



# Sweden Report

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## Sustainable Governance Indicators 2020

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## Executive Summary

Democratic governance remains robust and deeply institutionalized in Sweden. Some of the societal underpinnings of governance are, however, changing. For example, party membership continues to decline and electoral allegiance to parties is increasingly volatile. These changes demonstrate that Sweden's system is capable of adaptation and reinvention.

The Swedish political and administrative system is fragmented by design. Agencies are autonomous in relationship to the political center. Local and regional governments likewise enjoy substantive, constitutionally guaranteed autonomy. Reforms over the past several years have focused on strengthening the political center's oversight powers. The Government Offices (GO), as an integrated public authority that includes government ministries and the Prime Minister's Office, have tightened their control over government agencies, and regional and local authorities. Advocates of these reforms argue that such powers are essential to sustaining responsive political leadership. Equally important is accountability, as the agents of political power must be held responsible for the policy measures they advance.

These reforms have increased the strategic capacity of the political system, though at some cost to the inclusiveness of societal interests, discourse and debate. By using information as a strategic asset, the government, especially the GO, has become more inaccessible to the media and interest associations. Increasing coordination among government departments, where fragmentation had been a major hinderance, is enhancing the strategic capacity of the government while also weakening points of contact with society.

In terms of economic policy, the government has skillfully navigated the Swedish economy through a period of crisis and instability. Not being a member of the euro zone has certainly helped, but the government deserves praise for its management of the economy through financial and economic crises, global as well as European. The past four years have witnessed sustained economic growth, although there are now clear signs that a recession is looming – as there are in most other European countries.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the Swedish government in late 2019 involves integrating the large number of asylum-seekers that have arrived in

Sweden, both socially and in terms of employment. This policy challenge has upended traditional dynamics between parties as new alliances have formed and conventional collaborative arrangements have been strained.

This development has exacerbated ambiguities in an already fragile parliament. Until the change of government in September 2014, the center-right “Alliance” government had pursued a goal-oriented policy of transforming the welfare state. It had implemented market-based reforms across a wide variety of sectors, so much so that it appeared that bringing the market into public services was an end in itself. This previous government had cut tax rates substantially and reduced many welfare programs. Some of the implemented measures did not, at first glance, undermine the logic of the Swedish welfare model. Considered separately, the family, labor market, tax and social insurance reforms seem moderate. However, in aggregate, these reforms represent a significant departure from the traditional Swedish model. The tax policy reforms, in particular, marked a genuine break with the past and were uncommonly ideologically driven.

The unique features of Sweden’s political, economic and social systems appear to be fading. Stability, broad consensus and the absence of right-wing populist parties have traditionally been defining features of Sweden’s political environment just as corporatism, centralized wage bargaining, high taxes and a generous welfare state have attracted considerable praise. Noted for its societal homogeneity, and high levels of equality, employment and affluence, Sweden is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, and faces sustained unemployment, dualities in the labor market, growing inequality, and diminished quality of life and health outcomes. In short, Sweden is losing its “unique” status as a role model in the European context.

The Social Democratic and Green coalition government, which formed after the 2014 general elections, placed less trust in the market than its predecessor. Though this red-green coalition government had no clear majority in parliament, it nonetheless performed reasonably well in terms of securing majorities for its most significant bills. The strong economy offered the government a tailwind in terms of growing tax revenues to help fund government commitments.

The 2014 to 2018 distribution of parliamentary seats and resulting difficulties in terms of providing stable majorities for the government foreshadowed the even greater complexities that followed the 2018 elections. The red-green coalition and center-right “Alliance” parties control roughly the same share of seats. The right-wing populist Sweden Democrats party, with 62 parliamentary seats, holds a pivotal position between these two blocs. Though neither of the

two major party blocs is willing to negotiate with them. In the 2014 to 2018 parliament, the main parties struggled to find arrangements to secure workable parliamentary majorities without the support of the Sweden Democrats. Cabinet formation in the wake of the 2018 election proved to be an exceedingly complex process. Eventually, the Social Democratic-Green coalition secured enough support to remain in office, albeit significantly weakened. In January 2019, a major agreement was negotiated between the red-green coalition, and the Liberals and Center Party who, in return for supporting the coalition, secured government commitments to implement many of their pet reform ideas. These ideas include far-reaching neoliberal reforms in the areas of tax and labor market policies. The shift in government policy direction, and the apparent divorce of policy influence and accountability appears to have confounded party activists, voters and commentators.

The current state of parliamentary politics in Sweden is complex, with two parties (the Social Democrats and Greens) in government, two parties (the Liberals and Center Party) supporting government and redirecting government policy in a neoliberal direction, three parties (the Moderates, the Christian Democrats and Swedish Democrats) opposing the government from the right and one party (the Left Party) opposing the government from the left. The combination of a political system under duress and the challenge of maintaining a workable majority in parliament has weakened the strategic capacity of government institutions. Long-term strategic agenda setting and policy-planning, and providing the economy with political stability are crucial roles of government, which at present are suffering.

Citation:

Jochem, S. (2020), *Das politische System Schwedens* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag).

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## Key Challenges

Sweden's long-term strategic priorities include global competitiveness, a lean but effective and productive public sector, and carefully managed international influence. Many indicators suggest that Sweden is well on its way to achieving these goals. The key sustainability challenges facing the government relate to aiding those constituencies that are not part of the new, future-oriented economy. Sweden's government now faces the challenge of clearly defining its social agenda. Choosing the specific strategy is, however, not feasible until the government delineates its policy objectives; a process that, in late 2019, appears uncertain due to the extraordinarily complex representation of political parties in the parliament and shifting allegiances among those parties.

The current government faces several challenges, including accommodating, integrating and ensuring employment for asylum-seekers. Visible and invisible obstacles prevent immigrants from finding meaningful jobs and societal acceptance in Sweden. Unlike many other countries, Sweden has devoted huge financial resources to solving these problems. Yet its formula has not produced obvious improvements, likely because the government has been unable to overcome societal obstacles. The government has strengthened the internal strategic capacity of the state, but now, in a second step, it needs to address the issue of making governance more integrative and effective.

Over the past several years, Sweden has enjoyed strong economic development. Sweden stands out internationally as an economically strong, socially engaged and innovative country. Even during high-growth periods, however, the government has recorded relatively high levels of unemployment. Unemployment in general and youth unemployment in particular remain problematic. The share of young Swedes (15 – 24 years old) not in education, employment or training is slowly increasing, albeit from a low level. The center-right governments (2006 – 2014) put their trust overwhelmingly in the market and in incentives, while the red-green governments (2014 onwards) have adopted a more “dirigiste” approach. However, the red-green governments have been unable to implement far-reaching reforms, because of the need to compromise with the center-right “Alliance” parties in order to isolate the Sweden Democrats.

In the period under review, we have seen the red-green government align itself with the Liberals and the Center Party. This move has ensured a working majority in parliament for the government and has split the center-right

opposition, ensuring that the Swedish Democrats remain isolated on the far right. The political costs for this strategy have been high and its success can also be called into question as the Swedish Democrats are increasingly seen as a legitimate partner by other center-right parties, especially the Conservatives and Christian Democrats.

Core values of Swedish governance, such as equality and equal treatment, are being tested by the challenge of integrating asylum-seekers from Syria and other war-torn countries. In the past, equality was one of the major features of the Swedish model. However, inequality has increased in Sweden because of wage bargaining deregulation, the decline in collective wage determination and increasing income from capital for high-income earners. Tax reforms under the previous government (2006 – 2014) have accelerated the rise in inequality. So far, this trend has not been halted or reversed by the red-green governments (2014 onwards). Historically and comparatively, Sweden is a very egalitarian society although the rise in inequality has been strikingly fast and threatens to further undermine societal trust and integration. Addressing rising inequality will therefore remain a political challenge for the current red-green government.

The government has the rare opportunity to capitalize on high institutional trust, a strong economy, a vibrant civil society and competent professional staff at all levels of government. The key political decision facing the government will be whether to employ these resources to pursue collective goals or to promote partisan initiatives. It appears unlikely that Sweden's strong economic growth can be sustained with a "race to the bottom" strategy that undermines integration, equality and trust. Economic prosperity will more likely be achieved through the concerted action of an effective public sector and a globally competitive business ecosystem.

Citation:

Jochem, S. (2020), *Das Politische System Schwedens* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS).

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Pierre, J. (ed) (2015), *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

## Party Polarization

For a long time now, Swedish politics has been polarized. With few exceptions, cooperation across the left-right divide has been rare and short lived. More recently, the so-called GAL-TAN divide (GAL: green, alternative, libertarian and TAN: traditional, authoritarian, nationalist), which refers to the political cleavages associated with values and lifestyles, has emerged as a new feature of the party system. Traditionally opposed parties within the left-right spectrum may adopt similar positions within the GAL-TAN scale. For example, on issues such as migration, the Social Democrats and Conservatives share a similar policy position, while left-wing, green and center parties tend to share a different policy position.

Thus, the party system remains polarized, both along the traditional left-right continuum and in terms of the emergent GAL-TAN divide. Herein lies a major reason for why it proved so challenging to form a government following the 2018 elections. (Score: 6)

Citation:

Jochem, Sven (2020), *Das politische System Schwedens* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS).

