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Agency control or autonomy? Government steering of Swedish government agencies 2003–2017

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ABSTRACT
A central claim of the NPM doctrine is that public sector organizations will deliver better quality and improve efficiency if managers are given more autonomy in managerial and operational decisions. At the same time the idea is to keep managers under close control, which has led to the introduction of result-control instruments. This balancing strategy is referred to as the paradox of autonomization. There is, however, still scarce knowledge on whether and how the proposed balancing techniques work. Using a unique database on Swedish government agencies this article aims to mitigate this deficiency ($N = 1752$). A balancing strategy is mainly confirmed, since higher managerial and structural autonomy are balanced with more external results control by government. We show that governments' attempts at more managerial approaches to public service provision in reality add new ex post controls without reducing the old ones. However, policy and financial autonomy are not balanced by increased results control – these dimensions diminish when controlling for budget size. This study is an answer to a general call for more objective measures for evaluating bureaucratic autonomy.

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Introduction

Government control and agency autonomy are related concepts, since agency autonomy is the flip side of government control. It is therefore worthwhile to consider the ways in which government agencies are controlled by their principals. If we want to know the level of autonomy of a public agency – and thereby the level of government control – we must analyze not only the decision-making powers of the agency on managerial and policy matters but also the extent to which the government can constrain the use of these powers by structural, financial, legal, and interventional means. Thus, the safest strategy for avoiding biased results is a multi-dimensional analysis of agency autonomy (Verhoest et al. 2004:109). What the combination of government control and agency autonomy actually looks like, and why, is the focus of this article. Our aim is explanatory. The main hypothesis is derived from existing literature and predicts that a government agency's level of autonomy in managerial and operational matters (e.g., human resource management or other aspects of organizational management) will explain the level of government control

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by means of reporting requirements, evaluation and auditing provisions against externally set goals and norms (Roness et al. 2008; Verhoest et al. 2010; Wynen and Verhoest 2016).

The idea that the managerial and operational autonomy of agencies affects the government's results control is reflected in public management policies. Since the 1990s, agency reform has been broadly characterized by structural disaggregation from central departments, by delegating of more management decision-making autonomy to managers, and by performance contracting (Talbot 2004; Pollitt et al. 2004). This reform activity is in sync with other management reforms in the public sector of the last decades. In general terms, contemporary public management ideas are based on assumptions regarding how to balance political control and bureaucratic autonomy (Verhoest et al. 2004; Wynen and Verhoest 2016). This is illustrated by the central claim of the New Public Management doctrine (NPM), that public sector organizations will deliver better quality and improve efficiency if managers are given a high level of autonomy in managerial and operational decisions (Hood 1991; Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Smullen 2010; Verhoest et al. 2010). According to this NPM logic, agency autonomy is conditional, since implementing organizations are granted certain freedoms, provided they also take responsibility for realizing previously agreed-upon results in as efficient and effective a way as possible (Smullen, van Thiel, and Pollitt 2001; Verhoest et al. 2004; Verschuere 2007; Verhoest et al. 2010). Contemporary public management models, such as management by objectives and results (MBOR), identify the need for governments to monitor the performance of government agencies and to control their results (Moynihan et al. 2011). External control of results through, for example, performance reporting and sanctions are applied to restrict agency autonomy (Verschuere 2007; Wynen and Verhoest 2016). Thus, contemporary performance management models suggest a balancing logic, where high levels of managerial and operational autonomy are balanced by low levels of interventional autonomy, which relates to the scale and quality of the demand for performance information and evaluation (Verhoest et al. 2010; Yesilkagit and Van Thiel 2008). Critical observers have also shown that to uphold an intended balance in practice can be hard, since an abundance of, for example, performance information requests can impede the operational and managerial autonomy of agency managers (Hoggett 1996; Diefenbach 2009).

Using the conceptual scholarship by Verhoest et al. (2004) on different dimensions of autonomy, our point of departure is that governments have the possibility to combine different steering techniques, which together either enhances or limits agency autonomy. Theoretically we can picture three main strategies. The first is *a balancing strategy*, where there is a negative association between the government's demand for results control (an agency's interventional autonomy) and other dimensions of agency autonomy. In less theoretical terms, this means that when the government allows an agency high levels of operational and managerial autonomy, it will be more interested in controlling agency results ex post. In addition, there are two possible *unified strategies*. Governments can in theory allow agencies high levels of autonomy in all dimensions, or in none. By identifying and explaining these types of patterns, we hope to contribute to the literature on ministerial steering of government agencies.

This research is based on an unique database, using objective data on Swedish governments' steering of government agencies during the period 2003–2017, covering 182 agencies and 1752 observations. The Swedish national executive features a dual structure, with small government offices (ministries) lending support to the cabinet and 340 semi-autonomous government agencies involved in all stages of the policy process (Pierre 2004; Ahlbäck Öberg and Wockelberg 2015; Statskontoret 2019a). Our primary data source is the government's appropriation directives issued to government agencies on an annual basis. These appropriation documents are publicly accessible, and considered to be one of the most important instruments for the government to control central government agencies. An additional contribution to this line of research is hence that we provide strong empirical evidence on how different government steering techniques relate to the level of government results control. These types of systematic large-*N* analyses of agency autonomy and government control based on objective – rather than perceptual – data over time are scarce (cf. Verhoest et al. 2010; Yesilkagit and Van Thiel 2008; Van Thiel and Yesilkagit 2014).

The article is organized as follows. We begin with an introduction to the literature on government control and agency autonomy. This account also presents an analytical framework to capture the distinction between different types of agency autonomy. After this, the research design is outlined and the data are presented, followed by the results of our empirical study. Finally, we sum up our main findings in the conclusions and comment on the article's contribution to the existing literature.

