seen as dependent on voters’ income level, the assumption that labor market programs primarily protect low-income individuals will make the median voter less positively inclined to support redistributive policies across the dividing line between high and low labor market risk exposure. Although some life course-related risks such as suffering from ill health, living to an old age or becoming a parent to a certain degree actually do correlate with income level, to paraphrase Barr (2001:54), the median voter “still tends not to know how much healthcare they will be needing in the future” (Jensen 2012:275f).

Suggesting that welfare preferences differ from one voter to the next depending on each voter’s risk exposure isn’t new. Iversen and Soskice’s theory of skill specificity suggests that at any given level of income, “workers with specific skills are more inclined to support a higher level of protection than those with [more] general skills” (2001:889). In other words, a person’s labor market risk exposure can be characterized as largely dependent on to which degree the worker’s skills are easily transferable from one place of employment or economic sector to another. Assuming a worker’s labor market risk exposure to be inversely related to the degree to which the worker’s skills are transferable, Iversen and Soskice found those more greatly exposed to labor market risk to be more favorably disposed to increases in public social spending (ibid.:886). To quote Iversen and Soskice, “[l]ike physical capital, human capital can be more or less mobile, and workers who have made heavy investments in asset-specific skills stand a greater risk of losing a substantial portion of their income than do workers who have portable skills” (ibid.:889). As a result, changes in labor market risk exposure and the education systems that define the spread and distribution of skills are assumed to have an impact on the popular demand for social protections.

The idea of labor market risk having an effect on voters’ welfare preferences is also touched upon by other authors albeit in slightly different ways. Rehm, Hacker and Schlesinger (2012) find the creation and sustainment of encompassing class coalitions in support of the welfare state to be dependent on the degree of overlap between income disadvantage and labor market risk exposure. Rehm et al.’s findings suggest that social policies became more contested the more labor market insecurity correlates with relative income disadvantage. David Rueda’s insider/outsider theory, on the other hand, warns of a decline in the number of skilled stable blue-collar jobs that have traditionally made up a core of advanced economies’ labor markets. This increasing scarcity of relatively safe blue-collar jobs in turn leads to an increased
dualization of the labor market, with remaining relative secure “insider” jobs standing in sharp contrast to emerging more insecure temporary unskilled “outsider” jobs. At the same time, Rueda expects insiders’ and outsiders’ labor market preferences to differ, with insiders assumed to be relatively more supportive of EPL in order to ease the entry of outsiders into the “insider” portion of the labor market, while “outsiders” in turn are assumed to be more supportive of a more flexible labor market as it would strengthen their own position in the labor market relative to more sheltered “insiders” (Rueda 2007; Palier & Thelen 2010:120f).

Whether trade unions advocate for either strengthened EPL or more outsider-friendly active labor market policies (ALMP) such as providing educational programs, job employment agencies, or career counseling have been explored by Tepe and Vanhuysse (2013). Their conclusions point toward unions’ choice of advocacy focus being largely context-dependent, with unions advocating most powerfully in favor of EPL in contexts where EPL is already enacted. Conversely, if unions as a rule defend already enacted EPL-related concessions before all else, Tepe and Vanhuysse’s findings suggest that unions will settle for advocating for “second-best” ALMP in contexts where existing EPL is largely absent, with unions furthermore being more likely to advocate for ALMP that is deemed beneficial in mitigating their own members’ labor market risk. The view that ALMP is unions’ “second best” labor market interest behind EPL is also voiced by Emmenegger (2010) in his account of the emergence of the Danish “flexicurity” social model of generous ALMP in combination with a more flexible EPL. In Emmenegger’s account, the reason why LO-DK (the Danish central organization of blue-collar unions) has primarily been advocating for ALMP is that LO-DK historically hasn’t been able to carry the same level of political momentum as their stronger Swedish counterparts (LO-S) and has thus been forced to settle for “second best” concessions from employers in LO-DK’s pursuit to lessen the labor market risk of its membership.

Other authors suggest that unions’ labor market preferences are primarily shaped by their strategies towards inequality. Attempting to explain the reason for why LO-S primarily advocates for maintained EPL while LO-DK instead has pushed harder for collective agreements to guarantee workers employer-financed continuous on-the-job training, Ibsen and Thelen see the two LO organizations as having different so-called strategies for inequality when it comes to wage-setting (Ibsen & Thelen 2017:413). In their view, LO-DK champions a “supply-side” view of egalitarianism, “under which political capacities [are] deployed to improve and equalize the marketability of individuals and their ability to compete, instead of protecting them from the market” (Streeck 1999:7f, original emphasis). LO-S, on the other hand, has primarily been focused on keeping lower-skilled workers “in the fold” by advocating for smaller wage differences between higher- and lower-skilled workers. This LO-S approach of egalitarian wage-setting in turn risks being at odds with the wage-setting preferences of Swedish white-collar unions, who argue that those who obtain higher skills should be rewarded with higher wages (Ibsen & Thelen 2017:412, 429). But what motivates this difference in wage-setting preferences between unions?
Union organizational principle and the white-collar/blue-collar divide

Mosimann and Pontusson (2017) see unions’ preferences as regards to wage solidarity as depending primarily on to which degree the union adheres to low-wage, high-wage, or “comprehensive” unionism (where the union represents a member base with varying levels of income). But why would self-interested higher-wage workers with a strong negotiating position agree to wage solidarity with lower-productivity and lower-wage workers? From the point of view of Mosimann and Pontusson and as argued earlier by Wallerstein, higher-productivity unions could be interested in showing wage solidarity with unions representing lower-productivity sectors in exchange for those lower-productivity unions agreeing to wage restraint.

If a wider coalition of unions as a result observe the same level of wage restraint, this will have a dampening effect on inflation, which will inter alia lessen the price increases on exported goods. As large price increases on exported goods would in turn greatly hurt the competitiveness of the export-dependent sectors of the economy, price increases would in the longer term also be against the interest of the (generally) high-productivity workers employed in the export industry. As a result, higher-productivity unions agreeing to wage solidarity with lower-productivity unions could be argued to be a relatively small price to pay in exchange for lower-productivity unions agreeing to show wage restraint (Wallerstein 1990:996-999).

This view of higher-productivity unions agreeing to showing wage solidarity with their lower-productivity peers as part of a within-union bargaining process rhymes well with the reasoning behind the centralized wage negotiation of the 1960s-era Rehn Meidner model. In the Rehn-Meidner model, centralized wage-setting wasn’t only designed to strengthen the negotiating hand of the union movement as a whole but was also meant to foster cooperation between blue- and white-collar unions to the benefit of the overall competitiveness of the heavily export-driven Swedish economy. In the longer term, centralized wage-setting was expected to boost Swedish export competitiveness by making it easier to enact wide-ranging structural transformations, with the resulting high collective agreement-based minimum wage forcing the transfer of production resources to the more efficient and thus more competitive sectors of the economy, the very same sectors able to shoulder the wages demanded by the solidaristic centralized wage-setting. In other words, as the less efficient sectors of the economy would become financially unable to meet the solidaristic wage demands of unions, these lowest-efficiency companies would ultimately go out of business, their capital and labor thus being transferred to the more efficient and competitive sectors of the economy (Ibsen & Thelen 2017:413).

Although Swedish white-collar unions agreeing to solidaristic wage-setting can be seen as a bargaining concession in exchange for wage restraint from blue-collar unions, union preferences for wage compression and wage solidarity can also be explained by unions’ degree of white-collar or blue-collar unionism. Nijhuis suggests that white-collar unions should oppose increased wage compression as their
membership would be better off relying on privately-supplied social insurance. Nijhuis bases this assumption on seeing white-collar union members as “losers” of redistribution between skilled and lesser-skilled workers, as Nijhuis assumes the costs of redistributive policies to ultimately be channeled back to consumers rather than being fully absorbed by employers as limited profit margins force employers to offset increased costs by raising the price of the goods and services that companies offer to consumers. With the costs of redistribution thus ultimately being shouldered by wage-earners, Nijhuis sees the interest divide over redistributive policies as being primarily between more and less privileged workers. This view of redistributive preferences dividing white- from blue-collar workers is at odds with the traditional PR school view, which sees the dividing line in public opinion as primarily going between “antagonist” or (at best) “consenting” employers and “proagonist” workers as suggested by Korpi (2006) (Nijhuis 2009:301, 323, 325).

Nijhuis’ view of white-collar or blue-collar membership shaping workers’ redistributive preferences can in turn be strengthened or mitigated by the organizational structure of the union. Mosimann and Pontusson define encompassing unionism as combining “[a] high [union] density [with] a more or less equal split between low-wage and high-wage workers”, with unions embracing encompassing unionism traditionally representing a majority of unionized workers in Sweden (Mosimann & Pontusson 2017:453f). The prevalence of encompassing unions in Sweden is in turn one of the most recurring explanations to the minute level of wage differentiation between Swedish high- and low-skilled workers, this low wage differential being accredited to the previously mentioned Rehn-Meidner model, being a result of white-collar workers’ concessions to the solidaristic wage demands of blue-collar unions. Encompassing unionism is in turn supposed to mitigate white-collar effect on redistributive preferences through a so-called solidarity effect, with higher-wage members of encompassing unions becoming more responsive to the plight of the lower-wage members of the same union (and in the long term lower-wage workers as a whole), making white-collar members of encompassing unions more positive to redistributive policies than white-collar members of more homogenous high-wage unions. Similarly, union membership is assumed to have an enlightenment effect on lower-wage workers as a result of unionized low-wage workers becoming more aware of their position on the income scale, this knowledge in turn expecting to make unionized low-wage workers more pro-redistribution than their non-unionized low-wage compatriots (Iversen & Soskice 2015:479; Mosimann & Pontusson 2017:452).

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1 Note that employer alternatives to passing on their costs to consumers entail cutting their labor force or going out of business entirely, two alternatives that similarly disadvantage the company’s wage-earners in the longer-term.
Trade union structure and its relevance for Swedish trade unionism

The suggested effects of union organizational structure and white- contra blue-collar unionism on redistributinal preference is of particular interest when studying the Swedish union movement. As noted above, much of the literature on the Swedish union movement has tended to note a high degree of encompassing unionism, with Swedish unions assumed to be most commonly organized “vertically” by sector or industry. Although this assumption of Swedish vertical unionism is a simplification, it holds true for the majority of the unions that are members of the LO, the blue-collar Swedish Trade Union Confederation (Nijhuis 2009:323).

To illustrate, the three largest LO unions by order of largest number of active working members are the Municipal Workers’ Union (Kommunal), the Industrial/Metalworking Union (IF Metall), and the Swedish Commercial Employees’ Union (Handels). Vertical unionism is also the structural norm for the unions of the TCO, the white-collar Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees. To illustrate, the largest TCO unions by order of largest number of working members are the private salaried workers’ union (Unionen), the Swedish Teachers’ Union (Lärarförbundet), and the Swedish Union of Local Government Officers (Vision). The member unions of the white-collar SACO Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations, however, breaks the stereotypical Swedish mold of vertical unionism, with most SACO unions being organized “horizontally” by craft or profession. To illustrate, the SACO unions with the largest working memberships are the Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers (Sveriges Ingenjörer), Jusek (the primary union for lawyers, business majors and social scientists), and The National Union of Teachers in Sweden (Lärarnas Riksförbund) (Swedish National Mediation Office 2018:222f).

If one assumes higher-skilled workers to be less supportive of solidaristic and redistributive social policy, unions representing predominantly white-collar member bases should thus be expected to eschew more solidaristic redistributive policies in favor of more market-based allocations of resources in line with their white-collar memberships’ stronger negotiating position. Channeling Swenson’s (2002:8) and Nijhuis’ (2009) critique of the PR theory’s assumption of union homogeneity across countries, federations, industries and professions, Arndt (2018) has studied the results of 30 annual Sweden-wide Riks-SOM surveys, which amongst numerous other attributes register respondents’ political views on redistribution and wage solidarity plus whether they are a member of a LO, TCO or SACO union. Comparing the answers of union members of LO, TCO and SACO unions, Arndt found that the typical SACO/TCO member has a higher wage, has a longer education, and was more likely to work in the traditionally more sheltered public sector than the typical LO member. Furthermore, by using respondents’ views on redistribution, wage solidarity, and privatization as a proxy for pro-market/pro-state redistributive preference, 30 years of Riks-SOM survey results allowed a level of insight into the within-union preference fractionalization. Differentiating the respondents according to their income level, Arndt’s findings suggest that the median SACO member tends to be the most pro-market of the three, with the median TCO member being slightly more pro-state and
the median LO member being the most pro-state-leaning. The state/market preference spread was also larger amongst white-collar TCO/SACO members than amongst the more pro-state LO members (ibid.:14).