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# Policy Performance

## I. Economic Policies

### Economy

Economic Policy  
Score: 9

Over the past several years, the Swedish economy has been exceptionally strong. Growth in terms of GDP in 2017 and 2018 was 2.3%. For 2019, GDP growth is expected to be somewhat weaker, mainly due to the impending international recession. In 2020 and 2021, the GDP growth rate is expected to be approximately 1.5%. As a highly trade-dependent economy, Sweden's economic development is sensitive to fluctuations in international markets.

Notwithstanding, most long-term economic indicators on Sweden assuage concern; particularly with regard to international competitiveness. Thus, it is fair to say that the institutional and regulatory framework of the Swedish economy provides basic stability and predictability. However, there are some challenges. The National Bank of Sweden, fearing deflationist tendencies in the economy, lowered its "steering interest rate" to an unprecedented 0% in late October 2014, then to -0.35% in September 2015. By November 2016, the interest rate had fallen to -0.5%, which is also the interest rate level in October 2019. In addition, the inflation rate remains below the National Bank of Sweden's target.

Another concern is household debt, which remains high. There are also growing fears (e.g., mentioned in an IMF report) of an emerging bubble in the real-estate market. In an attempt to cool the market, the government introduced mandatory mortgage repayment rules and there is discussion on phasing out tax deductions for interest rate payments. Together with increasing construction, these measures would help cool off the real-estate market in metropolitan areas in the longer term. Nonetheless, the current housing shortage in metropolitan areas that is driving real-estate prices up increases the short-term risk of a bubble in the real-estate market. In November 2017, the government announced plans to introduce a mortgage requirement, the exact

date is yet to be decided, to help cool the real-estate market and curb household debt.

Economic growth and international competitiveness are closely linked to unemployment and labor-market dynamics. The red-green government committed itself in 2014 to halving the country's unemployment rate (which, at the time, was one of Europe's lowest) by 2020, a target which will be difficult to reach. Unemployment gradually decreased since 2015. In 2018, unemployment fell to approximately 6%. In other European countries, the decline of open unemployment is stronger.

There are now signs on both sides of the political aisle that policymakers might relax their commitment to the regulatory framework that has to date shaped public budgets and the economy. The previous center-right government (2006 – 2014) downplayed the importance of a surplus goal, a stance which the incoming Social Democratic and Green government after the 2014 election has shared. The argument for doing so is that there are urgent programs that require public funding. In 2016, the Social Democratic and Green government negotiated with opposition parties to introduce a reform of the financial framework. The revised framework retains the surplus goal, but at a lowered 0.33% over a business cycle. More importantly, the revised framework states that public debt is to be brought down incrementally.

Moreover, some sectors of the economy, for example the housing market, suffer from low efficiency and lack of transparency. In addition, tax reforms implemented before the last period under review have further undermined economic equality. Nonetheless, Sweden's economy and its regulation thereof are generally considered to be efficient and sound. Whether this is a product of policy incentives, or a consequence of being outside the euro area is a matter debated among economic experts.

Although the institutional and regulatory framework of economic policy remains overall robust and efficient, the governance of that system has proven exceedingly complex since the 2018 general elections. With 62 seats, the Sweden Democrats (SD) party holds a pivotal position between the Social Democratic-Green-Left bloc and the center-right "Alliance." In January 2019, the Social Democratic-Green government negotiated a 73-item agreement ("the January Accord") with the Center Party and the Liberals in order secure parliamentary passage for major government bills. The agreement indicates a shift toward neoliberal economic policy, including an overhaul of the tax system and re-evaluation of public services across a large number of policy areas.

## Citation:

Finanspolitiska rådet (2019), Finanspolitiska rådets rapport 2019.

<http://www.finanspolitiskaradet.se/download/18.3503cfdc16c417dd2ae56a76/1567153042967/Swedish%20Fiscal%20Policy%202019.pdf>

Agreement between the Social Democrats, the Greens, the Center Party and the Liberals in January 2019.

<https://www.socialdemokraterna.se/globalassets/aktuellt/utkast-till-sakpolitisk-overenskommelse.pdf>

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## Labor Markets

Labor Market  
Policy  
Score: 7

The heyday of full employment policies in Sweden is gone, seemingly forever. Current labor market statistics indicate that Sweden (with an unemployment rate of 7.1% in August 2019) does not differ in any significant way from comparable capitalist economies. If anything, unemployment among youth and immigrants is higher than in other comparable countries. This pattern raises questions about the efficiency of Sweden's labor market policies and the overall regulatory framework. The huge influx of asylum-seekers into Sweden in 2015 and 2016 has put a pressure on the labor market. Unemployment among immigrants in August 2018 was more than twice as high (15.4%) as among native Swedes. In 2017 and 2018, the strong economy kept unemployment (primarily among native Swedes) at a very low level, thereby moderating the impact of the growing number of job seekers. With a recession expected to hit Sweden in 2020 and 2021, we should expect unemployment to increase further.

One of the key problems is matching the recently arrived refugees to the often knowledge-intensive jobs that are available in the job market. Also, language skills remain a significant barrier for the recently arrived job seekers. There is also a more general problem associated with matching. The Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen) has for some time now been criticized for underperforming in this respect. The agency has also undergone a massive internal reorganization process and developed a new model for its internal management, which will take time to implement. In the midst of this process, a key part of the January Accord – a 2019 agreement between the government, the Center Party and the Liberals – involves relaxing regulation

on private business to boost the efficiency of matching job seekers and available jobs. The initial reform of the Public Employment Service was effectively dismantled with the 2019 budget, which significantly reduced the agency's resources in lieu of a reform opening up the task of matching unemployed with available jobs to private businesses.

While language skills and professional skills remain major problems in matching job seekers with job vacancies, more and more asylum-seekers do successfully enter the labor market. Overall, employment has increased significantly since 2014 and reached an all-time high in 2018. In 2019, a large number of immigrants are actively looking for employment, posing a challenge to the labor market system in terms of matching job seekers with available jobs. The proportion of adults not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Sweden is about the OECD average. This indicates that, despite high open unemployment, the Swedish labor market is successfully integrating a large share of people into the labor market.

Ongoing EU integration and the mobility of labor has triggered a new set of issues related to the domestic regulations in the market. Also, there has been extensive debate about introducing an apprentice model to help younger age cohorts to make the transition from education to the labor market. Additionally, Swedish policymakers have been trying to create a short-time work scheme for public employees, as it exists in Germany. These examples may indicate that the old Swedish model of labor market policy is gradually moving toward the German model.

Union strength has declined rapidly in recent years, but union power remains strong by international standards. The strength of unions in part explains the relatively modest reform in labor market rules related to dismissal, minimum wage and apprentice arrangements, which would entail some workers earning a lower salary. But this applies only to insiders on the labor market because employment protection legislation for precarious work is underdeveloped. As in other European countries, Sweden's labor market is undergoing dualization, albeit at a slower speed than, for example, in Germany.

Thus, whether related to culture or differences in training and work experience, immigrants to Sweden continue to have severe problems entering the labor market. Sweden shares this problem with many countries but has proven to be particularly inept at addressing this aspect of integration. The large number of unemployed immigrants tears at the fabric of integration policies.

Citation:

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## Taxes

Tax Policy  
Score: 8

In terms of horizontal equity, this aspect of tax policy has improved over the last several years. The tax system has been reformed and simplified with fewer deductible items, which in turn has broadened the overall tax base. Combined with a less progressive tax rate and an overall reduction in taxes, horizontal equity has improved. A broad tax reform is envisaged for the next few years.

Vertical equity has significantly decreased, however. Studies show that differences between different socioeconomic strata has increased over the past decade in most OECD countries, but more rapidly so in Sweden. Current tax policy penalizes those who do not work, regardless of the reason for not being part of the workforce. Thus, for instance, retirees have not been able to make deductions that the employed are allowed to make (this arrangement, however, is currently under review). This policy has served to incentivize people who are outside the workforce to seek jobs.

Taxes are obviously central to budget balance or surplus. The economic boom of the past few years have helped the government balance the budget and reduce the national debt. In 2017, the budget surplus was some SEK 61 billion, roughly equal to €10 billion. During 2018 and 2019, the government has made strong progress in reducing the national debt, which is now quite low.

Taxes are also increasingly used to promote sustainability. This includes taxing energy consumption and CO2 emissions. Exemptions are given to high energy-consuming industries in order to safeguard their international competitiveness.

Tax policy is less of a factor in national competitiveness today than it was 10 to 15 years ago when economists pointed to the high-income tax levels as a major impediment to the competitiveness of Swedish businesses. The first two budgets of the red-green government, however, signal a return – however modest – to a philosophy of higher levels of taxation and public spending, rather than incentives, as the engine of the domestic economy. Swedish tax

levels are still largely on par with those of its main competitors – in fact, taxation of business is low from a comparative perspective.