The research field and hypotheses

Research on organizational autonomy in the public sector can be found in the field of public management and organizational studies, and survey methodologies are often used to measure perceptual data on organizational autonomy and control of government agencies (Verschuere 2007; Verhoest et al. 2012; Maggetti and Verhoest 2014). Within this research field we find studies that investigate the distinction between formal and factual autonomy of agencies (Verhoest et al. 2004; Yesilkagit and Van Thiel 2008), the use of management instruments (Verhoest and Wynen 2018), and ministerial control through performance contracts (Binderkrantz and Christensen 2009; Kristiansen 2015; Askim, Bjurstrøm, and Kjaervik 2019). Our contribution to this field is our explanatory approach using large-*N* data, where we investigate how different agency-level characteristics that allow higher or lesser agency autonomy explain the level of interventional autonomy in the form of government results control. The Swedish research context enables an unusually large pool of government agencies, which allows for variation of agency-level characteristics. Since the dependent variable (interventional autonomy, that is, the level of performance information requested by the government) is chosen from the MBOR system, it is also an advantage that this system has been universal and relatively stable for the whole government sector during the period investigated (2003–2017). It should, however, be noted that starting with 2009, the Swedish government aimed to reform its application of the existing MBOR model (Government Budget Bill 2007/08:100; Government Budget Bill 2008/09:1). Studies conducted after the reform suggest that Swedish ministries were to a varying degree able and willing to implement the reform (Statskontoret 2013; Erlandsson 2014). Moreover, in a recent report from the Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret 2019b) the discrepancy between policy ambitions and policy outcomes when it comes to the MBOR system is clearly spelled out:

> "The government could […] commission the Swedish Agency for Public Management to do an analysis of what explanations there are to the fact that the original ideas of management by results only have had a limited impact in the practical arrangements of steering despite repeated attempts to accomplish a moderate and from the perspective of agencies' activities flexible steering." (Statskontoret 2019b:71, authors' translation).

This conclusion is in line with Sundström's earlier study of the Swedish MBOR system as a sticky institution with a high degree of stability over time (2006:399), and also Kristiansen's analysis of the Swedish MBOR discourse which has been marked by stability according to third-order changes (i.e. when the techniques and methods as well as the fundamental assumptions and objectives on which the techniques and methods are based are modified) (Kristiansen 2015:563). Hence, the main result after the 2009 reform is a decreasing number of performance information requests made in the appropriation directives. For our investigation, the interesting points are (a) we can still find the very same information in these appropriation documents as before 2009 (i.e., the variables that we use in our analyses are still there and not somewhere else) (Statskontoret 2013), and (b) the number of performance information demands has been reduced – it is obvious in our study – but that in itself does not necessarily affect the relationship between managerial and operational autonomy dimensions and the interventional autonomy, as such. However, this will be an issue that we will examine carefully.

The theory of agencification and autonomization

Government agencies have been described in many ways in the literature, but in this article we will use Pollitt et al.'s narrow definition, which defines an agency as a structurally disaggregated body, formally separated from the ministry/parent department, which carries out public tasks at a national level on a permanent basis, is staffed by civil servants, is financed mainly by the government budget, and is subject to legal procedures (Pollitt et al. 2004). Agencies can be interpreted as a corollary of the NPM agenda since many of the features associated with NPM, such as management autonomy and a focus on outputs and results, have also been attributed to agencies (Hood 1991; Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Smullen 2010). However, even though government agencies might enjoy a certain amount of autonomy over, for example, managerial matters, they are never totally autonomous, as political executives are politically responsible for the agencies' activities (Christensen and Laegreid 2006).

There is no lack of academic studies on the relationship between politicians and public bureaucracy in parliamentary systems. For a long time, the political control of public organizations has been one of the main concerns of students of politics and administration, and with the agencification of the NPM era, this concern has not diminished. As mentioned above, during the last decades political reformers have separated departmental units from ministries, created highly specialized organizations, and delegated substantial degrees of autonomy to these bodies (Roness et al. 2008; Yesilkagit and Van Thiel 2008; Smullen 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). As Yesilkagit and Van Thiel (2008:138) points out, due to a multitude of public organization designs the quest for political control has become even more central.

As previously stated, in the NPM ideal-type model, agencies are given a great deal of managerial autonomy to act more or less independently of their core governmental departments, which is expected to lead to increased efficiency and a decrease of waste (Hood 1991). NPM also emphasizes the need to shift the control of agencies from ex ante to results-based (ex post) control. The theory of agencification expects agents to perform at maximal efficiency if they have autonomy that allows them to specialize, on the one hand, and they are controlled strongly by the principal through results monitoring, on the other. Hence, a government agency can be assigned a high degree of autonomy in certain respects, but this can be combined with lower degrees of autonomy in other respects (Verhoest et al. 2004; Christensen and Laegreid 2006; Roness et al. 2008; Verhoest et al. 2010). For example, delegated mandates that allow for a high degree of managerial or operational autonomy may be combined with hard constraints in the form of detailed and extensive requests for performance information (lower degree of interventional autonomy). In the literature this is referred to as the paradox of autonomization, in which the autonomization of government agencies may imply stricter central regulation (Roness et al. 2008; Verhoest et al. 2010; Wynen and Verhoest 2016; see also "agencification paradox" in Smullen et al. 2001). This so-called paradox is, in other words, about combining a reduction of extensive input and process regulation with stricter demands of results control. It should, however, be emphasized that the term paradox should not be interpreted as an indication of governments being inconsistent or irrational, since it is perfectly logical for governments to balance autonomy dimensions. Instead, the term paradox should in this context be understood in relation to a perceived internal contradiction within the agencification literature, which from the beginning emphasized increased agency autonomy. The supposed benefits of internal self-reliance are more at the core of the agency story than is an increase of government control capabilities over its agencies (Smullen et al. 2001).

Thus, according to the managerialist school of thought, in interaction between a government and its agencies, high levels of managerial and operational autonomy are combined with a high level of results control and use of rewards and sanctions. Conversely, organizations that have lower levels of autonomy, and hence are closer to government, would need less results control, because the prospect of information asymmetry and opportunistic behavior is much less in these cases (Roness et al. 2008; Verhoest et al. 2010:8; Wynen and Verhoest 2016:541). Permitting a government agency more managerial and operational autonomy shifts decision-making powers from external actors (e.g., parent departments/ministries) to the agency itself, by delegation or devolution. External results control, in the form of, for example, performance information, refers to an idea where government agencies are given clear objectives by parent departments, and to the extent to which their achievement of these objectives is monitored and evaluated (Wynen and Verhoest 2016).

So far, we can conclude that the paradox of autonomization for a public organization implies a particular balance between managerial and operational autonomy, on the one hand, and interventional autonomy, on the other. Our interest is in what this balance actually looks like and what explains it. However, we need to specify theoretically the autonomy dimensions we are interested in to enable a distinctive analytical perspective on how much or little autonomy/control agencies actually enjoy.