While Arndt’s findings suggest that members of unions representing white-collar members should *ceteris paribus* be more accepting of inequality and more market-driven provisions of goods and services, other studies have instead focused on the particular strategy of solidarity that the Swedish LO unions have employed in their pursuit of redistributional political objectives. Of the most recent studies, Ibsen and Thelen’s (2017) comparison of Swedish and Danish trade unions’ strategies for wage setting principles, continuous training rights, and solidarity promotion is of particular interest. Ibsen and Thelen argue that the LO-S has traditionally focused on a strategy of showing inclusivity towards low-skill members by favoring the interests of the low-skilled in the centralized Swedish wage negotiating process. The LO-S strategy to keep lower-skilled workers in the fold has, however, led to a gradually increasing gap in the view of the guiding principles for wage-setting between the blue-collar LO confederation primarily representing lower-skilled workers and the white-collar TCO and SACO confederations representing higher-skilled salaried employees (ibid.:429).

As noted above, this LO-S primary strategy of showing wage solidarity with the lowest-skilled workers stands at odds with the primary advocacy focus of the LO-DK, which instead focuses on guaranteeing employer-funded training rights within the ramifications of the Danish collective agreements (the topic of Swedish training rights as part of Swedish collective agreements will be returned to in the later background section) (Ibsen & Thelen 2017:413f).

To conclude, the previous literature on trade unions’ labor market policy preferences suggests that union members’ primary policy interest lies in mitigating their social risk exposure, with union members’ labor market preferences ultimately shaping the advocacy focus of the union. Unions striving to maximize the strength of their negotiating position vis-à-vis employers and other unions can therefore be seen as a possible byproduct of trade unions aiming to effectively limit their members’ experienced social risk as they hope to secure as beneficial economic terms as possible for their member base. Beyond the assumption that trade unions are expected to advocate to the short- and longer-term benefit of their members, the literature also identifies several reasons why trade unions’ labor market policy preferences should vary depending on the union members’ specific skills and profession as well as the organizational principle of the trade union and its membership.
Introducing the trade union labor market interest quartet and formulating hypotheses

Before drawing up the two primary parameters dividing the Swedish trade union landscape and before diving into the current realities of the Swedish trade union movement it is necessary to translate the above presented theoretical literature on trade union and worker interests into a more finite set of tangible trade union labor market interests. First and foremost, such a structure is necessary in order to translate theories about the management of vaguely defined labor market risk into concrete topics of policy and advocacy that can be studied and separated from one another. Being able to separate different policy strands make it easier to differentiate more minute differences in one union’s advocacy focus from that of another union. Differentiating one value from another makes the study of preference possible if one defines preference as rooted in the act of preferring and/or being preferred, being preferred in turn being defined as being “liked better or best” or “used or wanted in preference to others” (“Preference”, “Preferred”, Merriam-Wester 2018). As an example, “I prefer chocolate over vanilla ice cream” pertains to a preference in judgement of one explicit attribute/value over another. Preference formation therefore requires a weighing of at least two attributes even in cases where one of the attributes is only indirectly implied².

Being able to separate one policy arena from another is of utmost importance when discussing how to best manage workers’ labor market risk exposure in the Swedish context as much of the Swedish labor market policy “toolbox” is defined by collective agreements between employers and unions. Given an absence of notable power asymmetries between unions and employers, in situations of most labor market institutional arrangements being the result of negotiation between employers and unions, a “win” for unions concerning (for instance) increased employer financing of employees’ continuous education program will often have to be offset by related of concession from the union side in another area of policy dictated by the employer/worker relationship. This tradeoff effect should be even more apparent given the increasingly “defensive” stance of trade unions in modern Western economies in the age of globalization and permanent austerity. With unions’ advocacy for different components of labor market risk mitigation increasingly resembling a zero-sum game, trade-offs between different interests should become more common, in theory exposing underlying differences in trade union preferences as to what institutional framework would be of greatest benefit for their members (Pierson 2001; Davidsson & Emmenegger 2013:342f).

By singling out four central and recurring trade union labor market interests below, the so-called quartet of trade union labor market interests, the author aims to study to which degree differences between Swedish trade unions as measured by the

² As an example, “I prefer small college campuses” signifies preferring smaller college campuses over non-smaller (presumably larger) college campuses.
above defined two parameters have an effect on the same unions’ choice of labor policy standpoints. By defining the quartet of trade union labor market interests, the author aims to single out four primary policy areas that should encompass the full “span” of institutional frameworks that serve the function of making union members’ labor market risk exposure manageable.

Furthermore, and as pointed out above, the “all-encompassing” nature of the quartet of trade union interest in mitigating workers’ labor market risk exposure should allow us to distinguish unions’ explicit and/or implicit trade-offs between one interest and another. To help us in this endeavor, the presentation and motivation of five theoretically motivated hypotheses will be intertwined with the presentation of the trade union quartet of labor market interests. These hypotheses will in turn motivate why high/low labor market risk exposure and/or white-/blue-collar unionism should contribute to specific labor market policy standpoints from specific trade unions.

Table 3: The Trade Union Labor Market Interest Quartet

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<tr>
<th>Employment protection legislation (EPL)</th>
<th>Solidaristic wage-setting (SWS)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Training rights (TR)</td>
<td>Unemployment insurance (UI)</td>
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Why employment protection legislation (EPL)?

Employment protection legislation often figures heavily when discussing union influence in the labor market and the individual workplace. Some authors would go as far as singling out strengthened EPL as unions’ “first-best” policy priority ahead of “second-best” active labor market programs (ALMP) that are typically seen as more beneficial to labor market outsiders. Conversely, EPL defined as legislation limiting employers’ ability to freely dismiss employees is typically seen as the most “insider-friendly” of labor market policies, primarily serving the protective interests of labor market insiders who make up the base of social democratic political parties according to textbook insider/outsider theory (Davidsson & Emmenegger 2013:339ff; Tepe & Vanhuysse 2013:480f).

Ranking EPL as a “first-best” policy priority might not only hold true for labor market insiders, however. Although strengthened EPL is often argued to be the primary concern for maintaining the continued job security of sheltered labor market insiders over the interests of supposedly EPL-antagonistic and “flexibility”-inclined labor market outsiders (à la Rueda 2007), international surveys have shown EPL to be just as much of a primary policy priority for labor market outsiders as it is for labor market insiders, with strong EPL in some surveys even trumping the issue of overall wage level or the need for a friendly work environment (Emmenegger 2009:131f). One possible reason for why labor market outsiders would prioritize strengthened EPL
ahead of more typically outsider-friendly ALMP (and thus technically act against their own self-interest) might be that outsiders long for insider status. Assuming that there exists a degree of an “insider dream” amongst labor market outsiders, the plausibility of such an effect requires that labor market outsiders consider their “promotion” to insider status as plausible. Another reason why labor market outsiders have been shown to value EPL might lie in flaws in the assumptions of the labor market insider/outsider theory itself. Unfortunately, testing the wider plausibility of the insider/outsider theory of labor market politics would warrant a thesis in itself but for a concise and convincing discussion and critique, see Emmenegger 2009.

Nevertheless, regardless of the degree to which EPL is more of a primary interest for labor market insiders than outsiders (or vice versa), the above listed findings of previous research give more than enough reason to see EPL as one of the primary labor market policy focuses of trade union advocacy.

The first hypothesis is the so-called white-collar EPL antagonism hypothesis. In sum, it argues that white-collar TCO and SACO unions will tend to have memberships that prefer greater labor market flexibility before strengthened EPL due to the stronger negotiating position of higher-skilled white-collar workers. This strong wage negotiating position of white-collar workers should translate to increased wage competition between prospective employers, with increased labor market flexibility thus benefiting the wage levels of the highest-skilled workers in the economy. Furthermore, with trade union advocacy resources being limited and trade unions increasingly “playing a game of defense” against increasingly risk-averse and efficiency-dependent employers, the stronger relative position of white-collar workers in the labor market of modern advanced post-industrial economies will make white-collar unions more intent on capitalizing on employers’ offers of concessions in wage and training in exchange for the greater level of labor market flexibility demanded by employers.

**H1, the white-collar EPL antagonism hypothesis:** White-collar unions’ higher-skilled members will be assumed to suffer less from weakened EPL and will have more to gain from possible employer concessions in the form of greater training rights and higher skill-motivated differentiation in wages. Thus, if a trade union is a white-collar union, it is less likely to emphasize strong EPL in its advocacy.

The second hypothesis is the risk-exposure-EPL emphasis hypothesis. It argues that the higher the labor market risk exposure experienced by a trade union’s member base, the larger emphasis that trade union will put on the importance of maintained or strengthened EPL.

**H2, the risk exposure-EPL emphasis hypotheses:** The higher the labor market risk exposure experienced by a worker, the harder it will be for that worker to find new related employment in the case of unemployment. Thus, a trade union representing members that experience a high level of labor market risk is more likely to emphasize the importance of strong EPL in its advocacy.
Why solidaristic wage-setting (SWS)?

In a nutshell, the question of solidaristic wage-setting can be said to focus on the degree to which workers’ wage level should depend on their level of skill. In other words, a simplified typology of unions’ standpoints as regards to solidaristic wage-setting would divide trade unions into one of two groups: those who favor the idea that market mechanisms should dictate the allocation of wages in the economy and those who are critical of market allocation. In practice, this should mean that skill-based and white-collar unions’ advocacy would focus more on the skill-building and -maintaining nature of education and training, with workers’ investments in skill acquisition and maintenance warranting a corresponding wage increase (Lbsen & Thelen 2017:416f). Inversely, wage differentials in accordance with skill levels would act as an economic incentive for workers to commit time and resources to skill acquisition, with employers and the wider economy reaping longer-term profits and increased competitiveness from a higher- and more specific-skilled labor supply.

While clear-cut in theory, more market-based allocations of wages give rise to several problems of interpretation. For one, demands for higher-skilled labor usually equals demands for more specifically-skilled labor. Acquiring more specific skills that are harder to transfer from one application/industry/sector/employer to another increases a worker’s labor market risk exposure. Such negative “push” incentives against acquiring more specific skills would need to be balanced by strengthened positive “pull” incentives in the form of either higher wages for positions requiring more specific skills and/or some added level of insurance for workers who are willing to take the risk of acquiring more specific skills (Iversen & Soskice 2001:888f). Similarly, the creation and maintenance of class coalitions for/against redistributive policies and the spreading of labor market risk has been shown to depend on the degree to which level of income and labor market risk exposure overlap (Rehm, Hecker & Schlesinger 2012:386).

Furthermore, as pointed out in the earlier main theoretical section of this thesis, discussions about wage solidarity are intimately linked to concepts of equality and discussing any concept of equality correspondingly warrants distinguishing presumptions of equality of outcome from presumptions of equality of opportunity. As a result, white-collar arguments for differences in skill motivating differences in wage rely heavily on an assumption of equality of opportunity for training and/or education. This supposedly more white-collar and high-skill view of egalitarianism as defined by equality of opportunity rhymes well with the “supply-side” egalitarianism of Wolfgang Streeck, who already in 1999 saw a shift in the focus of political capacities towards improving and equalizing “the marketability of individuals and their ability to compete, instead of protecting them from the market” (Streeck 1999:7f, emphasis in original). As noted by Ibsen and Thelen (2017:417), this focus on equality of opportunity rhymes less well with the traditional and ongoing Swedish LO primary focus on equalities of outcomes. As noted by the LO itself in its report to the LO national congress of 2016, the LO overall ambition is “[t]o strengthen the Swedish agreement model and prevent the emergence of low-wage sectors [...] LO’s wage
policy of solidarity, which is part of wider [sic] income policy, is also central to achieving an even distribution of income in society” (LO 2015:6).