Citation:

Finanspolitiska rådet (2019), Finanspolitiska rådets rapport 2019. <http://www.finanspolitiskaradet.se/download/18.3503cfdc16c417dd2ae56a76/1567153042967/Swedish%20Fiscal%20Policy%202019.pdf>

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### Budgets

Budgetary Policy  
Score: 9

Since the mid-1990s, fiscal, and budgetary discipline has been extraordinarily strong in Sweden and its tight budgetary regime has begun to yield benefits. In the wake of a financial crisis in the early 1990s, maintaining sound fiscal policy has been an overarching policy goal for both center-right and Social Democratic governments. Sweden is one of very few countries that targets a budget surplus and neither government nor opposition harbor any plans to abolish it. In 2016, a revised budget surplus goal of 0.33% was negotiated between the two major blocs in parliament. The agreement also includes a commitment to a long-term reduction of public debt. Thus, while the surplus goal is somewhat relaxed, there is now a stronger commitment to addressing public debt. Indeed, the past three budgets have generated surpluses. Overall, these developments indicate a continuing broad commitment to maintaining fiscal and budgetary discipline.

The budget surplus goal issue ultimately relates to the Keynesianism-monetarism controversy. The government wants to use the budget actively to drive the economy while the coalition of center-right parties in opposition (Alliance) take a somewhat more monetaristic approach. Either way, the fiscal and budgetary regulatory framework helps sustain a course of strong and sustained economic development.

After the 2018 election, the coalition government between the Social Democrats and the Green Party continued, although with the additional parliamentary support of the Liberals and the Center Party. In return for their support, the Liberals and Center Party presented an extensive list of demands to the government. Even so, however, the 2019 budget proposal submitted to parliament in late 2019 shows a surplus of SEK 130 billion (€12 billion).

There are only two clouds on this otherwise bright sky. One is the level of private lending, which the National Bank of Sweden and other financial

observers find alarming given that interest rates may rise over the next few years. The other source of concern is the low rate of inflation, despite very low general interest rates.

Citation:

The Swedish Government (2019), The budget in numbers. <https://www.regeringen.se/sveriges-regering/finansdepartementet/statens-budget/statens-budget-i-siffror/>

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## Research, Innovation and Infrastructure

R&I Policy  
Score: 10

Sweden ranks among the top five advanced industrialized democracies on all aspects of research and development (R&D): spending (public and private) per capita; number of researchers; number of patent applications and intellectual ownership licenses. This high level of investment in R&D has existed for considerable time. As an economy with high labor costs, Sweden’s competitive edge lies not in large-scale manufacturing but in knowledge-intensive sectors. R&D spending thus directly sustains that competitive edge.

Governments – center-right as well as Social Democratic-Green – rarely miss an opportunity to reinforce the argument that public spending on higher education, research institutions and research and development in general is integral to future prosperity and wealth. There is nothing suggesting that the commitment among all major political players to R&D spending is about to change.

While R&D spending has a long history, converting research and development concepts into valuable products was for a long time far more challenging for Sweden. The “Swedish paradox,” as it is called, was precisely the inability to convert research findings into commercially viable products. However, as recent data show, Sweden now ranks first with regard to patent applications and license fees for intellectual property. This is a valid indicator that R&D is bearing fruit, as securing intellectual ownership of emerging products is a critical stage in the process from the research facility to the market. Public

policy has targeted this issue lately, for instance, by simplifying the regulatory framework for private businesses, and the data suggest that R&D is now increasingly paying off.

Meanwhile, the new era of digital entrepreneurship has seen Sweden emerge as a global center of digital innovation. This applies to digital communication, computer games and IT-based services. The World Economic Forum, which views Sweden's tax levels as burdensome, suggests that the social welfare safety net has made Swedes less risk averse than entrepreneurs in many other countries. Overall, it appears that much of this success can be attributed to deregulation and other pro-business reforms introduced by the 2006 to 2014 center-right government.

Citation:

Edquist, C. and L. Hommen (eds) (2008), *Small Country Innovation Systems* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar).

World Economic Forum (12 October 2017), "Why does Sweden produce so many startups?"

### Global Financial System

Stabilizing  
Global Financial  
System  
Score: 9

The Swedish government has stood behind essentially all efforts to enforce regulation aiming at preventing criminal financial behavior in international financial management. Sweden also supports and implements rules laid out by the European Union and other international institutions related to international finance. It has rejected proposals, however, to introduce a Tobin-style tax on international financial transactions.

On the domestic scene, some friction between the Ministry of Finance and large commercial banks has been noticeable over the past couple of years. This discord has related to the banks' high profit levels and their insistence on giving their staff huge bonuses while charging high financial management fees. The government announced in August 2019 that it intends to levy a special tax on the commercial banks of SEK 5 billion per annum, starting in 2022. The government argues that this tax will help fund an increase in defense spending.

Another potential source of friction between the finance ministry and major commercial banks relates to political signals, and subsequent reforms, to force lenders to mortgage their loans rather than just pay interest. The Ministry, in concert with the National Bank, is concerned about the level of household debt, suggesting that there is a growing bubble in the metropolitan real-estate markets. Reducing debt and/or phasing out the right to deduct interest payments would help reduce the likelihood of such a bubble. Although the

banks do not have a commercial interest in debt reduction per se, they have also recently expressed concerns regarding the high household debt levels.

Taken together, Sweden is a forerunner for the sustainable regulation of international as well as domestic financial markets. This status is a consequence of the financial crisis in Sweden in the early 1990s, which initiated rapid policy learning in all major parties represented in the Swedish parliament.

## II. Social Policies

### Education

Education Policy  
Score: 7

Education policy remains a subject of heated debate in Sweden. Critics point to how Sweden has slipped in most international comparisons in terms of student knowledge and analytical skills. Sweden now ranks 19th on PISA (up from 32nd in the previous PISA report), which indicates that the decline appears to have been arrested. Notwithstanding, this remains an alarmingly poor ranking for a country relying on knowledge-intensive sectors for its economic growth and competitiveness. Recent studies suggest that Swedish students' knowledge in key subjects are falling behind students in other countries. Some studies attribute the decline to the decentralization of primary education in the early 1990s; others argue that the teaching profession is not held in high enough regard within society and thus fails to attract highly qualified professionals; while yet others suggest that poor performance could in part be attributed to the fact that many teachers lack the formal qualifications needed to teach the subjects they are teaching. Promisingly, all three potential sources of deterioration in primary education are now on the policy agenda. Overall, it remains clear that Swedish schools continue to deliver high-quality education.

Critics also point to the high level of youth unemployment, which suggests that the education system fails to provide skills and knowledge demanded by the contemporary labor market. However, the NEET data provided by the OECD show that the share of Swedes (15-24 years old) who are neither employed nor in education is slightly lower than in Germany. A final criticism is that the skills required to enter into a teachers' education program at universities today are relatively low, hence there is very little competition to enter those programs. As a result, new teachers may have only a limited aptitude to teach successfully.

In its defense, the previous center-right government (2006 – 2014) argued that it was extremely active in reforming education at all levels. The former center-right governments as well as the red-green governments (2014 onwards) have shown strong financial commitments to education. To improve the “fit” between education and the labor market, the current government announced to open alternative education programs that provide an avenue of learning other than to prepare for university studies. There are also plans, as mentioned earlier, to develop apprenticeship programs, which have proven successful in other countries like Germany. Finally, the Social Democratic-Green government intends to raise teachers’ salaries and increase the number of the staff present in schools.

A key means of assessing Sweden’s education policy involves looking at the extent to which the education system successfully provides a skilled labor force. High youth unemployment could be seen as an indicator of failure in this respect but could also be explained by the performance and the specific demand of the economy. Some education policy experts support a two-tier model where apprenticeships facilitate a smooth transition from work-related secondary education programs into employment in industry, and where students who seek to continue their education arrive at universities well-prepared. This model has not been entirely successful elsewhere, but that may be attributable to economic factors or labor market rigidities. Also, as mentioned earlier, the PISA results substantiate the problems in Sweden’s primary education to deliver good quality.

Concerning graduate output of secondary and tertiary education, Sweden’s performance in this respect could be seen as good but not great. Sweden is not as high in the rankings as its need for skilled and well-trained students to enter the research sector would require.

A third and final way to assess Sweden’s education policy concerns equitable access to education. Education policy has performed rather well in this respect. Coming back to a previous point, if anything, the system is “too equitable” in that requirements to enter some programs in university are so low that basically anyone who applies is admitted, resulting in a “race to the bottom” in tertiary education standards. Nevertheless, equitable access to adult education has been realized to a very large extent. Sweden is rather successfully targeting the ambitious goals of life-long-learning as a high percentage of adults are regularly in contact with further education organizations.

In summary, the data show that resources are not the key problem and public debate shows no shortage of ideas and inclination for reform. In 2017, a major royal commission on education presented its findings and recommendations.

The key proposals put forth by the commission are gradually being rolled out. Meanwhile, education remains high on the political agenda, although the political parties differ significantly in their analysis of the problems that the education system is facing and what should be done to address those problems.

Citation:

OECD (2018), *Education at a Glance* (Paris: OECD).

SOU 2017: 35: Samling för skolan. Nationell strategi för kunskap och likvärdighet (<https://www.regeringen.se/498092/contentassets/e94a1c61289142bfbcfdf54a44377507/samling-for-skolan—nationell-strategi-for-kunskap-och-likvardighet-sou-201735.pdf>).