Autonomy as a multi-dimensional concept

As stated in the introduction, the flip side of government control is agency autonomy. That is, any government's objective to more or less control any of its government agencies means more or less autonomy for the government agency. The level of autonomy of a public agency – and thereby the level of government control – must be analyzed using a multi-dimensional definition of autonomy that includes the decision-making powers on managerial and policy matters of the agency, as well as identifying constraints governments can apply on the use of these powers by structural, financial, legal, and interventional means. The conclusion is that if the analysis is limited to only a few of these aspects, the research risks being biased (Verhoest et al. 2004:109).

Hence, Verhoest et al. (2004) define two broad categories of autonomy that together offer a framework for studies of net effects of control or autonomy. The first category is autonomy given to government agencies to make managerial decisions (*managerial autonomy*) as well as to decide on form and content in their own policymaking (*policy autonomy*). An agency can have managerial autonomy with respect to human resource management (e.g., recruiting its own employees); financial management; or the management of other production factors such as logistics, organization, and space (Verhoest et al. 2010:19). Policy autonomy refers to the extent to which the agency itself can decide on, for example, the policy instruments that should be used to implement externally set policy. An indication of high policy autonomy would, for example, be the agency having the right to issue general regulations of its own. Managerial and policy autonomy point toward the potential discretion an agency may have due to the decision-making powers that have been delegated to the agency (Verhoest et al. 2004:105). The second category contains four types of autonomy, which represent the degree to which government agencies are subjected to constraints concerning the use of their mandates and includes what the authors call *structural, financial*, *legal*, and *interventional autonomy* (Verhoest et al. 2004:105f). Structural autonomy concerns control that flows from influencing the agencies' decisions through hierarchical and accountability lines toward the agency head or through the agency management board. The concept of financial autonomy refers in Verhoest et al.'s interpretation to the extent to which an agency depends on governmental funding or own revenues for its financial resources and the extent to which it is responsible for its own losses. Legal autonomy concerns whether the agency is legally a part of the state or "a legal personality under private law" (Verhoest et al. 2004:106), and the legal form of an agency is indicative of its formal autonomy. Lastly, interventional autonomy relates to the scale and quality of the demand for performance information and evaluation, and the sanctions attached to performance, in other words, control by influencing the agencies' decisions by means of reporting requirements, evaluation and auditing provisions against externally set goals and norms, and (the threat of) sanctions or direct interventions (Verhoest et al. 2004). Interventional autonomy is, thus, what the literature on agencification and autonomization denote when discussing governments' external results control, but in this latter conceptualization it is articulated from the perspective of the government agency. Interventional autonomy is low when governments exercise strong results control.

What control strategies do governments have?

As already mentioned, the managerialist school of thought suggests a balancing strategy in terms of organizational autonomy and external result control. This external result control is needed to minimize agency problems such as opportunistic behavior, which could be the result of goal incongruence and information asymmetry. That is, theoretically, governments are expected to increase organizational autonomy and to balance this by applying more external results control. Whether this actually is the case, however, is unclear, and a close examination is therefore called for. It should here be stressed that the balancing strategy as a theoretical concept does not suggest a better or a more favorable strategy, but should rather be seen as an adequate description of a balancing logic among different government steering options.

On the other hand, in contrast to the paradox argument, it could also be argued that the issue at hand is not so much a government strategy of balancing autonomy and control of every government agency, but rather that the level of government control corresponds to the type of state agency targeted (Kristiansen 2015; Askim et al. 2019). The government's demand for performance information is in these studies found to be in part contextually determined and varies across factors such as agency size, task, and political salience (Pollitt et al. 2004; Verhoest et al. 2010; cf. Van Thiel and Yesilkagit 2014; Kristiansen 2015; Askim et al. 2019). For instance, politically salient agencies can attract a lot of governmental attention, and salience is in turn linked to developments on the political agenda and to (large) budgets or costs (Verhoest et al. 2010). In this perspective, what could be observed would not be a balancing strategy between managerial and operational autonomy, and results monitoring, but rather a consistent government strategy to control its agencies – to a greater or lesser degree – in both these respects. We will call this other strategy a unified strategy, to contrast this with the balancing strategy presented above. There are two possible unified strategies: Governments can in theory allow government agencies high levels of autonomy in all dimensions, or in none.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses will be tested in this research. The first is

H1: Governments balance managerial and operational agency autonomy with interventional autonomy.

The very idea of the paradox of autonomization builds on an assumption that the positive effect of autonomy for an agency in the managerial and operational dimensions can be restrained by lower levels of interventional autonomy, that is, what we call a balancing strategy of the government.

However, earlier work on agency autonomy and government control suggests variation in de facto autonomy of agencies (Verhoest et al. 2010). Our interpretation is that this does not necessarily mean that there is a balancing logic in operation when it comes to agency autonomy and government control. Hence, a contrasting perspective predicts that the level of autonomy between the managerial and operational dimensions of autonomy, on the one hand, and interventional autonomy, on the other, will correspond positively or negatively in a unified manner. Our second hypothesis is, thus, that

> **H2:** Governments apply a unified strategy between managerial and operational agency autonomy, and interventional autonomy.

Hypothesis 2 is inspired by the plausible idea that governments are not equally interested in controlling all agencies in the same way, all the time. Instead, we can expect governments to e.g., apply strict control in all dimensions, if such a unified strategy is perceived as necessary for some reason. The idea that governments' incentives to control agencies can vary is not new. Several authors underscore political salience as a particularly relevant characteristic for explaining agency autonomy, where higher political salience is associated with lower agency autonomy (Kristiansen 2015; Askim et al. 2019), and political salience is often associated with agency size (Pollitt et al. 2004; Van Thiel and Yesilkagit 2014; Verhoest and Wynen 2018). Agency size could be measured in more than one way, and in this research we will use the size of the agencies' budgets. We expect that governments have strong incentives to exercise control over agencies that have a large budget (Askim et al. 2019). Moreover, the nature of the agency's main task might affect how much autonomy the agency is granted by its parent ministry (relative to agencies with other tasks) and how it will react toward ministerial control efforts (Binderkrantz and Christensen 2009; Verhoest et al. 2010). Lastly, even though scholars have had a hard time finding any obvious partisan differences in explaining the introduction of different NPM reforms, we will include the political variable – that is, what government is in office – as a control variable (Hood 1995; Ferlie 2017). Given our rich data, it will be interesting to find out whether this variable has any impact on the relation among autonomy dimensions.