In sum, the above suggested expected differences in white- versus blue-collar unions’ advocacy focus regarding solidaristic wage-setting warrant treating SWS as another area of labor market policy focus for trade union advocacy.

The third hypothesis is the white-collar SWS antagonism hypothesis, which states that white-collar unions, which represent higher-skilled workers and are organized “vertically” by trade or occupation (at least in the case of most SACO unions), represent a more narrowly defined and less diverse member base. Representing a more narrowly defined and higher-skilled member base is in turn expected to stimulate collegial within-union/within-occupation collegial bias, leading to less interest in the SWS favored by blue-collar LO unions in order to “keep the lowest-skill workers in the fold” (à la Ibsen & Thelen 2017:412, 429). This white-collar union opposition to SWS is in turn expected to be related to higher-skilled white-collar workers seeing themselves as “losers” of redistribution vis-à-vis lower-skill blue-collar workers as SWS in practice lessens the skill-wage premium that should be in the interest of higher-skilled workers. 

**H3: the white-collar SWS antagonism hypothesis:** with white-collar unions being more likely to have a narrower craft- and/or occupation-defined member base of higher-skilled workers, they are also more likely to be primarily focused on increasing the skill-wage premium of their members. Thus, a white-collar union is more likely to be opposed to lessened skill-wage premiums and is therefore less likely to stress SWS in its advocacy.

**Why training rights (TR)?**

Shifting demands in the labor market and ever-more specific skill requirements even in the relatively lower-skilled sectors have made skill acquisition and maintenance of utmost importance for workers’ standing in the labor market. Workers’ demand for continuous education/training rights is likely to be closely related to the skill-wage premium, with workers exposing themselves to labor market risk by investing in specific and non-transferable skill sets often demanding correspondingly higher wages in the modern knowledge economy (Iversen & Soskice 2015). Furthermore, in advanced economies such as those in the Nordic countries, the economic survival of the industrial sector is heavily dependent on companies’ international competitiveness as measured by their overall productivity (Davidsson 2018:184). As a result, increased per-worker productivity has been necessary to guarantee the longer-term survival of these countries’ export-driven industrial sector, with maintained and eventually increased productivity often mandating corresponding investments in education, which in turn mandate correspondingly higher wages for the workers in said industrial sectors.
On a similar note, previous studies have shown that training as a component of ALMP and passive labor market policies have a larger strengthening effect on workers’ perceived labor market security than strengthened EPL, with any significant effect of strengthened EPL on perceived labor market security vanishing when controlled for general market conditions and the level of experienced financial crisis (van Oorschot & Chung 2011). Complicating the classical expectations of the insider/outsider literature, previous research also seems to show that left/right government partisanship has an unclear effect on supposedly outsider-focused ALMP spending. This in turn sheds doubt on the insider/outsider assumption that insider-favoring unions and social democratic parties would be less inclined to favor outsider-friendly ALMP spending (for a concise overview of recent studies on the topic of partisanship and ALMP spending, see Tepe & Vanhuysse 2013:481f).

This leads to the thesis’ fourth hypothesis, the risk exposure – TR emphasis hypothesis.

**H4: the risk exposure-TR emphasis hypothesis**: workers that are more exposed to labor market risk will have a greater interest in training rights that allow them to strengthen their position in an emerging knowledge economy. Thus, a trade union representing workers that experience a high degree of labor market risk exposure will be more likely to emphasize the importance of strengthened training rights in their advocacy.

Why unemployment insurance (UI)?

As argued by Jensen (2012:277), the primary voter concern related to the welfare state is the need of insurance against risk, with redistributive egalitarianism merely being “a derivative consequence of what is and always was the foremost objective behind social policy, namely insuring the population against social risks” (Esping-Andersen 1999:32). As a result, when speaking of collectively provided insurance against labor market-related risk, unemployment insurance (UI) becomes one of workers’ primary bulwarks against immediate income loss in case of unemployment. In the case of Sweden, the question of UI is an even larger policy concern for trade unions as all but one of Sweden’s 27 UIF:s (UI funds) are administered by the Swedish trade unions in accordance with the country’s Ghent-style UI scheme (Inspektionen för arbetslöshetsförsäkringen 2018a).

As will be further specified in the following background section on the recent developments in Swedish trade unionism, the 2007 introduction of differentiated UIF membership fees as a result of lessened state subsidies to the UIF:s led to a massive fee increase for the members of UIF:s that had members that were more unemployment-prone. In other words, the introduction of differentiated UIF membership fees led to workers in lower-risk sectors effectively subsidizing the UI of workers in higher-risk sectors to a much lower degree.

This leads us to this thesis’ fifth hypothesis, the risk exposure-UI emphasis hypothesis.
H5: the risk exposure-Ul emphasis hypothesis: Workers in sectors that are more susceptible to unemployment will be more interested in having a UI that is more heavily state-subsidized and thus to a larger degree pools their cost of UI amongst the wider collective of workers. Thus, a trade union representing workers that experience a high degree of labor market risk exposure will be more likely to emphasize generous UI in their advocacy.

Trade union labor market interests considered but ultimately disregarded
Before preceding to the method chapter, some comments are needed on alternative trade union labor market interests that were considered but ultimately not included.

Any additional choice of union labor market interests would have to be theoretically linked to at least one of the two parameters chosen to categorize the Swedish trade union landscape. The formulation of an additional hypothesis is in turn predicated on the “additional” policy interest having a possible causal relationship with the thesis’ two parameters. As a result, many undoubtedly vital trade union labor market policy interests were ultimately dropped from consideration as their relationship with blue-collar/white-collar unionism or high/low labor market risk were unclear at best.

To illustrate, poor work environments and related issues such as under-staffing were ultimately deemed to be dependent on a too wide array of factors to be included in the analysis. In addition, making a clear causal relationship between the quality of the working environment and the two chosen thesis parameters proved problematic at best. While a healthy working environment is undoubtedly a vital union interest, it is difficult to theoretically motivate why a union’s choice to emphasize the importance of an improved working environment would be heavily dependent on whether the union is a LO or TCO-SACO union. Likewise, it was found difficult to link a union’s emphasis of the importance of a healthy working environment with whether the union members tended to be exposed to high or low risk in the labor market.

On a final and more general note, limitations in time and maximum thesis length ultimately limits the scope of even the most ambitious of theses.
Defining the parameters dividing the Swedish union landscape: labor market risk exposure and white-contra blue-collar unionism

Before proceeding to defining any hypotheses as to how Swedish trade unions’ labor market preferences are to be expected to differ, the Swedish trade union landscape must be defined and categorized. In order to categorize the wider trade union landscape, two differentiating parameters will be identified and defined to allow any sort of systematic comparison between one category of union and another. With one binary parameter dividing a population in two categories, defining two theoretically motivated binary parameters should give us four different categories/permutations of Swedish trade unions. In the aim to capture as much theoretical complexity as possible when comparing unions’ labor market preferences, the use of two binary parameters resulting in a total of four categories also represents an upper limit for a system of categorization that is easily presentable graphically – in the case of this thesis by a 2x2 table.

To begin with, if one chooses to define the primary purpose of welfare policy as insuring the population against risk (Esping-Andersen 1999:32), this makes low contra high labor market risk exposure experienced by union members a fitting first parameter. If the resulting variable is to be binary, a useful definition would entail \( R=1 \) signifying a high level of labor market risk exposure and \( R=0 \) signifying a low level of labor market risk exposure. Although easy to motivate in theory, operationalization of such a variable requires finding a clear-cut indicator of labor market risk exposure. This thesis will use the Swedish Public Employment Service’s (SPES) labor market shortage index (Arbetsförmedlingens bristindex) from the annual Vocational compass function (Yrkeskompassen), which rates different vocations on a scale from one to five where a five signifies a very noticeable shortage of available labor and a correspondingly low level of competition for job openings for a particular profession (Swedish Public Employment Service 2017; 2018:38f). The opposite applies for a labor market shortage index rating of one, which signifies an extremely high level of competition for the available job openings within a specific profession. The 200 professions that are indexed are in turn defined in accordance with the SSYK 96/SSYK 2012 classification of occupations as part of the annual SPES labor market shortage index reports (Statistics Sweden 2018a).

The SPES labor market shortage index is as a fitting indicator for labor market risk exposure for several reasons. Firstly, high labor market tightness and a correspondingly low labor market shortage index rating reflects a shortage of job vacancies for a specific occupational group, thus signifying not only a higher risk of unemployment but also a higher degree of difficulty, if unemployed, to find new employment in that specific occupation. Although a perfectly valid indicator of labor market risk exposure should measure not only the likelihood of unemployment but also the damage caused by eventual unemployment (Jensen 2012:277), this author has not been able to find an indicator that is able to systematize not only the
“expected likelihood” but also the “expected damage” element of labor market risk exposure. At the very least, the author is not aware of the existence of such compound systematic indicator of labor market risk exposure that is tailored to the Swedish context; creating a brand-new compound index of labor market risk exposure is unfortunately beyond the purview of this thesis.

On a more positive note, unlike all the other indicators reviewed by the author, the SPES labor market shortage index is the primary indicator of the annual SPES Vocational compass and should thus be the measure of occupation-dependent labor market shortage that is most familiar to Swedish workers and trade unions. Furthermore, the basis for the SPES labor market shortage index reflects not only the national macroeconomic short-term (one-year) assessment for each sector but is also shaped by the input from trade unions and employers, the experience of local SPES offices, and over 13,000 interviews with both private- and public sector employers carried out by the SPES (Swedish Public Employment Service 2018:38f).

Choosing the SPES labor market shortage index as the parameter differentiating union memberships’ level of labor market risk wasn’t completely clear-cut, however. Of all the possible alternative indicators for labor market risk exposure, labor market skill specificity was the most interesting alternative. The existing literature on the effect of skill specificity on workers’ redistributive preferences suggests that workers who have invested heavily in skills that are harder to transfer to other employment opportunities will as a result demand greater social insurance against the resulting risk that they would otherwise have to bear in a competitive labor market (Iversen & Soskice 2001). Undoubtedly, skill specificity would be of great interest when studying the labor market policy preferences of Swedish highly skilled workers in white-collar unions vis-à-vis the lower-skilled workers of the LO. In the end, however, the possible effect of skill specificity is in the author’s view too specific to really capture the full width of workers’ expected labor market risk exposure in case of unemployment. For example, it is harder to link skill specificity to commonly experienced labor market risks such as involuntary part-time work or zero-hour employment contracts.

The second parameter of this thesis will differentiate the Swedish trade union landscape along the official divide between member unions of the blue-collar LO union confederation and member unions of the white-collar TCO/SACO union confederations. There are many advantages to choosing such a dividing line. Firstly, strategic coordination is common within the auspices of the Swedish union confederations, which makes distinguishing trade unions by confederation a necessity when studying unions’ policy preferences (Nilsson 2016; IF Metall 2016). Secondly, the LO versus TCO/SACO divide acts as a natural institutional barrier between the primary blue-collar and white-collar union organizations of Sweden, which might be of great importance to trade unions’ policy preferences if much of the above referenced theoretical literature is to be believed. Thirdly and maybe most significantly, the distinction between LO and TCO/SACO unions also correlates with union organizational structure, with the majority of LO unions being “horizontally”
organized by industry or sector while the vast majority of SACO unions are organized “vertically” on the basis of craft or occupation.

Several alternative second parameters were briefly considered by the author but ultimately disregarded. One such alternative parameter was the divide between high- and low-skilled workers and another was the divide between high- and low-income earners. The problem with both of these potential parameters is the relative arbitrary nature in defining what separates a low- from high-skill worker or a “high” income earner from somebody with a “low” level of income. At the same time, previous research of Riks-SOM surveys has shown that rate of higher education and income vary strongly depending on workers’ union confederation membership, with LO members on average having the lowest income and being the least likely to have a university degree while SACO members are almost exclusively university-educated and receive the highest average wages of Riks-SOM respondents (Arndt 2018:8). In other words, differentiating SACO and TCO unions from LO unions doesn’t only equate to differentiating blue-collar from white-collar unions but also effectively differentiates unions according to skill and income level. The LO/TCO-SACO divide does not fully correspond to the low/high experienced labor market risk divide, however.