## Social Inclusion

Social Inclusion  
Policy  
Score: 7

An analysis of Sweden's social inclusion policy probably yields different results depending on whether it is conducted diachronically or synchronically. In the first approach, which observes Sweden over time, it is not difficult to see that social inclusion in some areas, particularly gender equality, works extremely well while other aspects of social inclusion are more problematic. Young people find it very difficult to find a job; large groups of immigrants are far from integrated into Swedish society (see Integration Policy); poverty is low, but increasing; the Gini coefficient measuring the distribution of wealth remains low but is rapidly increasing; and the "life satisfaction" index is fairly high but somewhat decreasing. Thus, the empirical data point to significant challenges in the areas of intergenerational justice and justice between native Swedes and immigrants.

If we compare Sweden with other countries, we find that recent developments challenge the country's historical position as a leader in the public provision of welfare through wealth redistribution and as a country with extremely low levels of poverty. Together, the data and recent developments suggest that Sweden is gradually losing its leading role in these respects and is today largely at par with other European countries in terms of its poverty levels and income distribution. If Sweden could previously boast an egalitarian and inclusive society, there is less justification to do so today. Reflecting on the 2014 general elections, Bo Rothstein concludes that "the days of Swedish exceptionalism are over." Not only does Sweden now have a strong anti-immigration party in its parliament, core data on Sweden's welfare state are moving toward levels found among comparable, average-performing countries. This pattern continues to hold true in 2019, not least after the general elections.

## Citation:

Jochem, S. (2020), *Das Politische System Schwedens* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS).

Pierre, J. (ed) (2015), *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Rothstein, B. (2014), "The End of Swedish Exceptionalism," *Foreign Affairs*, September 18.

## Health

Health Policy  
Score: 7

The healthcare system continues to be a problem area for Sweden, as is the case for most European countries. The media regularly reports on excessive waiting times in emergency rooms and scandals in long-term care, in which patients received sub-standard treatment. These weaknesses may be the consequence of far-reaching privatization measures during the most recent past. The Health and Social Care Inspectorate was created in 2013 to address problems with administrative oversight of the healthcare sector.

The general account of Swedish healthcare is that once you receive it, it is good. Funded primarily by the government, the Swedish healthcare system is decentralized with regional governments (landsting) allocating 90% of their budgets to healthcare services. Healthcare is divided into primary care, which is delivered locally (albeit under the auspices of regional government), and advanced care, which is provided by the hospitals.

The key challenge, as pointed out in previous assessments, is a governance problem. Healthcare is driven by three contending sources: elected officials, the medical profession and the market. These three sources governing the healthcare system send different signals, make different priorities, and allocate resources differently. This bureaucratic split at the top has the effect of reducing quality, inclusiveness and cost efficiency. Governance problems are rarely solved by pouring more financial resources into the organization, which has thus far largely been the typical political response to problems in the healthcare sector.

From the patient's perspective, a key problem is accessibility. This applies to accessing general practitioner, specialist or emergency services. Patients in need of care are required to make an appointment with a primary healthcare provider, not with a hospital, but even primary care often struggles to meet the demand. Referrals to specialists may offer the patient an appointment with a medical doctor in weeks or even months. An evaluation published in 2019 suggests that there has been some moderate improvement in terms of general practitioner waiting times.

Partly as a result of these problems, a rapidly increasing number of people in Sweden purchase private health insurance. Estimates in 2018 suggest that more than 650,000 Swedes have a private health insurance policy, either purchased privately or, more common, provided by their employer. The rapidly increasing number of private health insurance policies clearly suggests a lack of faith in the expediency and quality of public healthcare.

Specific assessments:

- The quality of advanced medical care is generally quite good. The care provided by hospitals draws on close access to research centers and is of high standard.
- Concerning inclusiveness, eligibility to healthcare is generously defined in Sweden. Instead, the big problem is the waiting time from diagnosis to treatment. The previous, center-right government (2006 – 2014) introduced a “care guarantee,” (“vårdgaranti”), which entitles a patient to see a general practitioner within 90 days. Evaluations suggest that the guarantee has somewhat improved the situation but also that a large number of patients still have to wait beyond the stipulated 90 days for treatment, or that patients are offered a brief consultation with a medical doctor, which means that the 90-day rule on service delivery is formally met.
- Properly assessing cost efficiency in the healthcare sector is extremely difficult. The medical profession advocates that evidence-based assessment of costs for treatment and medication are used to a greater extent than is presently the case, that is, costs should be related to expected patient utility.

Citation:

Socialstyrelsen (2019), Uppföljning av hälso- och sjukvårdens tillgänglighet (Stockholm: Socialstyrelsen) (<https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/ovrigt/2019-4-10.pdf>).

Kollega, 20 February 2014: “Sjukvård som förmån ökar” (<http://www.kollega.se/sjukvard-som-forman-okar>).

Dickinson, H. and J. Pierre (2016), “Between substance and governance: Health care governance and the limits to reform,” *Journal of Health Organization and Management* 30:1-9.

## Families

Sweden has been politically and economically committed to strong family policy for the past 50 years. Major features of Sweden’s policy have been the separation of spouses’ income and individual taxation, the expansion of public and private day care centers and a very generous parental leave program provided to both women and men, which has created much better possibilities to combine a professional career with parenthood.

Family Policy  
Score: 10

The basic difference between the Social Democratic and Green parties, on the one hand, and the center-right parties, on the other, is that the former emphasize gender equality whereas the latter emphasize freedom of choice. Both constellations of parties are, however, fully committed to the overarching goals of family policy and see it as integral to promoting gender equality.

Citation:

Eydal, G. B./Rostgaard, T. (eds.) (2015): *Fatherhood in the Nordic Welfare States. Comparing Care Policies and Practice* (Bristol: Policy Press).

Jochem, S. (2020), *Das politische System Schwedens* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS).

Pierre, J. (ed) (2015), *Handbook of Swedish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), esp. Section 1.

## Pensions

Pension Policy  
Score: 8

Sweden's pension system succeeds in preventing poverty among senior citizens, but those living only on the very basic pension have problems making ends meet. In fact, Sweden has twice as many pensioners living at or below the poverty line as in Denmark and three times as many as in Norway, two comparable Nordic countries. Pensioners living on a baseline pension with limited savings and no private pension insurance are, however, eligible for additional support from social welfare programs.

The stability of the pensions system was a problem for a long time but appears to have improved over the last several years, due to major reforms of the whole pension system in Sweden. One result of the pension reforms is a new public-private mix, strengthening capital funded occupational and private pension schemes. The distributional principles appear to be sound but the volatility of the stock market during the most recent past has meant a major source of uncertainty about how stable and sustainable the system will be in the future.

Lastly, in regard to equity in the system, the results are mixed. Ideally, a pension system ensures equity among pensioners, the active work force and the adolescent generation. If equity refers to basically similar living conditions, Sweden's system fails in this respect. If equity however refers to a provision of baseline material goods related to needs, the performance of the system looks better. Some studies state that the new Swedish pension system does not undermine intergenerational equity, as long as the entry into the labor market for the adolescent generation is not blocked. Therefore, high and persistent youth unemployment rates threaten this aspect of equity in the long run.

There is a long-term plan to gradually raise the retirement age in order to ensure the sustainability of the pensions system as the proportion of senior citizens in Sweden increases. In 2019, the parliament confirmed an agreement between the government and most of the opposition parties to increase the retirement age to 67 years, with an option to remain in the workforce for another year.

Citation:  
OECD (2019), *Pensions at a Glance* (Paris: OECD).

### Integration

Integration Policy  
Score: 7

By most international comparisons, Sweden has a generous immigration policy. The country has received a large number of refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria and, in 1992, from the former Yugoslavia. Indeed, there are individual local authorities (Södertälje) that have received more immigrants from Iraq than has the entire United States. In the European setting, Sweden stands out as one of the most immigration-friendly countries (together with Germany).

As is the case across Europe, the war in Syria has triggered huge immigration to Sweden. In 2015 and 2016, Sweden received some 163,000 and 29,000 asylum-seekers respectively; for 2017 the number was about 22,500 and by October 2018 some 16,000 people had applied for asylum. The number of asylum-seekers increased further in 2019. By end of September 2019, 89,000 asylum-seekers had been granted permanent residency.

For 2020, the prognosis is that 20,000 – 30,000 asylum-seekers will arrive in Sweden, many of whom will arrive as part of the family reunification program. Permanent residency was granted to about 120,000 refugees between 2015 and 2017. These provisions, however, are widely debated in public and parliamentary discussions. Sweden offers permanent residency for unaccompanied children and for Syrian families with children.

The increasing immigration represents a major challenge, unprecedented in size and scope, to Swedish integration policy. These policies cover a wide range of measures, from language training to supportive labor market and housing policies. Most of the policies are implemented locally. Given the extensive autonomy of Swedish local governments, the instruments vary regionally. There are now political signals that local autonomy should no longer prevent individual local authorities from being requested by central government to receive asylum-seekers.