Research design

In this section we will present our data and how we have operationalized the theoretical concepts for our empirical study. The framework for studies of multidimensional autonomy presented above will be presented in more detail, and necessary adjustments to the Swedish context of operational definitions will be made.

Research context

The Swedish case is an excellent candidate for a large-*N* study of how public management tools are applied, for several reasons. First, a prominent feature of the Swedish national executive organization is its administrative dualism, that is, the major part of the national executive is organized in separate units outside the ministries (Ahlbäck Öberg and Wockelberg 2015; 2016). This means that the executive is organized into small-sized government offices (ministries), on the one hand, and 340 semi-autonomous government agencies, on the other (Statskontoret 2019a). The type of semi-autonomous organization that is today referred to as central government agencies has actually been around in Sweden for several hundreds years (Pierre 2004; Ahlbäck Öberg and Wockelberg 2015). Further agencification during the NPM era has taken place, for example, in terms of added delegation of managerial decisions to the agency level. Thus, the organization of the Swedish executive offers an unusually large pool of objects of analysis. It should also be added that another aspect of the Swedish administrative model is that the Constitution guarantees the independence of the central government administration (Instrument of Government, Ch. 12, Art. 2). This means that *steering government agencies in particular cases when exercising public authority* is not allowed, while steering government agencies in general, through legislation, regulations, appropriation directives, etc., is allowed. Second, the same public management models are commonly applied throughout the whole national public sector at the same time, and fine tuning of these general models has been universal in nature. This means that we can observe how the same ideas are applied in a wide range of contexts. Third, unlike in many other countries, we have complete access to the government's appropriation directives (*regleringsbrev*) issued to each authority on a yearly basis, which means that our data are based on an objective data source. An appropriation directive document is a government directive putting an appropriation at the disposal of the spending authority and specifying the allocation of the appropriated funds. Hence, appropriation directives are important elements in operational, year-to-year ministry–agency governance. Using data coded from such policy documents is not unique (Binderkrantz, Holm, and Korsager 2011; Binderkrantz and Christensen 2009; Askim 2015; Askim et al. 2019), but it is rather uncommon. The prevailing methodology is rather to study ministry–agency relationships with data obtained from surveys of public sector employees (e.g., Verschuere 2007; Verhoest et al. 2012; cf. Maggetti and Verhoest 2014). We argue that appropriation documents are valid expressions of actual steering practices, more so than survey data, which offer perceptions of steering practices. Arguably, systematic document studies are time-consuming when subjective interpretation is required, and this is especially true for our data covering as many as 1752 appropriation documents. Nonetheless, just like Askim et al., we believe that this method's advantages in validity and reliability more than outweigh its disadvantages relative to survey research when the objective is to understand ministry–agency steering relationships (Askim et al. 2019). Appropriation directives are the final result of the central government budget. According to instructions issued by the Swedish Ministry of Finance on a yearly basis to the government offices, "the [appropriation directive] is one of the most important instruments for the government to control central government agencies with the purpose of reaching the political goals within the financial framework decided by Parliament" (Finansdepartementet, Budgetavdelningen [Ministry of Finance, Budget Department] 2002:3 [our translation]). In Table 1 we describe the typical structure of these documents during the time period studied here.

It should be emphasized that these "performance contracts" are in the Swedish setting quite extensive documents, that is, a rich source of information. During the period studied these directives varied between 2 and 70 pages (average around 11 pages). Swedish ministries use these documents not only to define performance objectives but also to instruct agencies to perform various tasks and to display the financial conditions for the agency's coming year – thereby placing input and process controls on the agency (Binderkrantz and Christensen 2009; Askim 2015; Askim et al. 2019). Instructions for the drafting of these documents are given yearly in guidelines issued by the Ministry of Finance. These instructions concern the structure as well as the content of the appropriation directives, their role in the steering process and the formal structure of the decision-making process that leads up to the document, as well as how special themes on the public management agenda are to be treated (e.g., gender equality). While the government's ideas concerning how to manage by the use of appropriation directives vary over time, changes are in general universal; that is, they concern all appropriation directives. In short, the annual appropriation documents are a rich source of public management information. Since they are issued annually for all major government agencies, they represent an

Table 1. Standard headings of an appropriation directives document.

Appropriation directives for the year xxxx
Context-adapted steering
Aims and requests for performance information [regular activities]
Organizational steering
Commissions
Financial steering
Appropriation funds
Conditions tied to the appropriation funds
Other financial conditions
Other credits
Fees and subsidies

excellent, but often neglected, source of information. In addition to the appropriation documents, we have consulted other public databases and public documents to gather agency-specific information on management models (structural autonomy) and policy autonomy.

Data and variables

Our body of data contains information from 1752 observations from a total of 182 different central government agencies during the period 2003–2017, which constitutes 65% of the total population ($N = 2688$) (see Appendix Table C (Supplemental data) for the full list of agencies included in this study).[1] During this period the Swedish government issued 161–200 appropriation directives a year, and Appendix Table A (Supplemental data) displays how many of these we have hand coded and what share of the full population that represents, a year.

The information that we have retrieved from every appropriation directive relates to three of the five autonomy dimensions that we are investigating. To begin with, our data allow us to measure managerial autonomy. Agencification Swedish-style during the 1990s and onwards was dedicated to extensive delegation of managerial decisions to the government agencies (Swedish Agency for Government Employers 2009; Wockelberg and Ahlbäck Öberg 2016). For our study we are measuring managerial autonomy regarding the extent to which an agency is allowed to buffer spending, that is, how large a share of unspent funding saved by the agency one year is allowed to be used the following fiscal year (the right of disposal of unspent funding between fiscal years), and this is information that can be found in the appropriation directives. Traditionally, governments have strived for uniform and detailed formats, where shifting budgets from one year to another has not been allowed, and strictly controlled compliance has been observed (Verhoest et al. 2010). Hence, being able to shift budgets between years represents an important tool for managerial flexibility in agencies, since the principle of budget annuality obliges agencies to return unused budgetary resources to the government at the end of the year ("use it or lose it"). Swedish government agencies are granted the possibility to shift 3% of the total appropriation from one year to another (*Anslagsförordningen* (Appropriation Ordinance) 2011:223; formerly 1996:1189). However, this percentage may be changed – to a lower or higher share – and if so, it is indicated in the annual appropriation document.