Although differentiating white-collar TCO and SACO unions from blue-collar LO unions in practice does entail differentiating unions on the basis of their members’ skill level and income, this parameter alone does not effectively differentiate unions according to their organizational principle. As noted in the earlier section on the existing theoretical literature, the degree to which a union organizes primarily high- or low-income earners is expected to have an effect on union redistributive preferences. Similarly, so-called encompassing unions that organize workers with varying levels of skills and income are theorized to have redistributive preferences that differ from unions that primarily organize higher-skill and higher-income workers. Both of these effects can be expected to fall under the above-mentioned differentiation between “horizontal” unionism organized by industry or sector and “vertical” unionism organized by occupation or craft.

In order to include this possible effect of union organizational structure, the thesis’ second parameter of white-collar versus blue-collar unionism will exclusively compare “vertically” organized white-collar TCO and SACO unions from “horizontal” blue-collar LO unions. By comparing white-collar unions organizing a more “narrowly” defined homogenous white-collar member base on one side with a selection of horizontally organized heterogenous blue-collar LO unions on the other, the resulting selection of cases allows for as much theoretically motivated “maximum

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3 Admittedly, some of the largest TCO trade unions are also organized “horizontally” by industry or sector including Unionen (organizing private sector salaried employees), Vision (organizing municipal and regional salaried employees) and ST (organizing state salaried employees). However, for the sake of theoretically motivated case selection, these horizontally organized white-collar unions will not be studied here.

4 With the possible exception of Lärarförbundet, the TCO-member Swedish Teacher’s Union.
difference” as possible between the chosen TCO/SACO unions on one side and the chosen LO unions on the other. Aiming for “maximum difference” in the white-collar/blue-collar parameter should in turn be the most likely approach to observing possible differences in policy preference. Admittedly, not including horizontally organized white-collar TCO unions in the analysis opens up the possibility of union organizational principle having a potential effect on labor market policy preferences. Focusing more specifically on the effect of within-union organization on union labor market preferences will have to remain the subject of another thesis, however.

Based on the SPES labor market shortage index data that acts as the foundation of the 2012 SPES Vocational compass\(^5\) (*Yrkeskompassen*), the author has chosen to base each studied labor union’s member labor market risk exposure on a specific selection of occupations that can be expected to make up the core membership of each union. The occupations associated with each of the studied trade unions will be accounted for in Table 1 below, with Table 2 giving an overview of the suggested placement of the studied unions in accordance with the thesis’ two union parameters.

\(^5\) The SPES labor market shortage index data is SSYK 96-coded and has been kindly compiled and provided by Axel Cronert.
## Table 1: Swedish Public Employment Service Labor Market Shortage Indexes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trade union name and union confederation membership</th>
<th>Occupations represented, SSYK 96 code</th>
<th>SPES Labor Market Shortage Index 2012 (Median = 3.01, Standard deviation = 0.94)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handels (the Swedish Commercial Employees’ Union, HAN), LO.</td>
<td>421, Cashiers, etc.</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>514, Hairdressers and other service workers, personal services.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>522, Salespeople, retail, demonstrators.</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IF Metall (Industrial/Metalworking Union, IFM), LO.</td>
<td>721, Founders, welders, beaters.</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>812, Process operators in steel mills and other metal mills.</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>813, Process operators, glass and ceramic produce.</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>821, Machine operators, metal and mineral treatment.</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>822, Machine operators, ceramic-technical industry.</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>828, Fitters.</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalistförbundet (Swedish Union of Journalists, SJF), TCO.</td>
<td>245, Journalists, artists, actors, etc.</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kommunal (the Municipal Workers’ Union, KOM), LO.</td>
<td>513, Healthcare and care professions.</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sveriges Ingenjörer (Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers, SI), SACO.</td>
<td>214, Graduate engineers, architects, etc.</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>311, Engineers and technicians.</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lärarförbundet (Swedish Teachers’ Union, LF), TCO.</td>
<td>232, Upper secondary school teachers, etc.</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>233, School teachers.</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>234, Special educators.</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lärarnas Riksförbund (National Union of Teachers of Sweden, LRF), SACO.</td>
<td>232, Upper secondary school teachers, etc.</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>233, School teachers.</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>234, Special educators.</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As maybe noticed by attentive readers, the SPES labor market shortage index data in Table 1 and the union placement in Table 2 differs on two points. Firstly, the unexpectedly high labor market shortage indexes of the listed IFM occupations suggests that these occupations actually aren’t more risk-exposed than the median Swedish occupational group. Contrary to the SPES statistics, the IFM is classed as a union organizing members more heavily exposed to labor market risk as a result of the industrial sectors high exposure to international competition, the high level of economic cycle sensitivity commonly attributed to export-dependent industry, and the rapid pace of technological development in the industrial sector. Being exposed to the effects of globalization has in turn been found to increase low-skilled workers’ risk perceptions and demands for social protection (Walter 2017). This common perception of high and possibly ever-increasing labor-market risk amongst low-skill jobs in the industrial sector gives this author reason enough to classify the IFM as high-risk.

Another noticeable discrepancy between Table 1 and Table 2 is the surprisingly low SPES labor market shortage index of non-academic healthcare and care professionals, which seems to suggest that care workers are more exposed to labor market-related risk than the average IFM worker. On this point the author wants to point out the limitations of the data sample used, which aggregates several care-sector occupations in the single category listed, potentially skewing the index somewhat. The largest occupation organized by KOM is assistant nurses (undersköterskor, SSYK 2012 code 532), and this exact occupational group is given the stunningly high labor market shortage index of 4,54/4,15 in the most recent SPES data (Swedish Public Employment Service 2018). As there are at least circa 170,000 assistant nurses in Sweden and circa 511,000 members in KOM, assistant nurses in particular and health and care workers in general can be expected to make out a large part of the KOM member base (Lindholm 2018; Statistics Sweden 2018b).

Table 2: Expected placement of trade unions according to selection parameters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low labor market risk (R=0)</th>
<th>High labor market risk (R=1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White-collar TCO/SACO union (W=1)</td>
<td>Lärarnas Riksförbund, LRF Sveriges Ingenjörer, SI Lärarförbundet, LF</td>
<td>Journalistförbundet, SJF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue-collar LO union (W=0)</td>
<td>Kommunal, KOM</td>
<td>Handels, HAN IF Metall, IFM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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6 For assistant nurses working in home care and elderly care/hospitals, respectively.
Method, material studied, and sample selection

Method and material studied

Before proceeding, a quick overview of the research design of thesis design is in order. The research question is to what degree is a Swedish trade union’s labor market policy preferences defined by the union members’ labor market risk exposure and whether the union adheres to white-collar or blue-collar unionism? Firstly, a theoretical discussion grounded in the existing literature on trade union and worker labor market interests has resulted in a quartet of vital trade union labor market interests. Two parameters have been chosen to categorize the Swedish trade union landscape: type of unionism (white-collar or blue-collar) and member labor market risk exposure (low or high). Overall, the thesis will take a qualitative theory-testing approach, testing five theoretically motivated hypotheses that each suggest an expected tendency in trade unions’ labor market policy preferences. Each of these five hypotheses will in turn be based on whether a specific union is blue-collar or white-collar and/or whether a specific union’s members experience a high or low degree of labor market risk.

Being a so-called “small n” study studying seven unions, the thesis has prioritized empirical depth over case breadth by utilizing a combined methodological approach of holding semi-structured elite interviews as well as studying publicly available documents. The document study has focused solely on publicly available material including news stories, commentary from Swedish union newspapers, and reports published by the unions themselves. If available, union opinion pieces and opinion programs have been studied. In cases where relevant opinion programs or published opinion pieces haven’t been available (or even published at all!), union national congress protocols have been analyzed to illustrate unions’ internal debates as well as the official policy positions of union congresses.

The reason for this discrepancy in the written material studied is partially due to differences in each union’s communication strategy, with different unions favoring different communication channels. Furthermore, the amount of available lobbying/marketing resources varies between unions, making comparisons between a union with 8,000 members and another union with 120,000 members difficult. In other words, large unions with large public relations departments and sizable analytical capacity in-house are capable of publishing more opinion pieces and policy reports than smaller unions. Comparing unions’ policy emphases therefore becomes difficult in cases where larger unions are able to “cover more ground” advocacy-wise while smaller unions with more limited resources are forced to keep their policy emphasis focused on a smaller number of policy areas. This methodological problem has been found to be difficult to rectify and might skew the results somewhat. Nevertheless, the author is still confident that this thesis will be able to point toward preliminary conclusions of interest for future studies employing alternative methodological approaches.
Naturally, there are both benefits and potential pitfalls associated with qualitative text analysis. Channeling Fairclough and Fairclough (2015:2f), policy advocacy is here understood as an argumentative process of premise-conclusion sets of statements with the purpose of reaching a normative conclusion about what policy is best or should be enacted. Textual analysis allows the researcher to analyze such premise-conclusion sets within a wider range of explicit political advocacy “acts”. The primary methodological challenge associated with employing comparative qualitative textual analysis lies in reliably estimating valid levels of difference. As a result, judging a certain union’s policy advocacy focus to be “more/less EPL-oriented” becomes meaningless without sufficient comparison with comparable (or sufficiently and reliably different) other trade unions (Esaiasson et al. 2012:146f, 150).

Similarly, utilizing semi-structured interviews poses its own set of benefits and challenges. To begin with, the partially ad hoc nature of semi-structured interviews gives a “double blessing” of allowing the resulting discussion to be shaped in a manner specific to the interviewee, the potential “wiggle room” of open-ended questions might allow respondents to shape the interview narrative in their favor. This risk is dealt with in two ways. Firstly, the author has tried to keep the discussion on track while at the same time trying to avoid steering the interview too much on the basis of the interviewer’s pre-conceptions. Secondly, written material has been analyzed to complement the interview material. Finally, giving respondents a limited possibility to steer the interview is actually an advantage as the respondents’ and unions’ self-formulated motivations and arguments to a certain degree are the focus of the thesis.

Interview overview

Out of the eight interviews conducted, five (Sjöquist & Palmkvist, Von Otter & Kornebäck, Sahlin, Lapidus, and Treville & Carlsson) have been made in the central national offices of the unions. Two of the interviews have taken place over the phone (Bagge and Tufvesson & Persson) while one of the interviews took the form of an email conversation due to the preceding interview over telephone suffering technical issues with the author’s recording equipment (Frankelius). Half of the interviews (Sjöquist & Palmkvist, Von Otter & Kornebäck, Treville & Carlsson and Tufvesson & Persson) have involved two interviewees from the union due to the relative width of the policy issues covered. In the other four interviews (Sahlin, Lapidus, Bagge, and Frankelius), the interviewees participated in the interviews alone. All the interviews were held between the 5th and 20th of December 2018.

All interviews have been recorded by the author at the permission of the interviewees. The shortest interview was ca. 37 minutes long (Treville & Carlsson) and the longest interview was slightly over 80 minutes in length (Sjöquist & Palmkvist). The total recorded time of the interviews is around 304 minutes and the length of the transcript of the interviews spans 16,420 words. Both the transcript and recordings are in Swedish and are available from the author on request. The interview
guide is found attached to the thesis as part of the appendix and a list of the interviewees is found on page 46.

The respondents have been chosen on the basis of their assumed insight into both the unions’ internal political decision-making process and the unions’ external policy advocacy. The choice to systematically interview the respondents on the record has been made in order to maximize the validity and transparency of the interviews. As neither the unions or the respondents have received the opportunity to control the transcriptions post-interview, the interview material cannot be treated as official union policy as the recorded responses haven’t passed the “quality testing process” of each union’s central leadership and public affairs/communications department. As a result, the interviewees are first and foremost treated as respondents with insight into the union policymaking and advocacy process rather than immediate purveyors of precise official union policy standpoints – that is what the studied written material is for!