It is difficult to argue that integration policy in Sweden has been successful. In terms of both educational attainment and employment, immigrants in Sweden find it much more difficult to integrate than immigrants in comparable countries. This is not to say that there is a lack of political or economic commitment to integration policy. To the contrary, integration policy remains a very important policy sector and related political activities are far-reaching. Swedish integration policy ranks highly from a comparative perspective. The activities of the ombudsman and the minister for immigration and equality ensure that immigration issues have a high public salience.

Sweden's lack of success in integrating immigrants, despite strong efforts, thus indicates that the problem lies in the design and implementation of its integration policies. It is possible that the same obstacles facing young people as they try to make their way into the labor market also discriminates against immigrants. The current surge in immigration in the wake of the Syrian crisis has exacerbated these problems. Whether this is a short-term phenomenon or a lasting situation remains to be seen.

There is some good news, however. Studies show that second generation immigrants, particularly girls, perform well in secondary and tertiary education. However, for immigrants with low education, entry into a labor market with high standards seems more or less blocked.

Citation:

Migrant Integration Policy Index (<http://www.mipex.eu/key-findings>).

Multiculturalism Policy Index (<http://www.queensu.ca/mcp/>).

### Safe Living

Internal Security  
Policy  
Score: 6

The crime rate in Sweden is slightly higher than it is in comparable countries. Assessing the effectiveness of the internal security police is a complex undertaking. For a long time, Sweden has experienced substantial problems with organized crime and conflicts among gangs. Despite increased efforts to address this problem during the period of review, organized and/or gang-related crime shows no sign of waning, rather the opposite. Many media accounts of homicides and assaults relate these incidents to rivalry among competing organizations. Much of the growing violence in Sweden is related to gangs and organized crime.

These issues are atop of the political agenda in Sweden in 2019. While all major parties agree that the present situation is not acceptable, they do not always agree on which strategy to curb the violence will be the most effective. In the 2018 election campaign, law and order-related issues played a major

role. It seems clear that many people living in cities now feel increasingly unsafe. This means, for instance, that they will be less inclined to be outdoors after dark and less assured of the police's capacity to guarantee safety and solve crimes. The response time, particularly outside metropolitan areas, is today longer than what many people find acceptable.

In terms of solving and preventing crime, there has been extensive debate about police effectiveness. Studies suggest that the police do not use their resources effectively and that only 2% of their working time is spent on actual crime prevention or resolution. These problems appear to have been exacerbated during the last couple of years: Sweden is falling in international rankings on the number of homicides, the percentage of crimes which have been resolved and brought to trial is decreasing, and media reports argue that gang-related violence in distressed suburbs and neighborhoods is rapidly increasing.

In 2015, regional police districts and core national staff were merged into one police authority. A recent evaluation by the Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret 2018:18) found that the organizational reform has not improved performance and that the organization remains fragmented.

The red-green coalition government and the center-right parties agree that recruiting more police officers is an important component of the response to this situation. There is also a growing understanding that some percentage of rising crime levels in metropolitan areas reflect a failure of integration programs.

An additional problem is related to the emphasis on performance measurement and management which, critics argue, has led the police to focus on high performance scores rather than crime prevention. Preemptive police work which may observers argued is the best way to prevent crime does not show up in performance measures. Also, given the performance targets some aspects of police work such as checking automobile drivers' sobriety is conducted with almost more attention to getting the numbers in than actually bringing criminals to court.

The percentage of "smaller" crimes, particularly petty crimes such as theft and burglary that are solved is still lower than deemed acceptable by many Swedish citizens.

Citation:

Holgersson, S. and J. Knutsson (2012), Vad gör egentligen polisen? (Institutionen för ekonomisk och industriell utveckling. LIU-IEI-Research Report 12/0004. Linköping: Linköpings Universitet).

Statskontoret (2018), Ombildningen till en samlad polismyndighet. Slutrapport. (Report number 2018:18) (Stockholm: Statskontoret).

## Global Inequalities

Global Social  
Policy  
Score: 10

Promoting global social justice is an overarching policy goal for Swedish governments regardless of their ideological orientation. Sweden combines bilateral strategies with an active involvement in multilateral efforts toward those objectives. Additionally, public spending for development issues is comparable high. There has been a gradual shift from conventional aid to developing countries, mainly sub-Saharan countries, toward aid directed at countries that are closer to Sweden. This involves, for instance, promoting democratization and civil society in Eastern Europe. There are growing concerns about the effectiveness and efficiency of some foreign aid programs and the risk of aid being used for unintended purposes by actors in the receiving country. That said, the commitment to international solidarity and aid to developing countries remains very strong.

The red-green governments (2014 onwards) launched a campaign of “feminist foreign policy” which has gained international attention: international solidarity has a gender dimension which has long been ignored. This foreign policy approach has been introduced in various international venues such as the United Nations and European Union. The new government has also become known for showing less tolerance than its predecessors with what it describes as “medieval” punishment techniques employed in Middle East countries, which has caused some diplomatic friction. More broadly, the return of the Social Democrats to government reenergized Swedish foreign policy. It has become more visible, but also more controversial. Whether the complex outcomes of the 2018 elections will impact Sweden’s foreign policy direction remains to be seen.

:  
Aggestam, K. and A. Towns (2018), “The gender turn in diplomacy: A new research agenda,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*.  
Pierre, J. (ed) (2015), *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), esp. Section 7

## III. Environmental Policies

### Environment

Environmental  
Policy  
Score: 9

As is the case with global social injustice, Sweden tries to be a forerunner in environmental policy as well. Sweden performs extremely well in areas such as reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the use of renewable energy sources but is not a leader in recycling or water usage. Thus, while there is

strong political commitment among all the major political parties, the execution of that commitment in some aspects is still lagging. Meanwhile, Sweden continues to push environmental issues in international forums such as the EU and is a strong supporter of the Paris Agreement. Environmental policy made its way onto the political agenda in the 1970s and has remained a salient set of issues. With its legacy as a high-energy consuming industrial economy, Sweden certainly has a long way to go, but the data suggest its environmental policy is working. It should be noted that environmental policy is an integrated component of the larger project of restructuring the economy and making it more sustainable; much of this work takes place at the urban level.

After the 2014 elections, the Social Democrats formed a coalition government with the Greens; a government which remains in office despite a slight setback in the 2018 election. While both are strongly committed to “green” issues, it seems as if the Greens’ ascendance to power has further increased the attention on environmental issues. Nonetheless, the two coalition partners disagree on some issues. For instance, they do not seem to agree on the future of nuclear power. As fate would have it, two nuclear power plants are scheduled to be closed over the next few years by their owners due to low profitability resulting from falling electricity prices.

The commitment to sustainable development and addressing climate change is strong among all political parties. After the 2018 election, the government is reliant on the parliamentary support of the Liberals and Center Party. There is nothing to suggest that this new parliamentary situation has altered the coalition’s commitment to green issues and sustainable development.

### Global Environmental Protection

Global  
Environmental  
Policy  
Score: 10

Sweden continues to present a very strong international record in terms of supporting international environmental protection regimes, including the Paris climate change conference in 2015. Indeed, the country has a record of going beyond the requirements of international accords, from the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement, as a means of setting an example to other countries. Climate change and global warming can only be addressed through multilateral efforts and Sweden has played an important role toward such arrangements. Sweden is also a very active player on the EU’s environmental policy agenda.

:

Zannakis, M. (2010), *Climate Policy as a Window of Opportunity: Sweden and Global Climate Change* (Gothenburg: Department of Political Science, university of Gothenburg).

# Quality of Democracy

## Electoral Processes

Candidacy  
Procedures  
Score: 10

During the period under review, the electoral process was free and fair. Parties or candidates were not treated differently on any grounds.

Candidates are selected and ranked within the party organizations with essentially no public rules guiding the process. Political representation in Sweden is overwhelmingly collective representation. Since 1998, there has been the opportunity to indicate preferences not just for a particular party but also for specific candidates, but voters tend to vote for parties rather than for individual candidates. This culture of representation gives parties a central role in candidate selection. Against that backdrop it is perhaps not very surprising that indicating preferences for specific candidates has, with a few exceptions, not had a major impact on outcomes.

Citation:

Bengtsson, Åsa et al. (2014), *The Nordic Voter. Myths of Exceptionalism* (Colchester: ECPR Press).

Karlsson, D. and M. Gilljam (2014), *Svenska politiker. Om de folkvalda i riksdag, landsting och kommun* (Stockholm: Santérus).

Oscarsson, H. and S. Holmberg (2014), *Svenska väljare* (Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer).

Oscarsson, Henrik (2017) *Det svenska partisystemet i förändring*, in: Ulrika Andersson, Jonas Ohlsson, Henrik Oscarsson, Maria Oskarson (eds.): *Larmar och gör sig till*, Göteborgs universitet: SOM-institutet, 411-427.

Media Access  
Score: 10

All candidates and all parties have equal opportunities of access to the national media and other means of communication. The equality among political candidates in terms of their access to media is to a large extent safeguarded by the public service rules of the SVT (public television) and Sverige Radio (SR), a public radio outlet.