Regarding policy autonomy, we have operationalized this dimension over the time period studied by using a measure of agency policymaking, namely, to investigate whether a government agency is allowed to issue general regulations of its own. Under the Instrument of Government (1974:152), public authorities and agencies are not competent to issue their own general regulations and may do so only by authorization from the *Riksdag* (parliament) or the government. Those government agencies that have received this type of authorization publish their regulations and general recommendations in an agency-specific rule catalogue. As a measure of policy autonomy, we have investigated whether and when a given agency has been authorized to issue rules of its own. An authorization to issue these kinds of rules is interpreted as high policy autonomy, and vice versa. Data for this autonomy dimension have not been collected from the appropriation directives, but had to be collected separately from each and every government agency included in this study.

Turning then to the limitations of autonomy, we will focus on structural, financial, and interventional autonomy, respectively. Before conveying how these categories are measured, let us comment on the fourth type of limitation, the legal autonomy of Swedish government agencies. Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2014) found in their study that the legal status of the agency is more decisive than task in explaining agency autonomy and control. In the Swedish setting all government agencies have the same legal status, such that this dimension will be held constant. However, recognizing the interesting result of Van Thiel and Yesilkagit in terms of the significance of differences in legal autonomy among the Dutch government agencies examined, we are interested to find out whether or not considerable variation might exist even though the legal status is held constant. This remains an open question, and any sign of this would add to our present understanding of determinants of agency autonomy and control.

While legal autonomy is held constant, we expect a high degree of variation in structural, financial, and interventional autonomy. The structural autonomy category directs our attention toward the management model that the government has chosen for each agency, which is mainly a policy instrument used when the government is starting up the agency (changes during the lifetime of an agency do occur, but rather seldom). There are, according to official policy, a limited number of management models for governments to choose among. The new Myndighetsförordning (2007:515, Authority Ordinance) of 2008 represents the government's ambition to limit the number of management models available and to clarify their different functions. Official policy now states that when governments seek actively to control and steer an agency, it should be headed by a sole Director-General (DG) (Finansdepartementet 2007). Agencies in need of more autonomy from the government should be headed by a DG and a fully responsible agency management board.[2] The government can also appoint specific councils with the task of monitoring government agencies from within. In addition, agencies with court-like tasks are headed by collegial boards (*nämndmyndigheter*). Before 2008, agencies could also be headed by a DG and a board, with shared responsibility for the agency. Since we have reason to believe that there is little difference in practice between the different types of boards (i.e., DG and a fully responsible agency management board, and DG and an agency management board with limited responsibility), we regard them as equal in terms of the level of autonomy they allow the agency in relation to the government. We conclude that management models differ when it comes to the autonomy they give an agency vis-à-vis the government. That is, when analyzing the structural autonomy of the government agency by asking whether the government agency has a board or not, we get an indication of the degree of ministerial control and oversight toward the agency (having a board decreases the ministerial oversight, as oversight of the agency is done by the board) (Verschuere 2007; Verhoest et al. 2010; Jacobsson, Pierre, and Sundström 2015). This type of information has been collected mainly by analyzing the government-issued agency ordinances over time (i.e., "agency instructions," *myndighetsinstruktion*), readily available in the Swedish code of statutes.

Discretion in financial management can be related to several decisions (Verhoest et al. 2010). In the literature, financial autonomy refers to the extent to which the agency depends on governmental funding or own revenues for its financial resources and the extent to which it is responsible for its own losses (Verhoest et al. 2004). Another operationalization has been the right to set fees without approval from the parent ministry (Van Thiel and Yesilkagit 2014). However, none of these operationalizations works in the Swedish context, since the government agencies in this study all receive, and are dependent on, government funding. Furthermore, only about 5% of the agencies are allowed to set fees, which means that the variation in this respect is too low for an extensive analysis. Instead, an alternative that we will use for our analysis is to measure to what degree the assigned block grant (*ramanslag*) comes with conditions spelled out by the government. Block grants issued without the government conditioning the spending of parts of the grant for specific purposes would indicate higher financial autonomy for the government agency. A block grant where the government conditions the use of parts of the grant would indicate lower financial autonomy, since it in actual essence would be more of an "earmarked" grant than an actual block grant.

Lastly, we turn to our dependent variable: An agency's interventional autonomy is challenged by external results control, evaluations, and monitoring. Our empirical operationalization of this autonomy dimension is the number of requests that the government makes on government agencies when it comes to performance information. In this article we focus on number of requests that are expressed in relation to the regular activities of the agency. Requests for performance information can differ in quality, asking for e.g., quantitative measures, time series or descriptions of single events. Such differences are not analyzed here, a limitation motivated by the extensive

Table 2. Empirical operationalization of autonomy variables.

	Autonomy as the level of decision-making competencies		Autonomy as the exemption of constraints on the actual use of decision-making competencies		
	Managerial	Policy	Structural	Financial	Interventional
Operationalization	Measured as the extent to which the government agency is allowed to buffer spending, i.e., how large a share of unspent funding saved by the agency one year is allowed to be used the following fiscal year	Whether the government agency is authorized to issue general regulations	Type of management model chosen for the agency	Number of conditioned paragraphs	Measured as the number of requests that the government makes on government agencies with respect to performance information
Variable values	Categorical: 1 = >3% 2 = 3% (ref group) 3 = <3% (a change from 2 to 1 = high autonomy; 2 to 3 = low autonomy)	Dichotomous: 0 = high autonomy, 1 = low autonomy	Dichotomous: 0 = agency headed by a agency management board or a decision-making committee with secretariat support = high autonomy; 1 = unitary agency whose powers are vested in its Director-General, incl. advisory council, etc. =low autonomy	Continuous: 0– (low numbers = high autonomy; high numbers = low autonomy)	Continuous: 0– (low numbers = high autonomy; high numbers = low autonomy)

data and (already) complex models we use. Moreover, we do not include other types of commissions that are requested outside what are considered regular activities. It is theoretically possible to think about interventional autonomy as the dependent variable to be explained by other types of autonomy as independent variables in regression analyses, for two main reasons: First, this type of external results control is more of an ex post control than the others (Verhoest et al. 2004), which can be seen as elements of the agency set-up that admittedly also might be changed but in practice very seldom is. Second, the paradox of autonomization clearly points out managerial and operational autonomy versus external result control, that is, an agency's interventional autonomy. Altogether, we think it is a reasonable interpretation of earlier work that the government agencies' interventional autonomy is affected by the other dimensions of autonomy.