Finally, some quick comments regarding the interview guide are in order. The interview guide is found in the Appendix on page S4 and consists of 16 questions. The author’s ambition has been to ask the most general questions first while keeping the questions as open-ended as possible in order to allow the interviewees a sufficient degree of freedom in their answers. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the exact questioning order hasn’t always been followed for the sake of maintaining a good natural conversation that accommodates the responses of the interviewees.

Questions one to four cover the two parameters of the thesis and are intended to make the interviewees start thinking about labor market risk and the structure of the union membership early on. When possible, the interviewees have been asked to try to rate the importance of EPL, SWS, TR and UI on a scale from one to five and the final question has always been to ask the interviewees to rank the components of the trade union labor market interest quartet in order of their importance to their unions’ members. Unfortunately, almost none of the interviewees were able/willing to rate their union’s policy priorities from one to five but the interview’s final question was relatively successful in getting the interviewees to pinpoint the primary policy focus of their union.
Background

Introduction to Swedish EPL policy, wage-setting norms and training rights regimes

The primary EPL focus of this thesis will center on LAS, the Swedish Employment Protection Act (Lagen om anställningsskydd, SFS 1982:80). The 2007 reforms (SFS 2007:390 and SFS 390:391) of 5 § LAS gave employers the possibility to utilize so-called Allmän visstidsanställning (ALVA) temporary employment, effectively dualizing the Swedish labor market as the reform made it possible for employers to single-handedly sidestep the previous LAS-mandated norm of open-ended (tillsvidare) employment contracts. Furthermore, large swaths of LAS are dispositive through collective agreement as defined by the 3rd paragraph of 2 § LAS meaning that collective agreements between central union organizations and employers can sidestep several of the rules of LAS.

The dispositive sections of LAS include 5 § LAS regulating the proper use temporary contracts (including ALVA) and 22 § LAS regulating the “first in-last out” principle that mandates that the most recently hired employee hired will be the first fired in cases of a lack of work. Employers’ right to use temporary contracts such as ALVA is time-limited as LAS mandates employers to offer open-ended employment contracts to employees who have been working for them under the conditions of 5 § LAS for at least two of the last five previous years (5 a § LAS). While this limit of maximum temporary employment contract length in theory limits employers’ possibility to “stack” temporary contracts under a longer period of time, 5 a § LAS has together with the possibility of ALVA contributed to the creation of an increasingly two-tier Swedish labor market.

One of the most important components of the so-called Swedish model of industrial relations is the lack of a statutory minimum wage as wages are determined by collective agreements between employers and unions. While collective agreements are traditionally decided through a central bargaining process, central collective agreements can be supplemented by more detailed local agreements given that the local agreement doesn’t infringe on the more centralized agreement (Swedish Mediation Institute 2018). The collective agreement covers all workers at the workplace and is automatically binding for both the members of the trade union and for the companies that are members of the employers’ organization concluding the agreement. Collective agreements can only be concluded by trade union organizations and not individual workers (23 § Swedish Co-Determination Act, SFS 1976:580).

On a final note concerning Swedish wage-setting, the current Swedish wage-setting norm follows the so-called industrial agreement (Industriavtalet) of 1997, in which the export industry sets the norm for the maximum annual wage increase, the so-called “mark”. The reasoning behind establishing the norm of the “mark” through the industrial agreement has been to minimize the risk of damaging Swedish international competitiveness through union demands for rampant wage increases, a tendency that in the past fueled high levels of Swedish inflation and subsequent
repeated devaluations of the Swedish crown in order to maintain the international competitiveness of the Swedish export industry (Swedish Mediation Institute 2018:15).

The Swedish UI system is built upon a Ghent system of voluntary UI fees paid to union-administered UI funds (a-kassor, UIF:s). Currently, there are 27 different UIF:s of which all but one are union-administered. Beyond a basic unemployment allowance of 365:- a day that is also granted to UIF non-members, UIF:s insure UIF members’ previous incomes of up to a maximum of replacement level of 80% of UIF members’ previous wages. The maximum previous wage insured by UIF:s is ca. 27,000:-, of which a maximum 80% is reimbursed monthly to UIF members that become unemployed (Inspektionen för arbetslöshetsförsäkringen 2018a; 2018b).

The lack of universal training right (TR) regimes has long been a subject of debate in Sweden and as of the time of writing a truly universal TR regime does not exist. The most important Swedish TR regime of note are the employer- and union-funded “transition funds” (omställningsfonder), which support recently laid-off workers economically on top of the UI provided the UIF:s and/or individual coaching and training services. The extent of TR provided by the five largest transition funds varies, however, and is usually dependent on the individual “transitional coach” deeming an already laid-off worker’s skills to be insufficient (Walter 2015:11ff).

Previous attempts to create more ambitious universal TR regimes beyond the purview of the union- and employer-financed transitional funds have failed, including the suggested creation of so-called Individual Learning Accounts (IKS, Individuellt kompetenssparande) in the early 2000s. The IKS reform would have created tax subsidies supporting the allocation of funds in worker-specific IKS:s; funds that ultimately could be used to finance job-relevant continuous training programs (Government of Sweden 2015). The original plan to introduce IKS was ultimately shelved in 2004, however (Jacobsson 2004). A more recently suggested universal TR regime is the so-called system of developmental leave (utvecklingsledighet) which hopes to grant workers with ten years of work experience a year of absence for continuous education. Whether the system of developmental leave will be more successful than the somewhat similar system of “free years” (friår) in the mid-2000s remains to be seen, however (Wallner 2018; Government of Sweden, 2019).

Recent developments in Swedish trade unionism
When discussing the current realities of Swedish trade unionism, it quickly becomes important to highlight the ongoing shift in the power relations within the previously very LO-dominated Swedish trade union sphere. Although the LO still represents more than forty percent of the unionized active employees in Sweden, the active LO membership of ca. 1,2 million workers represents a minority of the unionized Swedish workforce when compared to the ca. 1,6 million active working members of
the TCO and SACO\(^7\) (Swedish National Mediation Office 2018:222ff). Furthermore, the longer-term membership trend of the blue-collar LO in relation to the white-collar TCO and SACO shows a steady decline in LO union membership amongst active workers, with the LO-organized share of the total active unionized workforce falling from ca. 75% in 1960 to ca. 40% in 2017. The white-collar TCO and SACO confederations have in turn experienced a drastic increase in both relative and absolute membership rates, with the TCO share of active unionized workers growing from barely 20% in 1960 to almost 38% as of 2017 and SACO growing from representing less than 5% of the total active unionized labor force in 1960 to almost 20% in 2017 (The Swedish National Mediation Office 2018:222ff; Arndt 2018:5). The level of total unionization in Sweden has similarly fallen from 81% in 2000 to 69% in 2017. Although the last fifteen years’ drop in Swedish unionization rates has been dramatic, the current level of Swedish unionization is still high in an international perspective (Kjellberg 2018:7ff).

There are many reasons for the above described shift from the predominantly LO-dominated blue-collar unionism of the 1960s to the increasingly white-collar unionism in Sweden today. Firstly, the relative size of the LO as part of the larger Swedish union movement has fallen as a result of a shrinking industrial sector and an ever-smaller public sector in relation to the economy as a whole (with the possible exception of Sweden’s personal care sector as junior nursing staff are traditionally organized in the LO’s Municipal Workers’ Union). The member loss of the LO has happened parallel to the gradual increase in the membership of the TCO, who in 2017 had ca. 1.1 million active working members, around the same level of TCO membership as was recorded in the mid-1990s. As a result, the gradual strengthening of the TCO membership has given rise to some observers expecting the TCO overtaking the LO as the largest Swedish union confederation and thus claiming the LO’s traditional mantle as informal head of the unified Swedish union movement. Similarly, the number of workers with academic degrees has risen sharply since 2000, fueling a strong SACO member increase of almost 100,000 new members between 2000 and 2009, a period during which the TCO lost ca. 85,000 members before returning to the membership levels of the mid-1990s between 2008 and 2017. The LO membership loss has been even more dramatic, losing ca. 450,000 members between 2000 and 2009, the rate of member loss slowing but not stopping since, with the LO losing a further 98,000 members between 2009 and 2017 (Kjellberg 2018:57ff).

Secondly, the shrinking LO and TCO membership during the first decade of the 2000s was partially caused by a drastic shift in the fees for the Ghent-style union-administered UIF:s. The 2007 liberal-conservative reform of the UI system included abolishing the tax deductibility for union and UIF fees and an increased

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\(^7\) Note that these figures exclude retirees in all three central organizations, student members of the TCO and SACO, and the self-employed members of SACO. As the number of student members of TCO and SACO unions number in the hundreds of thousands, the true political weight of the three central organizations is hard to judge from the number of active workers alone.
Differentiation of UIF fees, which in practice meant that the members of UIF:s that covered lower-risk sectors stopped subsidizing the fees of UIF:s covering sectors and crafts/occupations that were more unemployment-prone. Differentiating the membership fees of each UIF raised the UI premiums of more unemployment-prone (and often lower-wage) UIF:s and lowered the UI premiums of less unemployment-prone (and commonly white-collar) UIF:s. As the fees of several LO UIF:s increased drastically, many lower-wage blue-collar workers were forced to prioritize their UIF memberships over their union memberships or renounced their UIF memberships altogether. Curiously, the dismantling of part of the differentiated UI fee and reintroduction of tax deductibility for union fees under the current socialist government has not returned the membership of the worst-hit LO UIF:s to their pre-2007 levels. Within the ranks of the white-collar unionized workforce, around 90,000 TCO UIF members are estimated to have changed their union membership to a SACO UIF in order to benefit from these funds’ lower fees (Kjellberg 2018:58, 75f).

Thirdly, the increasingly differentiated Swedish labor market has also contributed to a shift in LO/TCO/SACO unionization rates. The increase in short-term, zero hour, and other less secure forms of employment has had an effect on overall unionization rates as workers with non-fulltime and non-permanent contracts exhibit consistently lower unionization rates. Furthermore, the size of the public sector has been steadily shrinking and the use of staffing agencies has increased in a private sector labor market increasingly characterized by flexibility-minded employers aversely inclined to open-ended employment contracts possible. Finally, unionization rates have dipped as a result of less standardized forms of work, with “team-based” work realities in combination with overall minimal staffing making it harder than ever for employees to find the time for union activities (Kjellberg 2018:58, 75f).
Analysis

**H1, the white-collar EPL antagonism hypothesis:** *White-collar unions’ higher-skilled members will be assumed to suffer less from weakened EPL and will have more to gain from possible employer concessions in the form of greater training rights and higher skill-motivated differentiation in wages. Thus, if a trade union is a white-collar union, it is less likely to emphasize strong EPL in its advocacy.*

On the basis of H1, it would be assumed that controlling for the level of union members’ labor market risk exposure, white-collar unions would be expected to put less emphasis on EPL in their advocacy than blue-collar unions. In the sample studied, this would mean that the white-collar LRF, SI and LF would put less emphasis on the importance of EPL than the blue-collar KOM. In line with the hypothesis, SJF should put less emphasis on the importance of strengthened EPL than the blue-collar HAN and IFM.

It quickly becomes clear that Swedish EPL in the form of LAS serves as a more general prerequisite for union representation than merely mandating a certain order of “first in-last out” dismissal in cases of redundancy. The semi dispositive nature of LAS makes it is possible for collective agreements between employers and central union confederation-affiliated unions to sidestep parts of the EPL and this includes §22 regulating the proper order of dismissal in cases of redundancy. This semi dispositive nature of LAS potentially allows for greater levels of EPL flexibility as long as such EPL flexibility is agreed upon by both parties to the collective agreement. As a result, sector-specific collective agreements are in theory able to “tailor” the EPL requirements in accordance to the wishes of the local parties, with unions not seldomly agreeing to change the “first in-last out” order of dismissal of §22 LAS in exchange for other collective agreement-defined benefits such as strengthened local employer-financed training programs.