The print media in Sweden is overwhelmingly center-right in its political allegiance and is therefore more likely to cover center-right candidates than candidates from the parties on the political left. However, journalists have a significantly stronger preference for the Green and the Left parties than does the electorate as a whole. There is also a genuine left-wing media, particularly

present on the internet. The right-wing Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD) was initially marginalized by mainstream media and some newspapers still refuse to publish their advertisements. Given the party's sustained growth in elections and polls, however, they are now given somewhat more media coverage.

In Sweden, as elsewhere in Europe, the usage of social media and other new forms of information sharing are increasing. These media are becoming more important for political campaigns. Though the information provided by social and other electronic media is vast and varied, selectivity facilitates a more narrow consumption of information than in traditional print media.

Citation:

Andersson, U., A. Carlander, E. Lindgren, M. Oskarson (eds.) (2018), *Sprickor i fasaden* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

Asp, K. (2012), "Journalistkårens partisympatier," in K. Asp (ed.), *Svenska Journalister 1989-2011* (Gothenburg: JMG), 101-107.

Voting and  
Registration  
Rights  
Score: 10

The Swedish electoral system meets the highest requirements in terms of eligibility, transparency and the basic right to participate. There are no legal obstacles to anyone who wants to run in an election. Political parties conduct candidate selection without any interference from the state, and the media closely monitor the parties during the selection process. Electoral turnout has always been high and increased even further in the 2000s. In the 2018 elections, turnout was 87.2%.

Citation:

Valmyndigheten (<http://www.val.se/>).

Party Financing  
Score: 8

Political parties in Sweden receive public as well as private support. Despite extensive debate, political parties still do not make their financial records available to the public and there is no regulation requiring them to do so.

This lack of disclosure has become increasingly frustrating to the public, as the parties receive extensive financial support from the state. The current support (central, regional and local) amounts to a total of some SEK 440 million (equal to €52 million) per annum. The only information that is made available about party financing is scattered and provided on an ad hoc basis by the respective parties.

In spring 2018, the government passed legislation that substantially increased the transparency of party financing in Sweden. Relating to the 2018 election, public demands again surfaced to further sharpen the rules to clearly document the financial sources of electoral campaigns and further increase monetary penalties for violations.

Citation:

[https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-201890-om-insyn-i-finansiering-av-partier\\_sfs-2018-90](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-201890-om-insyn-i-finansiering-av-partier_sfs-2018-90)

Popular Decision-Making  
Score: 7

Citizen initiatives for national referendums are rare but they do happen. Such initiatives have occurred on several occasions at the local level concerning a wide variety of issues, for instance a referendum on poll taxes (for automobiles, “trängselskatt”) in the city of Gothenburg in 2014.

Outcomes of referendums are never binding in Sweden. However, it is customary that all parties commit themselves to obeying the outcome of the referendum. In constitutional terms, no referendum can be legally binding.

Citation:

For an overview over national referendums cf.

<https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/demokrati/allmanna-val/folkomrostningar-valresultat/>  
<https://www.val.se/val-och-folkomrostningar/folkomrostningar.html>

### Access to Information

Media Freedom  
Score: 10

Media freedom in Sweden is valued and well-protected. The Swedish constitution’s Freedom of the Press Act and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression guarantee freedom of the press.

The media in Sweden operate independently from government. This is not to say that government is not present in the media sector, however. Government institutions offer financial support to newspapers (typically smaller newspapers) and also to magazines.

Furthermore, government is a leading owner of the public service companies Sverige Radio (SR) and Sveriges Television (SVT). In November 2017, a royal commission (SOU 2017:79) proposed that public service radio and television should henceforth be financed not via license fees but through a tax. This reform comes into effect in 2019.

The media market in Sweden has opened up considerably over the past couple of decades. Today, the SR and SVT face significant competition from privately owned and managed radio and television channels. It is noteworthy that trust is especially high in public media (television and radio), whereas trust in private media (especially television) is low in Swedish society. Private media ownership is concentrated in a small number of major corporate actors inside and outside Sweden.

A precondition for the media to scrutinize government and hold elected officials to account is that the government provides access to public documents. During the last couple of years there appears to be growing frustration among the media against government departments for failing to provide public documents to the media or individual citizens. Government departments increasingly use information as a strategic means of communication. Nevertheless, Swedish government and administration still meet high requirements regarding transparency and publicity.

Citation:

Andersson, U. et al. (eds.) (2017), *Larmar och gör sig till* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

Andersson, U., A. Carlander, E. Lindgren, M. Oskarson (eds.) (2018), *Sprickor i fasaden* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

Olsson, J., H. E. Oscarsson and M. Solevid (eds.) (2016), *Eqvilibrium* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

SOU 2017:79 *Finansiering av public service – för ökad stabilitet, legitimitet och stärkt oberoende* (<https://www.regeringen.se/4a9767/contentassets/c557ad42ef7245daa0b9f60a8fe54769/finansiering-av-public-service-for-okad-stabilitet-legitimitet-och-starkt-oberoende-sou-201779>).

Media Pluralism  
Score: 9

The Swedish media market is highly competitive. There is a very clear distinction between public service and commercial media with the former mitigating the downsides of the latter. The only problem with the growing private media market is that it has a highly centralized ownership structure with significant foreign ownership.

New social media (Facebook, blogs, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) are developing at an amazing speed in Sweden, as elsewhere, and are playing an increasingly important role in politics. Electronic media are most popular with a younger and well-educated demographic. Internet penetration in Sweden is among the highest in the world.

Citation:

Andersson, U. et al. (eds.) (2017), *Larmar och gör sig till* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute) (<https://som.gu.se/publicerat/bocker/70.-larmar-och-gor-sig-till>).

Andersson, U., A. Carlander, E. Lindgren, M. Oskarson (eds.) (2018), *Sprickor i fasaden* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

Johansson, B. et al. (2014), *Det politiska spelet. Medborgare, medier och politiker i den representativa demokratin* (Lund: Studentlitteratur).

Olsson, J., H. Ekengren Oscarsson and M. Solevid (eds.) (2016), *Eqvilibrium* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

Access to  
Government  
Information  
Score: 9

Sweden is a forerunner and remains a leading country on all issues related to transparency in government and public access to government information and documents. Both the political elite and public cherish the fundamental

principle that all government documents are public, unless they are classified or relate to individual integrity. If anything, the emergence of e-government has further promoted the objective of accessibility and transparency. Sweden is also pursuing greater transparency within the European Commission.

There has been a growing problem lately in the willingness of government departments to provide documents to the public and the media as swiftly as the constitution states. Media representatives in particular have criticized the government on this matter. There is also some frustration among executive agencies to have access to documents of the government departments. Nevertheless, Swedish government and administration still meet high requirements regarding transparency and publicity.

Citation:

Andersson, U., A. Carlander, E. Lindgren, M. Oskarson (eds.) (2018), *Sprickor i fasaden* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

Olsson, J., H. E. Oscarsson and M. Solevid (eds.) (2016), *Eqvilibrium* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

### Civil Rights and Political Liberties

Civil Rights  
Score: 9

Civil rights and legality are core values in Swedish governance. The constitution has a chapter devoted to human rights. Legal security is an essential guideline for the public administration. In all these respects, Sweden earns a top score for this indicator.

However, the emphasis on efficiency in administrative reform is undermining legal security. This applies, for instance, to the immigration service and the performance management system used by the police, which incentivizes staff to prioritize efficiency and closure over full legal consideration. Moreover, the immigration administrative system has come under considerable stress from the rapid increase in asylum-seekers caused by the Syrian war. The Migration Agency has done its utmost to step up to this challenge by increasing staff and introducing work shifts to deal with the soaring number of immigrants.

Also, there were instances in the recent past which raise issues about the extent to which state institutions or actors uphold the basic civil rights codified in the constitution. There is a current debate about whether it is humane to return young Afghan men or boys who have been denied asylum to their country of origin. While such extradition is consistent with the law – migrants that have been denied asylum are to be extradited – these cases still raise questions about what constitutes humane treatment. The number of cases where extradition has raised objections in the media increased significantly in 2015 and 2016 along with the increase in asylum applications.

Lastly, it is worth noting that organized crime has taken a hold in some metropolitan regions of Sweden. Without a doubt, infringement of individual freedom caused by private actors such as organized crime is a real and growing problem. The national police have prioritized tackling organized crime and, in 2019, the government, under heavy criticism from the center-right opposition, rolled out a program addressing the issue of organized crime.

Political Liberties  
Score: 10

Political liberties and human rights are written into the constitution. Sweden is a highly institutionalized advanced democracy. As such, it upholds all political liberties.

Non-discrimination  
Score: 9

Sweden still ranks as one of the most egalitarian societies in the world. Discrimination based on any feature, be it gender, race, sexual preferences or ethnicity, is not tolerated.

That said, it is clear that there are still differences between salaries for men and women performing the same work as well as between immigrants and Swedes in the labor market. These are spheres of society where public regulation is only effective when complaints are filed with public authorities. There are two ombudsmen dealing exclusively with discrimination issues; one for gender issues and one for other forms of discrimination.

In terms of ethnicity, Sweden is an increasingly heterogeneous and diverse society. Integration policies are highly contested in the public debate. A Discrimination Ombudsman and a minister of integration and gender equality devote their political activities to anti-discrimination.