The empirical operationalization of the different autonomy dimensions is presented in Table 2.

As already stated, the control variables used in this study are budget size and government in office. Budget size is measured as the agency's total appropriation in a specific year (in thousands

SEK), and for government in office we will create a variable representing the different terms of office during the period of our study. In addition, using data over a 15-year period we also need to control for year-fixed effects to pick up any variation in the outcome that happens over time and that is not attributed to other explanatory variables. Even though Yesilkagit and Van Thiel (2014) found that task was less decisive in explaining agency autonomy and control, we will avoid omitted-variable bias in this respect by controlling for task-fixed effects. Controlling for task-fixed effects will, with the same logic, absorb time-varying, task-specific characteristics.

To categorize agency tasks, our point of departure is the conceptualization of Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2014). However, to maximize validity, we have also used categories identified by Statskontoret (the Swedish Agency for Public Management, SAPM); self-reported agency data on task collected by SAPM (Statskontoret 2017, annex 2); central government agencies' home pages; the formal Agency Instructions; and, for some now abolished agencies, the Swedish National Encyclopedia. We depart from earlier categorization by making a distinction between *Research* and *Information* tasks, and reserve the *Research* category for agencies explicitly commissioned to conduct analyses based on scientific methodology. What we here have chosen to call *Supervision and Inspection* is a type of task that is often labeled Regulation. Regulation is a term that denotes law-making, which is not what we aim to capture here. Agencies within this category supervise and inspect other agencies with the aim of making sure that the law is applied correctly. Our *Information* category contains expert agencies with the main task of collecting and analyzing information as a service to the government, to other agencies, or to the public. Moreover, while Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2014) have a special category for Political tasks, where they place agencies giving "policy advice," we have not. It is hard to uphold the distinction between information and policy advice when categorizing Swedish central government agencies. Hence, we collapse these categories under the label *Information*. The agencies' distribution according to main task is presented in the Appendix Table B (Supplemental data). Lastly, we also control for the government that is in office, and during the studied period there are four different governments: 2003–2006 Social democratic government; 2006–2010 Right-wing government (I); 2010–2014 Right-wing government (II); 2014–2017 Red–green government.

Descriptive statistics for all the variables can be found in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics.

Variables	*N*	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
Interventional autonomy	1752	0	2334	71.16	145.152
Managerial autonomy (>3%) (3%) (ref group) (<3%)	1454	0	1		
Policy autonomy	1718	0	1		
Structural autonomy	1728	0	1		
Financial autonomy	1632	0	152	10.02	21.097
Log total appropriation (thousands SEK)	1596	6.69	19.36	12.28	2.36
Task (dummies)	1752	1	0		
Decisions in individual cases					
Research					
Judicial					
Supervision and inspection					
Information (ref group)					
Tribunal					
Maintenance					
Other					
Government in office (dummies)	1752	1	0		
2003–2006 Social democratic (ref group)					
2006–2010 Right-wing I					
2010–2014 Right-wing II					
2014–2017 Red green					
Year	1752	2003	2017		

We should add that although our dataset includes 1752 observations, we have around 1400 observations in our regression analyses. This is mainly due to missing values in the managerial autonomy variable, since in about 300 cases the government has not specified the percentage by which that the government agency is allowed to buffer spending.

Empirical findings

The main empirical question is whether high levels of managerial and operational autonomy are related to high levels also when it comes to interventional autonomy, or whether, on the contrary, high and low levels are mixed in order to balance each other. Both results are in theory possible, and even likely. We can easily imagine that within the population of Swedish government agencies, some are highly autonomous, regardless of what type of autonomy we observe, while others are subject to more interference and control. It is also conceivable that governments find it necessary or preferable to increase some types of autonomy, but only under the condition that other types are kept low.

A balancing or unified strategy?

Based on our regression analyses, an initial conclusion is that the relationship between the managerial, policy, structural, and financial dimensions of autonomy, on the one hand, and interventional autonomy, on the other, is mixed (Table 4). To begin with, the effect that managerial autonomy has on interventional autonomy yields a strong and unambiguous result. For this

Table 4. Results of OLS regression models.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Constant	70.895***	−191.827***	−213.137***	−231.298***	−216.704***
	(7.549)	(24.923)	(26.171)	(29.840)	(26.332)
Managerial autonomy					
>3%	4.206	8.034	11.003	−15.925	−13.868
	(10.495)	(10.100)	(10.000)	(12.088)	(10.698)
<3%	−41.311***	−57.960***	−54.477***	−43.738***	−47.958***
	(11.474)	(11.181)	(11.155)	(11.240)	(11.037)
Policy autonomy	34.303***	−0.643	8.128	13.522	12.375
	(8.020)	(8.332)	(9.000)	(8.750)	(8.817)
Structural autonomy	−43.536***	−46.326***	−42.722***	−16.174*	−24.574***
	(7.777)	(7.481)	(7.742)	(8.323)	(8.105)
Financial autonomy	1.216***	−0.086	−0.002	−0.210	−0.184
	(0.196)	(0.223)	(0.227)	(0.222)	(0.224)
Total appropriation[a]		24.185***	24.751***	27.573***	27.417***
		(2.193)	(2.356)	(2.311)	(2.325)
Government in office					
Right-wing I					−19.290*
					(10.586)
Right-wing II					−59.183***
					(11.256)
Red green					−101.312***
					(13.788)
R^2	0.075	0.149	0.176	0.238	0.216
N	1408	1405	1405	1405	1405
Task-fixed effects			X	X	X
Year-fixed effects				X	

[a]Variable is logarithmized.

Significance levels: *$p < 0.10$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$, two-tailed tests. Standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories: Managerial autonomy = 3%, Year = 2003, Task = information, and Government in office = 2003–2006 Social Democratic government.

categorical variable the reference group is set to 3%, since Swedish government agencies are granted the possibility to shift 3% of the total block grant from one year to another. However, the government can decide to change this to a lower or higher percentage in the appropriation directives. As can be observed in all five models in Table 4, a shift to a lower percentage corresponds with the government making a considerably lower number of performance information requests compared to the reference group ($p < 0.01$ for all models). This result holds when controlling for budget size, government in office, and fixed effects for task and year. Hence, in terms of decreasing managerial autonomy, the government displays a clear balancing strategy: lower managerial autonomy for the agency is followed by higher interventional autonomy (fewer requests for performance information). However, a shift to a higher percentage of allowed buffer spending does not generate a similar or significant result.