In the case of the relatively low-risk white-collar unions, LAS fills a more complex function in defining the power balance of the employer-union relationship. At first glance when attempting to judge the EPL advocacy focus of the Swedish teachers’ unions, mentions of LAS are completely absent from the LRF’s report on the future of the Swedish upper secondary school (Lärarnas riksförbund 2016, “Så formar vi framtidens gymnasieskola”). Contrary to the initial assumption of EPL being of less interest for white-collar teachers’ unions, LAS and the collective agreement supplementing it still defines the procedure in the few cases of teacher lay-offs being made, with both the LRF and the LF interviewees noting employers trying to shrink the groups within which seniority is defined in line with the LAS “first in, last out” principle favoring senior workers. To quote the author’s interview with LRF investigator Katarina Treville, the LRF

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8 Making these “sequencing groups” smaller would in theory have made it easier for employers to single out specific teachers for termination.
“[...] doesn’t have any advocacy work that concerns LAS due to the shortage of [qualified] teachers [in the labor market], we’re more interested in things being done properly if the need arises.”

Author: “Meaning that the union is involved if dismissals are to be made...?”

Treville: “Exactly.”

In a similar vein, another more minute aspect of LAS makes it of great interest for the white-collar SI. As stipulated by 4 st. 22 § LAS, redundant employees have a right to be relocated to alternative work tasks at their employer so long as they are deemed to be qualified enough. While LAS gives employers the unilateral right to declare a lack of work (arbetsbrist), LAS doesn’t specify what constitutes high enough qualifications for a specific vacant post in the same company - that is most commonly defined by the employer in collaboration with the union. Lay-offs being made in parallel with recruitment attempts within the same company isn’t rare in the rapidly developing tech sector and the larger Swedish export-driven tech firms, thus making 4 st. 22 § LAS an important guarantor for continued union influence in the workplace for engineers. As a result, and contrary to the expectations of H1, when asked to rank the policy quartet in order of relevance, SI opinion strategist Jessica Bagge at SI characterizes a hollowing out of EPL as the most immediate threat to the SI’s interests (Bagge 2018).

For the relatively low-risk blue-collar KOM, on one hand, the labor shortage of nursing staff has made the “first in-last out” aspect of LAS of lesser interest for the union’s advocacy. On the other hand, however, many assistant nurses have found themselves in fixed-term ALVA contracts as a result of 5 § LAS, leading to a surprisingly high amount of insecure employment contracts within the nursing sector (Kommunalarbetsrädeförbundet 2014:10f; Kommunalarbetsrädeförbundet 2016a:19; Kornebäck & von Otter 2018). Although it is unclear why 30% of KOM members have non-permanent positions given the shortage of assistant nurses, the prevalence of ALVA contracts amongst KOM members has led to KOM advocating for the Swedish Social Democratic Party to act for the dismantling of ALVA. Nevertheless, KOM has very recently come out suggesting an EPL reform compromise where the LAS 5 § possibility for ALVA remains in exchange for ALVA contracts entailing a higher wage premium and a LAS-required faster path to a permanent position for those working on an hourly basis (Lindholm 2019).

The “second-tier” realities of ALVA employment contracts are increasingly worsening the employment security of the white-collar but high-risk SJF. As a result, “fighting insecurity” is the foremost policy priority of the opinion program passed by the 2018 SJF national congress (Sveriges Journalistförbund 2018:1). In the author’s interview with the head of press at the SJF Jacob Lapidus, Lapidus mentioned fears within the wider SJF membership of the worse conditions for ALVA-employed journalists potentially leading to a “slippery slope” where the employment conditions of

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9 A campaign that succeeded in 2017.
permanent-position journalists are also gradually worsened. As noted by Lapidus at the SJF,

“[W]e’ve already seen that LAS doesn’t work. The large media corporations such as Bonnier, Schibstedt, Mittmedia have […] created their own staffing agencies [bemanningsföretag] So if you graduate from JMK [The Department of Media and Communication Studies at Stockholm University] and want to work at Expressen you’ll instead be employed by Marieberg Media and after that you’ll maybe work Expressen for a year. If there’s any lack of work at Expressen it’ll be considered a business customer [of Marieberg Media] which makes it much easier [for Expressen] to claim that there’s a lack of work. Thus, you circumvent LAS and that’s a big deal. We’ve been big opponents of this in the run-up to collective agreements”

In the case of the higher-risk blue-collar IFM, the employment security focus of the union seems to be focused on securing members’ employability in the manufacturing sector by primarily using policies different from EPL. While the maintenance of LAS serves as a rallying cry for the IFM member base, IFM ombudsman Hans Palmqvist stresses that the actual implementation of LAS varies between local union-employer agreements (Palmqvist 2018). In the words of the head of the IFM investigative branch Stefan Sjöquist, workers’ employment protection lies in “remaining employable over time”, stressing the fact that many Swedish industries suffered from recruitment challenges following laying off much of their qualified blue-collar workforce in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 economic downturn (Sjöquist 2018). As a result, the IFM has suggested a system of short-term work in combination with parallel training as a way forward that allows companies to retain their working base on a part-time basis during a sharp economic downturn. Post-crisis, the companies will be more competitive internationally with a higher-skilled workforce (IFM in Aftonbladet 2018). In short, while stressing the need for workers’ economic security in economic downturns, the IFM doesn’t see protecting manufacturing jobs at all costs as a longer-term solution as such an approach doesn’t guarantee long-term economic competitiveness and thus long-term manufacturing jobs.

The primary EPL advocacy focus of HAN concerns the conditions of ALVA-employed workers in the retail sector, with HAN stressing the importance of having “norm employment” (full-time permanent position) for being able to qualify for UIF benefits, pensions and other benefits in Sweden. When asked about HAN’s weighing of the importance of economic competitiveness against the need for overall employment protection, HAN’s political coordinator Moa Sahlin says:

“For us it’s almost more important with norm employment for wage development as 70% of our members don’t have a permanent full-time position, this has an effect on wage increases and pensions in
the longer term and whether workers find themselves within the boundaries of the social insurance system.”

In conclusion and contrary to the expectations of H1, the conclusions from the analysis above seems to support stringent EPL (i.e. LAS) being of vital importance for maintaining the strong negotiating position of even the most homogenous of Swedish white-collar unions.

H2, the risk exposure-EPL emphasis hypothesis: The higher the labor market risk exposure experienced by a worker, the harder it will be for that worker to find new related employment in the case of unemployment. Thus, a trade union representing members that experience a high level of labor market risk is more likely to emphasize the importance of strong EPL in its advocacy.

On the basis of H2 above, it would be expected that higher-risk white-collar unions would be more likely to stress the importance of EPL than their lower-risk white-collar union peers and this thesis’ literature analysis seems to confirm that expectation. The SI, LF and LRF lack any mention of EPL in the opinion pieces and reports published on their websites10. As noted in the above discussion of H1, however, the SJF has strengthened EPL in the form of a diminished availability of ALVA employment as one of their primary policy goals, with the SJF opinion program further stressing the need for a “strengthened and expanded labor law” (Journalistförbundet 2018b:1). While these results might suggest a clear difference in EPL advocacy between high- and low-risk white-collar unions, comparing the ca. 8,000-member SJF with the 100,000-member LF, 60,000-member LRF and 120,000-member SI makes drawing valid conclusions difficult given the relative lack of homogenous higher-risk white-collar unions analyzed.

Amongst the studied blue-collar unions, the differences in EPL advocacy focus is less clear-cut than H2 would suggest. As noted in the above discussion of the H1 expectations amongst the studied blue-collar unions, most of the EPL focus of HAN and KOM centers on the two-tiered employment contract system made possible through 5 § LAS. While the highest-risk HAN has a significant ALVA focus in their advocacy, the same is also true for the lower-risk KOM as ALVA employment was a relatively common phenomenon throughout the KOM member base (Kommunalarbetareförbundet 2016a). According to the IFM interviewees Palmqvist and Sjöquist, ALVA contracts are less common within the IFM sphere when compared with the use of staffing agencies (bemanningsbolag) which might explain the relative IFM advocacy non-focus on EPL matters.

In the case of IFM, the exact extent of staffing agency use is heavily dependent on the specific details of the local IFM agreements and a LO-wide agreement about the use of staffing agencies (IF Metall 2017a, LO 2018a). The IFM EPL policy pragmatism

10 At least amongst shared opinion pieces from the last four years and shared reports from the last eight years.
shines through in the IFM leadership’s response to member motions calling for a curbing of staffing agency use during the IFM national congress of 2017, arguing that while “overusing staffing agencies adds insecurity for our members in the workplace, simply limiting the increased use of staffing agencies doesn’t solve the problem. [If IFM advocacy manages to guarantee lessened staffing agency use,] employers will add flexibility by increasing the number of non-permanent positions” (IF Metall 2017b:91). To tackle the increased use of staffing agencies, the IFM leadership instead suggested exploring LO-common strategies, calling for “an initiation of negotiations after [the IFM] congress to find solutions to [all issues associated with] employment forms including the use of staffing agencies, which will mean that the rules regulating ALVA and staffing agency use will be reviewed […] in order to strengthen employment security” (ibid.).

With LAS allowing ALVA, this in practice leads to a great loss in trade unions’ collective bargaining power (at least on the legal level – one must remember that LAS is semi-dispositive with EPL implementations depending on the national and/or local collective agreement). Banning ALVA would in practice diminish employers’ rights to unilaterally define when work shortages are at hand (Junesjö 2018). Keeping EPL stringent thus seems to primarily serve the purpose of unions being able to “force the employers to the negotiating table” as regards offering support for employees that are at risk of losing their jobs. But then again, previous studies suggest that unions are increasingly finding themselves playing a “game of defense” in times of increasing globalization and liberalization (Davidsson & Emmenegger 2013:342f).

As concerns H2 as a whole, the evidence seems to largely vindicate the expectations of H2. On a fundamental structural level, strengthened EPL acts as a central foundational guarantor of a continued strong trade union negotiating position vis-à-vis employers seemingly regardless of union members’ level of labor market risk exposure. This structural importance of EPL for Swedish unions’ negotiating power vis-à-vis employers isn’t always apparent in the advocacy of the lowest-risk white-collar unions, however. When analyzing the white-collar unions researched as part of the thesis, higher labor market risk exposure indeed seems to correlate with a stronger EPL advocacy.

H3: the white-collar SWS antagonism hypothesis: with white-collar unions being more likely to have a narrower craft- and/or occupation-defined member base of higher-skilled workers, they are also more likely to be primarily focused on increasing the skill-wage premium of their members. Thus, a white-collar union is more likely to be opposed to lessened skill-wage premiums and is therefore less likely to stress SWS in its advocacy.

In line with H3, it would be expected that relatively low-risk white-collar unions would be more supportive of a larger skill-wage premium than low-risk blue-collar unions. As will be demonstrated below, such a conclusion seems premature on the basis of the unions studied in this thesis.
While SI and LRF/LF do support an increased skill-wage premium, the premises of their advocacy is slightly different. The SI lists the attainment of a larger Swedish wage spread across sectors and employment opportunities as one of their foremost policy goals in their income policy opinion program (Sveriges Ingenjörer 2012:4). In line with most SACO unions, SI is of the opinion that working and studying in order to get an academic degree should lead to an associated skill-wage pay-off (ibid.:6). Furthermore, Jessica Bagge and SI lead negotiator Camilla Frankelius state a sense of confoundment over the fact that the supposed shortage of graduate engineers hasn’t corresponded to higher graduate engineer wage increases when compared to the wage increases of lawyers and business majors. Comparing the last years’ year-to-year wage increases of lawyers vis-à-vis graduate engineers lies outside the bounds of this thesis, however.

The LRF and LF advocacy for higher teacher wages similarly stresses the need for an increased skill-wage premium. The Swedish teacher unions argue for teacher wages that are “competitive” with other university graduate (akademiker) wages that allow for a greater degree of wage increases over the career of a teacher (Lärarnas Riksförbund 2016 Fyra viktigaste beslutet på LRs kongress, Lärarförbundet 2018:10 Styrdokument). Quoting Åsa Fahlén, the president of the LRF, future differentiated wage increases for teachers would have to be “synchronized with a professional program which contains national criteria for which [teachers] qualify” (cited in Hedman & Wallin 2018). In other words, the LRF and LF don’t only advocate for an increased skill-wage premium but also a more explicit and transparent system of tying teachers’ wage increases to more concrete skill and/or seniority requirements. As noted by LRF intervieweees Treville and Karlsson, such a national system of teacher career progression with associated wage increases would improve greatly on the current realities of teachers being forced to change employers in order to get any wage increase.