However, during the review period, ethnic segmentation in several suburbs of metropolitan areas in Sweden has further increased. This societal fracturing remains an unsolved political challenge in contemporary Sweden. With the increased immigration since 2015, there is an imminent risk that these challenges will be exacerbated.

### Rule of Law

Legal Certainty  
Score: 10

The Swedish legal framework is deeply engrained and the rule of law is an overarching norm in Sweden. With a Weberian-style public administration, values of legal security, due process, transparency and impartiality remain key norms. The only disturbing observation in this context is the growing emphasis on efficiency in public administration that has arisen in the context of a recent public management reform. This focus on efficiency potentially jeopardizes the integrity of legal certainty and security, in particular with respect to migration processes. Recent media reports have shown that pressures on migration staff to process a given number of asylum applications within a specific timeframe undermines the legal certainty and fairness of case work.

There are now signs emerging that market-based administrative reforms may have peaked in Sweden; there is now a search for a “post-NPM” or “neo-Weberian” model of administration. Again, the tension between efficiency goals in public administration and legal security is well-known but still looms large in the context of administrative reform. Most recently, the red-green government announced plans to downplay New Public Management as a philosophy of public sector reform and to reemphasize trust (“tillit”) as a normative foundation of the public administration. A series of “experiments,” replacing performance management with various types of trust-based management were carried out in 2017 and 2018, primarily at the local and regional levels.

The clients of the administration and the courts also expect and appreciate these values. The legal system is characterized by a high degree of transparency. The ombudsmen institution (a Swedish invention) remains an important channel for administrative complaints. The Ombudsman of Justice keeps a close watch on the application of the rule of law in Sweden.

Different arrangements to protect and strengthen the position of whistleblowers came into force in 2017 and are now being implemented.

:

Petersson, O. (2014), *Den offentliga makten* (Lund: Studentlitteratur).

Judicial Review  
Score: 10

The Swedish system of judicial review works well and efficiently. Courts are allowed to question legislation that they find to be inconsistent with the constitution. In addition, Sweden has a system of judicial preview where the Council on Legislation (“lagrådet”) is consulted on all legislation that potentially relates to constitutional matters. The institution’s review (or preview) goes beyond that assignment and includes an overall assessment of the quality of the proposed legislation. The government and the parliament have the right to ignore the council’s advice, however.

At the same time, critics have increasingly questioned this model of judicial review over the past few years. They argue it is part of a more general trend toward the judicialization of politics, where courts and lawyers acquire an inappropriate level of influence over political decisions. However, these criticisms are not particular to Sweden; they are observable in most European countries.

Appointment of  
Justices  
Score: 9

The cabinet appoints Supreme Court (“regeringsrätten”) justices. The appointments are strictly meritocratic and are not guided by political allegiances. Although the cabinet almost always makes unanimous decisions, there are no special majority requirements in place for these decisions.

Corruption  
Prevention  
Score: 9

There is only modest media coverage of the appointments, mainly because the Swedish Supreme Court is not a politically active body like the Supreme Court in countries such as Germany and the United States.

Sweden has one of the lowest levels of corruption in the world. As a result, public trust in democratic institutions and public administration is comparatively high. There are, however, significant differences among government agencies in the level of trust they enjoy from citizens, with the National Tax Agency being the most trusted agency and the National Social Insurance Agency and the Labor Market Agency the least trusted.

Corruption at the state level remains extremely rare in Sweden. Regulatory systems safeguarding transparency and accountability, coupled with an overall administrative culture that strongly forbids corrupt behavior, prevent corruption. At the local government level, however, there have been an increasing number of reports of corruption and court decisions on related charges.

Citation:

Andersson, U. et al. (eds.) (2017), *Larmar och gör sig till* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute) (<https://som.gu.se/publicerat/bocker/70.-larmar-och-gor-sig-till>).

Bergh, Andreas, Gissur Ó. Erlingsson, Richard Öhrvall, Mats Sjölin (2016), *A Clean House? Studies of Corruption in Sweden* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press).

Olsson, J., H. Ekengren Oscarsson and M. Solevid (eds.) (2016), *Equilibrium* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

# Governance

## I. Executive Capacity

### Strategic Capacity

Strategic  
Planning  
Score: 8

The strategic capacity of government has been enhanced over the past few years. Much of that capacity is found in the finance ministry where most of the long-term planning takes place. The main role of the Prime Minister's Office is not so much long-term planning but more coordination within government.

A case in the point is the so-called future commission which presented its final report in early 2013. In the final report, the commission assesses the economic and social changes that are likely to shape Swedish society in the longer term. The commission was not an institutionalized feature of the normal policy process but rather a group of experts the government appointed to examine long-term issues. The creation of the commission does signal that the government is thinking in the longer term, and other commissions have since been appointed to take a similar long view on various issues on the policy agenda.

In addition to these planning efforts in the government departments, the agencies are also engaged in planning. They are not operating in close proximity to the departments, however. The exception to this pattern is when a department asks one of its agencies to look into a particular issue and to prepare advice on policy-initiatives.

The center-right government (2006 – 2014) invested considerable energy to increase coordination among government departments and improve steering of the executive agencies. The Social Democratic-Green governments (2014 onwards) have not made any sustained efforts in this respect.

Historically, policy-planning has been achieved to a large extent by the use of royal commissions. Most of these commissions were composed of elected

officials and stakeholders. During the past decade or so, the quality of these commissions – particularly with regard to the quality of the studies they deliver and their capacity to generate consensus among major political actors and stakeholders as to policy goals and means – has deteriorated, as shown in a recent study published by the SNS. Many commissions today have very few members and are often dominated by civil servants. This has had a negative impact on those commissions’ final reports and the quality of the advice they produce as well as the political role of commissions as a forum in the policy process where compromises among the political parties can be negotiated.

Citation:

Zetterberg, K. (2011), "Det statliga kommittéväsendet: En del av den svenska modellen," Svensk Juristtidning 8:753-763.

Svenska framtidsutmaningar. Slutrapport från regeringens framtidskommission (2013) (Stockholm: Statsrådsberedningen) (<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/21/33/06/9cde7be8.pdf>)

Garsten, C., B. Rothstein and S. Svallfors (2015), *Makt utan mandat: de policyprofessionella i svensk politik* (Stockholm: Dialogos).

Dahlström, C., E. Lundberg and K. Pronin (2019), *Det statliga kommittéväsendets förändring 1990-2016*. SNS Analys Rapport nr 59. (Stockholm: SNS).

Expert Advice  
Score: 8

The government’s search for scholarly advice is today less institutionalized than it was 25 or 30 years ago when royal commissions would almost always include experts and scholars. With the decline in the royal commission institution (most commissions today are one-man task forces given 18 or 24 months to look into an issue and produce a final report), the government now seeks scholarly advice on a more ad hoc basis.

There are some positive signs, however. The 2006 to 2014 governments increased the number of boards or advisory groups where scholars (often, but not always, bona fide sympathizers of the ruling parties) could offer input and advice. There is a similar pattern among agencies that set up scientific councils to provide advice. There also appears to be a trend among agencies to organize hearings and public debates to bring in a variety of views on current issues. This can be seen not least in the context of administrative reform where commissions and agencies like the Swedish Public Management Agency frequently organize these kinds of meetings.

Overall, the government department staff solicits advice or other contacts with external actors less frequently than in the past. Communication is today managed in detail and there are disincentives to open up to external actors at sensitive stages of the policy process. The extent to which the government remains open to scholarly advice depends much on how politically salient the issue is. When policymakers seek scholarly advice, it is in most cases ad hoc and selective.

A recent study by Garsten, Rothstein, and Svallfors argues that “policy professionals” – networks of non-elected but highly influential policy experts – have significant influence on policymaking and policy design.

:

Garsten, C., B. Rothstein and S. Svallfors (2015), *Makt utan mandat: de policyprofessionella i svensk politik* (Stockholm: Dialogos).

Dahlström, C., E. Lundberg and K. Pronin (2019), *Det statliga kommittéväsendets förändring 1990-2016. SNS Analys Rapport nr 59.* (Stockholm: SNS).

### Interministerial Coordination

GO Expertise  
Score: 8

Interministerial coordination has been a significant problem in the Swedish system of government for a long time but has now been addressed in a comprehensive strategy. The previous government (2006 – 2014) implemented a major program (“RK Styr”) in order to strengthen the coordination among departments. This goal was believed to be a necessary step to increase the capability of the GO to steer the agencies more effectively.

In formal and legal terms, the government and its departments act as a collectivity. All decisions in government are made collectively and there is no individual ministerial accountability. The Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) plays a significant role in the coordination process. This is also the case for the finance ministry. Furthermore, when the incumbent government is a coalition government, as has been the case since 2006, policies must be coordinated not just among the relevant departments but also among the governing parties.