Furthermore, the government's choice of management model, that is, structural autonomy, has a high and statistically significant effect on the government's demand of performance information in all regression models in Table 4. Also, in this case we can observe a balancing strategy. When governments increase structural autonomy by appointing agency management boards instead of single heads, they demand more performance information. In other words, delegating to an autonomous board increases governments' interest in performance information – a single head is in this respect more trusted to perform "well" or will be easier to control in other ways. This result is stable also when controlling for budget size and government in office. This result corroborates earlier studies that suggest that the NPM ideal type of combination of management autonomy and results control is to be found relatively more often in the group of agencies with a governing board (Verhoest et al. 2010). Added to this, our findings also hold when controlling for year-fixed and task-fixed effects – that is, when we control for unobserved time and task characteristics that could influence the demand for performance information.

Our analyses do not generate any stable or significant results for our variables measuring policy autonomy and financial autonomy. A government's decision to authorize a government agency to issue rules of its own does not explain the level of performance information that the government demands. The same can be said about financial autonomy measured as the number of conditions tied to the block grant. The significant results that are generated for these two variables in the first regression model disappear as soon as the budget variable is introduced in regression models 2–5. Table 5 provides a clear answer to this, displaying that budget size has a high and statistically significant correlation with the variables measuring policy and financial autonomy. In comparison, the table also demonstrates a low – and in one case not significant – correlation between the variables measuring managerial and structural autonomy and the budget size variable.

As indicated above, the variable for total appropriation has been logarithmized, which means that a change in this independent variable by 1% gives an increase or decrease in the dependent variable in absolute numbers (coefficient/100). Hence, the results in models 2–5 lend support to previous research, which holds that government agencies with large budgets tend to be controlled more. In substantial terms this means that a budget that increases by 1% (in thousands SEK) will increase the number of performance information requests by on average 0.26 in models 2–5.

In model 5 we are also controlling for a political variable, that is, for government in office. At first glance it might look as if the changing of governments steadily reduces the number of performance information requests over time ($p < 0.01$). However, we should be very cautious in interpreting this as an ideologically sustained development – the fact of the matter is that during

Table 5. Correlation between budget and autonomy dimensions.

	Managerial autonomy	Policy autonomy	Structural autonomy	Financial autonomy
Budget	−0.079**	0.491**	−0.006	0.626**

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

the period studied there was an effort by the Ministry of Finance to reduce the number of demands for performance information from government agencies (Government Budget Bill 2008/09:1, 291). Hence, the effects we see from our variable government in office are due to the temporal development of a reform strategy – supported by all governments regardless of political stripe – to improve the result-based public management model. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the statistical program does not allow a test of year-fixed effects when controlling for government in office, since the latter variable also is constructed based on specific years.

Lastly, when controlling for task-fixed effects, we are absorbing time-varying task-specific characteristics. As can be seen in regression models 3–5, this control does not change the results reported above; that is, we are not overlooking variation within the agency task group. The same can be said for analyzing year-fixed effects (model 4). The findings presented on the relationship between our independent variables and results control is not changed when controlling for year-fixed effects, that is, when we control for unobserved time characteristics that could influence the demand for performance information.

So far, we can conclude that the relationship between the NPM ideal type of combination of managerial and operational autonomy and results control in general is to be found in organizational dimensions dealing with managerial and structural autonomy. In these two dimensions we observe a clear and indisputable balancing strategy. The other autonomy dimensions – policy and financial autonomy – did not generate any clear or reliable results when controls were added; on the contrary. In short, this means that the managerial autonomy and the choice of management model are in general more determining for the level of performance information requested by government than the agencies' level of policy or financial autonomy. We have also found strong support that budget size does matter for government's proneness to adding more results control to an agency.

We wish to address the fact that even though the government MBOR reform of 2009 – which in general resulted in a reduced number of performance information requests (Statskontoret 2013) – the stability of the relationship between our autonomy dimensions is striking. As the number of performance information requests is on average reduced from 2009 and onwards (indicating less government control) changes in other autonomy dimensions must have counter weighed this change (i.e. increased government control) for the regressions results to be as stable as they are in Table 4. We have already mentioned that the Swedish government launched a new Myndighetsförordning (2007:515, Authority Ordinance) in 2008 with the aim of limiting the number of management models available and to clarify their different functions. Official policy now states that when governments have the ambition to actively control and steer an agency, it should be headed by a sole Director-General (DG) (Finansdepartementet [Ministry of Finance] 2007). The effect of this change of the Authority Ordinance is, interestingly enough, that from 2008 and onwards a higher number of government agencies are headed by a sole Director-General, which in our modeling indicates more government control. Hence, one year prior to the government's reform of the MBOR system in 2009, which lead to a reduction of the number of performance information demands (less government control), the government changed the management models for many of its government agencies. In our study the ratio between government agencies led by governing boards and agencies led by a single head was 2003–2007 about 75% to 25%. After the change of the Authority Ordinance (2007:515) this was turned around, and for the period 2008–2017 the same ratio is about 30% to 70% (cf Statskontoret 2014). Hence, government agencies headed by a single head have become the norm, and this seems to counterbalance the effects of the 2009 reform of the MBOR system in terms of the level of government control.

Conclusions

Given the rich material to be found in the publicly accessible appropriation directive documents in Sweden, we have had the opportunity to investigate whether autonomy granted to a government agency in certain managerial and operational dimensions explains the level of an agency's interventional autonomy (government results control). Our findings show that government agencies that are granted more managerial autonomy by the government will also be the target for more government results control, that is, will be granted less interventional autonomy. The same finding is true for government agencies with an autonomous management model (agency management board) compared to those agencies that are led by a single head. Thus, for government agencies with high managerial and structural autonomy, we observe a balancing strategy from the government, and this is in line with the so-called paradox of autonomization. This means that our findings in this part lend support to our first hypothesis which states that governments balance managerial and operational agency autonomy with external results control.