If H3 was to be true it would mean that KOM, being a blue-collar union of a similar risk level to SI and LRF/LF, would be less positively inclined towards increased skill-wage premiums. Contrary to the expectation of H3, KOM has championed individual wage-setting since 1993 (Lapidus 2015). While admitting the potential unfairness of actual wage increases due to differences in supervisors’ subjective assessment of union members’ work, the official view of the KOM leadership is that

“[n]evertheless, the union’s member surveys indicate that the union’s membership wants differentiated wages. Defining a fair wage is difficult. There are many who are of the opinion that a fair wage entails being paid the same wage for the same work. A majority of the union’s members think that it’s important to be able to influence one’s own wage” (Kommunalbetareförbundet 2016b:130, author’s translation).

According to the KOM leadership, the union’s preference for individual wage-setting has been supported by a majority of KOM members in surveys in 2000, 2002 and
2011 although the consistency of the methodology of the surveys has been questioned by critics (Gustafsson Hedenström 2012, Lapidus 2014:11-14). The fact that KOM supports individual wage-setting with wage increases being distributed locally is hotly debated within the member ranks as proven by the 13-member motions arguing unsuccessfully for KOM returning to solidaristic wage-setting during the 2016 KOM national congress.

Finally, KOM has also advocated strongly for a national certification of the assistant nurse (undersköterska) profession in order to highlight the skill-wage discrepancy that KOM argues exists for assistant nurses (Kommunalarbetareförbundet 2018). While pushing for higher overall assistant nurse wages, the 2016 assistant nurse wage increase agreed between SKL (The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) and KOM did not equate to a uniform guaranteed wage increase for all assistant nurses as the increase in assistant nurses’ entry wages was lower than the overall “mark” wage increase set by the export-dependent industrial sector (Gustafsson Hedenström & Hjort 2016). On the other hand, the 2016 differentiated increase in assistant nurses’ wages can be seen as going hand-in-hand with a felt need within KOM “to define the skills that assistant nurses have and need as some have seen the job as a ‘simple’ job without any need for specific qualifications” (von Otter, 2018)

In line with H3, the white-collar SJF should be more positively inclined to increased skill-wage differentiation when compared to the blue-collar IFM and HAN. While the SJF indeed does pursue individual wage-setting and IFM and HAN doesn’t, the dividing line as regards to wage-setting principles isn’t as clear-cut. While five member motions submitted to the 2018 SJF national congress criticized the SJF system of individual wage-setting for being unfair, unpredictable and non-transparent, the SJF leadership’s motion to merely take note of the criticism ahead of the next collective agreement negotiation round in 2020 was only narrowly carried by congress (54-50 in votes with one abstention) (Sveriges journalistförbund 2018). The current SJF wage policy advocacy does, however, raise the issue of wage differences between ALVA and non-ALVA-employed journalists while previous SJF wage reports have also highlighted differences in journalist wages in urban versus countryside areas (Nesser 2015, Werne 2017:17, Sveriges journalistförbund 2018b:10)

Similar to the SJF’s lukewarm response to internal criticisms of its individualized model of wage-setting, the IFM isn’t as opposed to skill-wage differentiation in the workplace as H3 predicts. While the wage-setting realities of IFM workers depends on under which of the IFM’s 41 collective agreements they fall under as well as the specific details of the local IFM agreement, the IFM interviewees seems to suggest an increased wage differentiation correlating with workers’ productivity increases over time. To quote the head of the IFM research branch Stefan Sjöquist,

“[i]n car maintenance you have a relatively low entry wage but there’s a higher demand for professional improvement as a result
of the advances in the sector where you must learn how to use new systems, learn new skills as a service technician, then you [and your wage] develop at the same rate. From our point of view, a lower entry wage is reasonable in a comparative sense if you have good prospects to rise in wage over time. But if you look at areas where you quickly stagnate [in skill], the entry wage often is of greater importance and cannot be too low as that [wage] ‘floor’ risks also becoming the [wage] ‘ceiling’ for many.”

The IFM rhetoric of tying wage increases to correlated productivity increases rhymes well with the Swedish export-dependent industrial sector’s competitiveness focus. The IFM relative acceptance of within-union wage differentiation is also apparent in a statistical sense: the average entry wage in most of IFM’s collective agreements is only 60-75% of the median wage of workers covered by the same agreement (IF Metall 2018a:47). Similarly, while the IFM does highlight a need for a higher percentual rise for entry-level wages, the union also stresses the need for workers to be able to “grow” and “develop” through shouldering new tasks at work and correspondingly deserving a higher wage raise (ibid.:8, 10). In comparison, the minimum entry wage of those employed in the HAN-organized retail is around 85% of the average wage of blue-collar workers in the entire retail sector (author’s own calculations based on the LO 2017:7 and Handelanställdas riksförbund 2018).

HAN is the relatively high-risk union studied that most closely follows the expectations of H3, advocating for a strongly solidaristic policy of wage-setting between sectors. As noted in the decision program from the HAN national congress of 2016, the first and foremost stated emphasis of the union’s wage-setting policy is maintaining and supporting solidaristic wage-setting “[w]ith the same wage for the same job and with wage harmonization between different categories of workers” (Handelsanställdas riksförbund 2016:24). Interestingly, HAN has motivated its advocacy for high relative entry wages by stressing the role of the Swedish minimum wage in keeping the Swedish effective minimum income high in both a relative and absolute sense. Furthermore, HAN’s own reports suggest that the relatively high collective agreement-mandated minimum retail wage rhymes well with the high overall productivity of the average Swedish retail employee (Berge 2013:9, 19).

In conclusion and contrary to the expectations of H3, union attitudes towards SWS seem to be dependent on factors other than merely the blue-/white-collar unionism divide.

**H4: the risk-TR hypothesis:** workers that are more exposed to labor market risk will have a greater interest in training rights that allow them to strengthen their position in an emerging knowledge economy. Thus, a trade union representing workers that experience a high degree of labor market risk exposure will be more likely to emphasize the importance of strengthened training rights in their advocacy.
The expectations of H4 would entail that unions representing higher-risk workers would be more likely to stress the importance of training rights in their advocacy. In other words, amongst the studied white-collar unions SJF is expected to stress training rights more than the LRF/LF or SI and in the case of the blue-collar unions studied, HAN and IFM are expected to be more likely to stress the importance of strengthened training rights than KOM.

Of the three studied blue-collar unions, the IFM has the clearest emphasis on the need for continuous education and training rights. This is hardly surprising when put in perspective to the rest of IFM’s advocacy as the union consistently stresses the necessity of continued international competitiveness in the Swedish export sector as a guarantor for the continued existence of blue-collar industrial jobs. The exact reasons for the strong IFM emphasis on training rights is less clear-cut than H4 would suggest, however. An alternative explanation would speak for IFM vocations’ high average level of skill specificity fueling the union’s continued emphasis on continuous training in order for the Swedish export sector to “stay ahead of the curve” of its international competition (in line with Iversen & Soskice 2001).

As pointed out by Stefan Sjöquist of the IFM, Sweden presently lacks a national uniform system of continuous on-the-job education for those that are already employed. The system of “short-term work” suggested by the IFM (and mentioned in the discussion about H1 above) would be of great benefit for the continuous training of blue-collar workers in an industrial sector (Nilsson & Säikkäla 2018; IF Metall 2018b). Furthermore, the IFM has developed a system of “validation” of industrial worker skills that maps the skill-sets of blue-collar workers in the workplace in order to suggest paths forwards for needed training with the goal to boost workers’ and the overall workplace’s productivity (IF Metall 2017a). In the mindset of the IFM, effectively spotting workers’ specific training needs is of paramount importance for the maintenance of blue-collar workers’ labor market security.

On a related note, Moa Sahlin of HAN points out that their members’ skills are often harder to define than those of other occupational groups in general and those with university degrees in particular. As a result, HAN has launched a system of skill validation similar to the skill validation system of IFM in an attempt to formalize the less formal skills of those working in the retail sector. The HAN system of vocational validation has a role similar to the vocational validation practices used by IFM as it aims to strengthen the skill-dependent negotiating position of HAN workers vis-à-vis employers (Handelsförbundet 2018). While skill validation doesn’t guarantee lower-skilled workers strengthened training rights per se, validating less formalized skills gives formally lower-skilled workers a better “starting block” for future skill development. To paraphrase, knowing where you stand skill-wise is a vital prerequisite for successful skill development.

The limited training rights enshrined in the existing system of “transition agreements” (omställningsavtal) unfortunately disadvantages large swaths of the HAN membership. While “transition fund”-funded (omställningsfond) continued
education is not seldomly offered particularly risk-exposed recently laid-off workers, unemployed are required to have worked 16-hour weeks for the past 12 months in order to fall under the auspices of the services of a transitional agreement and the agreements’ coaching and matching services are only available after unemployment due to a lack of work. This and similar limitations within the recently suggested system of “developmental leave” (utvecklingsledighet) effectively disadvantage part-time workers as well as workers with a past history of ALVA employment contracts including large swaths of the HAN membership (LO 2018b:7ff, Wreder 2018).

Representing some of the lowest-risk occupations in the entire Swedish labor market, KOM has put a lot of advocacy focus on demanding national certification requirements for assistant nurses (undersköterskor). This has in turn led to the Swedish government in November 2017 ordering the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) to specify the skills needed to become a certified assistant nurse (Government of Sweden 2017). While KOM demands for the certification of assistant nurses is primarily motivated by the acute shortage of assistant nurses, the resulting concretization of assistant nurses’ professional requirements is seen as an important step in improving assistant nurses’ occupational standing and negotiating position. Strengthening assistant nurses’ negotiating positions vis-à-vis employers is in turn seen as a vital prerequisite for guaranteeing assistant nurses and other blue-collar care workers strengthened training rights in the future (Kommunalarbetareförbundet 2018).

Contrary to the expectation of H4, the importance of improved training rights is repeatedly stressed by the low-risk LF and LRF. The lack of teacher training rights is explicitly tied by the LRF to the lack of skill-mandated wage increases over the course of a teacher’s career. As part of the LRF report on the future of the Swedish secondary school system, 55% of secondary school teachers reported not having received any subject-specific education over the past five years while 40% of the respondents who considered leaving the teaching profession cited a lack of education as being one of the primary reasons for leaving. Overall, 65% of the studied teachers considered leaving the teacher profession (Lärarnas riksförbund 2016:9f). In the LRF’s consultation response to the government inquiry on the future framework for teachers’ professional development (SOU 2018:17), the union heavily stressed the need for guaranteed wage increases as part of any national system for teacher career advancement through teaching proficiency and/or attaining higher levels of specialized continuous education (Lärarnas riksförbund 2018:7f).

Both teacher unions stress teachers’ high workload as being one of the primary reasons for many employers’ lack of focus on continuous education, with the LF citing Swedish teachers on average having 3,6 days of annual on-the-job training in comparison to the OECD average of 9,1 days (Båvner 2018). The LRF further stresses the lack of quality teacher continuous education, a problem exacerbated by the state/municipal divide as municipalities that employ LRF teachers often find it difficult to organize university-level continuous training programs (Treville & Karlsson 2018).
The demand for strengthened training rights is also growing amongst the relatively low-risk SI members. As part of a recent survey amongst SI members, 60% were of the opinion that their employer’s company has failed to develop new products due to a lack of proper technical know-how. Furthermore, around 35% of the respondents stated that their employer had lost an order due to TR deficiencies (Sveriges ingenjörer 2018). Previously, the SI has advocated for a lengthened right to leave of absence (doubling it from 6 to 12 months), arguing that such a “year of innovation” would give more graduate engineers the opportunity to get further education or launching new innovations or business ventures (Sveriges Ingenjörer 2016, Lindstrand & Larsson 2017). The high rate of technological renewal is also cited as a primary concern of graduate engineers. In the words of Jessica Bagge of the SI, union “members don’t want to be used like nuclear reactor fuel, where one and one’s know-how is only of use as long as one’s know-how isn’t used up”. On the other hand, both Bagge and Frankelius of the SI are of the opinion that workers themselves often don’t press hard enough for their right to worker-employer training assessments as stipulated in many of the SI’s circa 90 collective agreements (Bagge 2018; Frankelius 2018).

On a positive note for SI and other private sector white-collar workers’ training rights, a recent strengthening of the TRR transitional agreement has been made possible as a result of historically low white-collar unemployment and a good overall business climate. As part of this strengthening of the TRR transitional agreement, laid-off SI members will now have the possibility to get TRR funding for four academic semesters’ worth of additional university studies (Tano 2019). This stands in contrast to the 2015 union-employer negotiations over the TRR, when SACO and the SI in particular saw the employer-funded TRR funding increase suggested by employers as not large enough to warrant the EPL concessions demanded in return (Virgin 2015).

The demands for strengthened training rights is similarly stressed by the relatively high-risk white-collar SJF. To begin with, most SJF members have a collective agreement-mandated right to paid leave when attending courses at the FOJO school of journalism and Nordiskt Journalistcenter (Journalistförbundet 2017a, Journalistförbundet 2017b). Freelance members of the SJF are similarly offered courses provided and funded by the union (Journalistförbundet 2019). The need for a strengthened training rights as part of a new TRR transitional agreement was front and center among the recent SJF policy suggestions for lessened labor market risk for journalists (Werne 2018:31ff). Unfortunately, and irrespective of the above-mentioned strengthened training rights as part of the 2019 TRR transitional agreement, the large and growing portion of the SJF membership that doesn’t have full-time permanent positions is effectively disqualified from the strengthened TRR training rights. To illustrate, half of journalists that lose their job have been found to have non-permanent positions (Lundquist 2017).

In conclusion and contrary to the expectation of H4, the analysis above suggests that unions representing workers experiencing a higher degree of labor market risk are not more likely to stress the importance of strengthened training rights in their
advocacy. On one hand, almost every union studied as part of this thesis seems to subscribe to the conclusion that the increasingly globalized knowledge economy and continued technological advances will warrant more stringent continuous training for workers. On the other hand, the exact methodology and overall qualitative approach of this thesis might be missing more minute differences in the studied unions’ emphasis on strengthened TR in their policy advocacy. A trend of note amongst the unions studied seems to be the increasing tendency towards occupational certification and informal skill validation amongst blue-collar unions such as the IFM, KOM and HAN. As regards to SWS, the author sees this trend as a sign of blue-collar unions attempting to improve lower-skilled workers’ overall standing in the skill-wage hierarchy rather than questioning the overall premise skill-wage discrepancies.

H5: Risk exposure-UI emphasis hypothesis: *Workers in sectors that are more susceptible to unemployment will be more interested in having a UI that is more heavily state-subsidized and thus to a larger degree pools their cost of UI amongst the wider collective of workers. Thus, a trade union representing workers that experience a high degree of labor market risk exposure will be more likely to emphasize generous UI in their advocacy.*

H5 suggests that unions representing higher-risk groups of workers will be more likely to stress the importance of more generous UI. Looking at the unions studied as part of this thesis, H5 would in other words suggest that the lower-risk blue-collar KOM should have a significantly lower UI focus than the relatively higher-risk IFM and HAN.

What differentiates the studied blue-collar unions when it comes to their UI advocacy standpoints isn’t the level of labor market risk experienced by each union membership. The three studied blue-collar unions are almost identical in policy advocacy when it comes to the UIF replacement rates as KOM and IFM want to see a raising of the UIF max replacement levels to guarantee 80% of recently unemployed 80% of their previous wage (IF Metall 2017:328; Kommunalarbetareförbundet 2016b:205). HAN, on the other hand, goes even further in its advocacy, calling for a 90% wage replacement rate for 90% of those becoming unemployed (Handelsanställdas förbund 2016:32).

What differs when it comes to the three blue-collar unions’ advocacy as regards to UI is the fact that IFM lacks the additional income insurance of KOM and HAN. The IFM’s lack of a union-guaranteed additional income insurance means that the IFM membership’s income above the current UIF cut-off point is uninsured in the case of unemployment. In the eyes of higher-income IFM members, the IFM’s lack of an additional income insurance has put the union at a disadvantage to other unions, losing higher-wage members in the process. As a result, the IFM has become forced to initiate a dialogue with the IFM membership over the discussion whether the IFM should get an additional income insurance of its own (Nilsson 2018). To quote Hans Palmqvist, ombudsman at IFM,
“It isn’t hard to drive an ideological or principal discussion about why everything [regarding a differentiated UI] has gone to hell but there’s also a reality to relate to. [...] But now reality is what it is and with the current political majorities it’s hard to see IFM’s goal of a UI of 80% [of the previous income being replaced] [...] Before the raising of the UI limit in 2015 I don’t even think that half of our members were insured to 80% if they ever became unemployed.”

In the case of the low-risk white-collar unions LRF, LF and SI, their advocacy focus as regards to the replacement rates of the UIF is almost non-existent considering the low premiums paid by their workers and the fact that all the unions provide an additional income insurance. As noted by Jessica Bagge of the SI, however, it’s quite improbable that the average SI has even noticed any difference in their UIF membership fee (Bagge 2018).

The harder UI reality of the higher-risk SJF is different from their relatively low-risk white-collar peers, with SJF members paying some of the highest UIF fees of all white-collar union members. Advocacy-wise, “[e]mployers have for years indicated that they want a more flexible labor market. The only way to interpret that is that they want more temporary solutions. But if they want to create [more temporary employment situations] they also have to ‘pimp’ the flexible labor market with a safety system” (SJF chairman Jonas Nordling cited in Hallstedt 2017). Similar to the reality of most non-fulltime non-permanent journalists finding themselves outside of the safety net of the TRR transitional agreement, the very same “non-norm” SJF members run a larger risk of finding themselves outside of the income insurance scheme provided by the SJF UIF.

In conclusion, the data for six out of the seven unions studied as part of this thesis seems to validate the H5 expectation that unions’ UI advocacy focus largely depends on the union members’ labor market risk exposure. Given workers’ increasing dependency on unions’ complementary income insurance of income above the limit insured by the UIF, the institutional premise for UI seems to be shifting away from universally guaranteed and financed UIF towards more vocation-specific privately-sourced and union-provided income insurance. In the absence of a new and more solidaristic system of UI financing across occupational groups, UIF fees risk remaining significantly higher for groups facing higher risks on the labor market.
Concluding discussion

The purpose of this thesis has been to test to what degree a Swedish trade union’s labor market policy preference is defined by the union members’ labor market risk exposure and whether the union adheres to white-collar or blue-collar unionism.

Contrary to the expectation of H1, EPL (i.e. LAS) plays a fundamental role in defining the structural balance of power in even the most white-collar of Swedish industrial relations, coaxing employers to the negotiating table in times of economic cut-backs as LAS by design makes local and sector-specific collective agreements possible. In line with H2, an important determinant of unions’ EPL advocacy focus seems to be union memberships’ experienced labor market risk. At the same time, the relatively punishing semi-dispositive facets of LAS in the absence of a collective agreement makes EPL of fundamental importance for Swedish unions regardless of labor market risk, although this isn’t always reflected in the advocacy emphasis of the lowest-risk white-collar unions.

Contrary to the expectations of H3, union support for SWS seems to be more dependent on whether union members’ productivity increases over time or not. As a result, any systematic effect of the white-collar/blue-collar union divide on unions’ wage-setting preferences is less apparent than H3 would suggest. Contrary to the expectation of H4, unions’ policy emphasis on strengthened training rights seems to be common amongst both high- and low-risk unions. Furthermore, the studied low-skill unions’ increased focus on informal skill validation and occupational certification within the nursing sector seems to suggest that unions representing relatively low-skill workers are attempting to strengthen their members’ skill-motivated negotiating position rather than merely questioning the fairness of higher skills mandating higher wages.

In line with the expectations of H5, unions’ emphasis of generous UI does seem to be strongly related to the union members’ experienced labor market risk. With ever-more unions considering privately-sourced and union-provided complementary income insurance that covers unemployed members’ lost income above the limit guaranteed by the UIF, the UI system of Sweden risks becoming increasingly dualized with differentiated UIF fees remaining high for the most risk-exposed occupational groups.

To conclude, a new understanding seems to be emerging amongst the more globalization-exposed parts of the blue-collar union movement that employment security is increasingly dependent on maintaining worker “employability” through a wider array of labor market policy than primarily protecting labor market insiders through mechanisms such as the “first-in-last-out” facets of LAS. Given the current development of the structural power balance between Swedish unions and employers, a future Swedish labor market consensus might lie in unions conceding a less stringently LAS-mandated “first-in-last-out” order of dismissals in exchange for strengthened training rights and other active labor market policies that are of greater benefit to workers with ALVA and/or part-time contracts.
Although the thesis’ choice of union-defining parameters and labor market interests might be limited, the author sees the thesis as an excellent starting point for further debate and research about trade union preferences as concerns ideal labor market policy. Of special interest will be future “large N” studies studying the labor market advocacy focus of a wider range of the Swedish union sphere. As a result, alternative methodologies utilizing quantifiable datasets might make comparisons of trade union advocacy easier. At the same time, qualitative elite interviews with labor union officials have been invaluable in giving the author an exclusive insight into each of the studied unions’ political and organizational culture. Therefore, future studies involving a qualitative interview component might find even more interesting results through interviewing union officials positioned at different levels of the union hierarchies.
**Interviews**

Bagge, Jessica. Public advocacy strategist, Sveriges ingenjörer.


Frankelius, Camilla. Head negotiation, Sveriges ingenjörer.

Kornebäck, Fredrik. Press secretary, Kommunalarbetareförbundet.

Lapidus, Jacob. Head of communication, Journalistförbundet.


Persson, Ulla. Ombudsman, Lärarförbundet.

Sahlin, Moa. Political coordinator, Handelsanställdas riksförbund.

Sjöquist, Stefan. Head of the investigative unit, IF Metall.

Treville, Katariina. Investigator and head of the public advocacy project, Läraras riksförbund.

Tufvesson, Malin. Head of socio-political affairs, Lärarförbundet.

von Otter, Clara. Speech writer, Kommunalarbetareförbundet.

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Appendix: Interview guide

1. What would you say is the level and nature of labor market risk facing the union’s member base? To what degree is the union’s membership forced to rely on scarce job opportunities, limited-time contracts, zero hour contracts or involuntary part-time work? 2. To what degree do union members feel that their skills are highly sector-specific; are there high skill requirements for the union’s members?

3. How would you describe the structure of the union’s member base when it comes to skill level and occupation? 4. What role does this homogeneity/heterogeneity play on the advocacy of the union?

5. To what degree does the union cooperate with other unions when negotiating collective agreements? 6. To what degree does the union take concessions granted to others unions/wage earners into account when negotiating the union’s collective agreements?

7. How would you say that the union and its membership value the EPL/labor market flexibility tradeoff? 8. How much emphasis is made on strengthening and/or entrenching EPL in the union’s advocacy work? 9. How would you rate the importance of EPL for the union membership on a scale from one to five?

10. How important a role would you say that SWS plays for the union membership? How would you rate the importance of SWS for the union membership on a scale from one to five?

11. How important would you say that TR are for the union’s membership on a scale from one to five? 12. How would a system of continued education be best designed and are there any potential pitfalls for the union members as regards to the current, past or recently suggested national systems of continued education?

13. What role do specific skills play for the attractiveness of the union’s members in the wider labor market? 14. What role would a system of continuing education play for the upkeep of the skill levels of the union’s members?

15. How important would you say that UI is for the union membership? How would you rate this importance on a scale from one to five?

16. In which order would you rank the importance of EPL, SWS and TR for the union’s membership?