However, neither policy autonomy nor financial autonomy was found to have clear and stable relationships with results control. The significant results that can be observed in our first regression disappear for both these autonomy dimensions when we add a control for budget size. Hence, there is no effect of policy autonomy – the possibility for the agency to issue rules of its own – on the agencies' interventional autonomy. In addition to the regression results, the strong correlation between policy autonomy and budget size displayed in Table 5 tells us that the agency's budget size is the central underlying variable that explains the lack of effect of policy autonomy on results control. Aside from the investigated hypotheses on government control strategies, we learn that the likelihood for high policy autonomy increases the larger a government agency's budget is. The very same analysis can be made for financial autonomy, that is, the degree to which the assigned block grant comes with conditions spelled out by the government: as soon as budget size is introduced into the regression models, the earlier significant result between financial autonomy and interventional autonomy disappears. Also, the correlation between financial autonomy and budget size is even stronger in Table 5, which also in this case indicates that budget size is an important underlying variable in terms of the relationship between this autonomy dimension and interventional autonomy. In terms of policy and financial autonomy, none of our hypotheses was supported.

Hence, the only government strategy that gained support was the balancing strategy between managerial and structural autonomy, respectively, and the agencies' level of interventional autonomy (H1). What we have found, thus, is that the suggested balancing logic between government agency autonomy and government control is supported when it comes to giving managers high levels of autonomy in managerial and operational matters. This part of the so-called paradox of autonomization is supported in this analysis, which also included controls for budget size, for government in office, and for unobserved time and task characteristics that could influence the demand for performance information. The contribution in this respect is that we offer strong empirical evidence – high in validity and reliability – to a relationship that admittedly has been investigated before but with far fewer observations and over shorter time periods. Our data cover almost 10 times more objects of analysis covering not just one single time but a time span of 15 years. What is more, we also disclose a balancing logic between the governments' choice of management model and the agencies' interventional autonomy. This relationship has so far not been investigated in such an extensive way (cf. Verschuere 2007; Verhoest et al. 2010), and our empirical findings in this respect therefore add important knowledge to the literature on ministry–agency relationships. In relation to earlier studies, we would like to emphasize that governments in actual fact seem to be working with both traditional input control of its government agencies (choice of management model) and a more output-oriented mode of control (results control). Hood (1991:16) and Askim et al. (2019) use the term "double whammy" to describe this situation where governments' control subordinate units both ex ante and ex post. This observation is accentuated by the fact that changes to a less autonomous management model were carried out just shortly before reforming the MBOR system in 2009 which aimed, among other things, to reduce the level of government control by reducing the number of performance information demands.

Pollitt et al. (2004) concluded that structural disaggregation does not always equal autonomization (being at arm's length is not a guarantee of being able to enjoy real discretion), a conclusion that is in line with our findings. However, they also found that tasks are considered to have an influence on agency control, depending on, for example, the size of the budget, and this is not supported in our extensive study (see also Smullen et al. 2001). Introducing a control for task-fixed effects (models 3–5 in Table 4) does not change the relationship between the managerial and structural autonomy dimensions and the level of interventional autonomy. Similarly, Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2014) found that there are no straightforward relations between task and agency autonomy or control. Instead they concluded that formal autonomy – that is, legal status – and the size of the budget have proven to be more decisive than task in explaining the design, autonomy, and control of agencies. Our findings support this conclusion in part, that is, that budget size plays an important role (see below). However, in our extensive study – operating within the very same legal framework – the degree of managerial and structural autonomy granted a government agency by the government is decisive in how much results control is imposed on a government agency. In contrast to Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2014) claim, our study displays a considerable variation for government agency autonomy and control within the same legal framework.

Beyond our search for government strategies, there are conclusions to be drawn on the effects of contextual factors (agency characteristics) for the level of government results control. Our results show that agency budget size does have a strong and significant effect on governments' results control. The larger the budget a government agency has, the more likely that the agency will be targeted with higher demands for performance information. This result also holds when controlling for task- and year-fixed effects. This is a contextual factor that has been brought up in several studies before ours, and we can discern a clear pattern even when analyzing about 1400 appropriation directives over a 15-year period (see e.g., Van Thiel and Yesilkagit 2014; Askim et al. 2019). However, our analyses did not generate any result when controlling for government in office. This supports earlier conclusions that there is no ideological or partisan divide when it comes to different governments' application of results-based controls.

To sum up, there are two main conclusions here: First, in our extensive study there is support for the conception of the paradox of autonomization, at least when it comes to the levels of structural and managerial autonomy and how these relate to the agencies' interventional autonomy. For our 1405 observations we discern that delegated mandates that allow for a high degree of managerial and structural autonomy have, in general, been balanced by constraints on autonomy that comes in the form of detailed and extensive requests for performance information. The paradox of autonomization does not, however, surface with the government controls relating to policy and financial autonomy – these latter dimensions diminish as soon as budget size is brought in as a control variable. Second, our study should be seen as an answer to a general call for more objective measures for evaluating bureaucratic autonomy. Large-N studies based on survey data are common within the field, but objective measures of different aspects of bureaucratic autonomy and political control are less common. We recognize that these kinds of data open up possibilities for further analyses addressing a wide range of theoretically driven research questions in the future.

In terms of limitations it should be emphasized that this study has investigated the specific relationship between agencies' managerial, policy, structural, and financial autonomy and the level of results control that the government targets the agencies with. We do recognize that ministry–-agency steering practices are dependent on other variables that are not investigated here. An example of this is how agencies conduct their internal steering (Verhoest and Wynen 2018) or how metagovernance and microsteering interplay (Jacobsson et al. 2015). It should also be recognized that we have studied the formal ministry–agency steering practices, and to get a full picture studies of informal steering practices would also be necessary. Moreover, this research is made in one specific context, the Swedish one, and it would be desirable to be able to have access to cross-country large-*N* data of similar type (objective data).

Notes

1. Some of the objects of the analysis are not measured for the whole period, as an agency might have been closed down, merged with another agency, and/or reorganized in some other way.
2. Government agencies in Sweden can be led by a single Director-General or by an agency management board (and sometimes by collegial boards) (Authority Ordinance 2007:515). Hence, if the management model chosen is an agency management board, the board is the agency's top level of management and has full responsibility for all its activities. It is the government who appoints the chairperson and the members of such a board, and these persons would be external to the agency. Until the 1990s the members would often represent different interest groups. However, there are few representatives of interest groups on the government agency boards nowadays. They have been replaced by experts, not the least by professors and specialists from the private sector.

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