The practice of governing and coordination is much more complex. Each department has a fair amount of autonomy in their respective sector. Coordination among departments takes places at different organizational levels depending on whether the issue is a technical and administrative issue, or whether it is a more political matter. With the latter, political actors make the final decisions. When bills involving more than one department are drafted, coordination is achieved through meetings where drafts of the bill are discussed. There are instances where drafts have gone through a very large number of revisions as part of the coordination process. In pro-growth policies in the mid-2000s, for instance, the bill that eventually was submitted to the parliament (Riksdag) was the 56th version of the bill.

The lack of coordination has to some extent been resolved by increasing the centralization within the Government Office. The finance ministry has become a “primus inter-pares” among the departments; a pattern that emerged in the wake of the financial crises in the early 1990s but that has remained ever since.

The PMO rarely coordinates policy content, which generally takes place during the process of deliberation or drafting of bills.

Citation:

Dahlström, C., B. G. Peters and J. Pierre (eds) (2011), *Steering from the Center* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

Jacobsson, B., J. Pierre and G. Sundström (2015), *Governing the Embedded State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Niemann, C. (2013), *Villkorat förtroende. Normer och rollförväntningar i relationen mellan politiker och tjänstemän i Regeringskansliet* (Stockholm: Department of Political Science, University of Stockholm).

Pierre, J. and G. Sundström (eds) (2009), *Den nya samhällsstyrningen* (Malmö: Liber).

Premfors, R. and G. Sundström (2007), *Regeringskansliet* (Malmö: Liber).

Line Ministries  
Score: 7

The leadership of the GO and the PMO are primarily involved when policies are initiated, when final decisions are to be made, and if a disagreement emerges among the governing parties or ministers. However, the line nature of the GO – and the chain of command between the political and administrative levels – means that the top leadership, apart from initiating and deciding on policy, does not routinely monitor its development. There are instead regular briefings and informal consultations. This informal coordination procedure nevertheless ensures that the PMO, in line with the finance ministry, play a crucial role in policy developments. Also, there are established but informal rules regulating procedures when there is disagreement among the non-political advisers on how to design policy. Essentially, the political level of the department should only be consulted when its ruling is critical to policy formulation; otherwise policy design should rest with non-partisan members of staff.

When the government is made up of more than one party, as has been the case for most of Sweden's recent history, there are mechanisms in place when disagreement arises. Either the political leadership proactively intervenes in the policy-planning process to resolve disagreements or such disagreements are "lifted" to the political level for a ruling.

It should also be noted that line ministries frequently ask for advice from the executive agencies during the early stages of the policy process.

Citation:

Jacobsson, B., J. Pierre and G. Sundström (2015), *Governing the Embedded State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Niemann, C. (2013), *Villkorat förtroende. Normer och rollförväntningar i relationen mellan politiker och tjänstemän i Regeringskansliet* (Stockholm: Department of Political Science, University of Stockholm).

Page, E. C. (2012), *Policy Without Politicians: Bureaucratic Influence in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Premfors, R. and G. Sundström (2007), *Regeringskansliet* (Malmö: Liber).

Cabinet  
Committees  
Score: 1

There are no standing cabinet committees in the Swedish system of government. Cabinet proposals are coordinated through iterations of sending drafts of bills to the concerned departments. This usually takes place at the middle level of the departments and thus does not involve the political level of the departments.

The cabinet is both a policy-shaping institution as well as the final institution of appeal on a wide range of issues. There is also a requirement that the cabinet must be the formal decision-maker on many issues. This means that the cabinet annually makes more than 100,000 decisions (mostly in bulk).

Ministerial  
Bureaucracy  
Score: 7

Most of the daily coordination on policy matters does not involve the political level of the departments but is instead handled at the administrative level. However, as soon as coordination takes place on a political dimension, it is “lifted” to the political level.

Coordination within the GO remains a significant problem, although some measures have been implemented to address that problem. Many departments still find it difficult to coordinate policy across departmental boundaries. Departments that were formed through mergers of departments tend to display “subcultures” of the former departments.

Citation:

Jacobsson, B., J. Pierre and G. Sundström (2015), *Governing the Embedded State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Niemann, C. (2013), *Villkorat förtroende. Normer och rollförväntningar i relationen mellan politiker och tjänstemän i Regeringskansliet* (Stockholm: department of Political Science, University of Stockholm).

Informal  
Coordination  
Score: 8

Informal mechanisms of coordination among civil servants and higher-ranking politicians alike are common and important in the Swedish system, although they may not always be effective. And yet, informal contacts between departments and agencies are believed to be integral to the efficiency of the politico-administrative system. Informal coordination procedures effectively filter many, but not all, policy proposals.

Citation:

de Fine Licht, J. and J. Pierre (2017), *Myndighetschefernas syn på regeringens styrning* (Stockholm: Statskontoret).

Digitalization for  
Interministerial  
Coordination  
Score: 6

The digitalization of the Swedish public sector has come a rather long way. One exceptional example is the budget process (one of the key mechanisms to support coordination among government departments), where documents are digitally shared and simultaneously developed among various departments. The government also uses digital services to coordinate interdepartmental responses to communications from the EU. Overall, however, digitalization is mainly used to support intraorganizational processes such as drafting documents and only to a lesser extent to support interdepartmental coordination.

The Swedish government now communicates all new legislation and regulations (SFS) digitally, with digital versions given legal precedence over printed versions as they are the most current versions of legislation.

Digitalization has been implemented more extensively at the agency level. For instance, there is now a joint service center (SSC) that manages back-office functions for a growing number of agencies. Also, statistical material and maps are shared digitally among agencies.

### Evidence-based Instruments

RIA Application  
Score: 7

The purpose of regulatory impact analysis (RIA) is to assess the degree to which regulation has negative and/or unintended consequences for the targets of regulation. More broadly, RIA is nowadays used to avoid increasing regulatory burdens on private businesses. RIAs are also used to examine which regulatory framework could be simplified or abolished.

Ex ante assessments of regulatory impact have been mandatory since 2007. In terms of the OECD's iREG scores, Sweden scores just below the OECD average for primary laws and just above average for subordinate regulations.

Sweden, according to an evaluation, has had “rather modest” results from RIAs. Simplifying rules pertaining to private businesses has been an important part of economic development policy over the past several years, but RIAs as a specific model of analysis do not seem to be used systematically and over a broad range of issues.

Citation:

Erlandsson, M. (2010), *Regelförenkling genom konsekvensutredningar* (Stockholm: Sieps).

<http://www.regelradet.se/in-english/about/>

OECD (2019), *Indicators of regulatory policy and governance*. Europe 2019. Sweden (Paris: OECD).

Quality of RIA  
Process  
Score: 7

As mentioned, RIAs play some role in Sweden but the system is less elaborate compared to many other countries. The Swedish model of RIA seems to perform reasonably well with regard to participation and communication but less so in terms of independent evaluations. Sweden scores somewhat below the OECD average in terms of stakeholder engagement in developing regulation.

Overall, simplifying regulatory frameworks appears to be conducted fairly ad hoc. For instance, the Simplex project in the Department of Industry and Economic Development aimed at removing regulations that were either obsolete or unnecessarily obstructing private businesses. The project appears to have practiced RIA without applying the entire RIA framework.

The increasing number of inspections agencies created specifically to review and evaluate the performance of other agencies in areas such as healthcare and social insurance is likely to strengthen quality evaluation and transparency.

Citation:

OECD (2019), Indicators of regulatory policy and governance. Europe 2019. Sweden (Paris: OECD).

Sustainability  
Check  
Score: 7

Environmental sustainability is one of several mainstreamed goals in the policy process. In theory at least, all government bills, procurements and directives to royal commissions are supposed to be assessed to determine their impact on environmental sustainability. As for other types of sustainability criteria, there is little evidence available about the degree to which they are considered in the RIA process.

Quality of Ex  
Post Evaluation  
Score: 8

Ex post evaluations take various forms in the Swedish system. For the past 10 to 15 years, performance measurement and management has been an integral part of public management in Sweden, as in most other countries. Also, audits conducted by the Swedish supreme audit institution (Riksrevisionen) are important evaluation instruments. There is, however, a tendency to focus more on institutions and cost efficiency (the audit approach) than on programs and impact (the evaluation approach) – a trend that is increasingly noticeable across many Western countries. That said, both approaches are useful as feedback on public policy.

Citation:

Pierre, J., B. G. Peters and J. de Fine Licht (2018), “Is auditing the new evaluation? Can it be? Should it be?,” (tillsammans med B. Guy Peters och Jenny de Fine Licht), *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 31:726-39.

B. G. Peters and J. Pierre (2019), ““From evaluation to auditing and from programs to institutions?: Causes and consequences of the decline of the program approach,” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*.

Public  
Consultation  
Score: 8

### Societal Consultation

Consultation with societal actors has historically been of a defining feature of Swedish (and Scandinavian) neo-corporatist governance, and such arrangements are still in place to a large extent. In this corporatist arrangement, government consults with key societal partners on a wide range of issues. Stakeholders are thus given an opportunity to influence public policy from the early stages of the policy process until implementation.

The more specific nature of the relationship between the state and societal actors is changing, however. Previously, these contacts were institutionalized with all major players invited to provide input on almost all major policy issues. Today, these consultations are more ad hoc and strategic. The current red-green government appears to have a more continuous dialog with organized interests, primarily the unions, than the earlier “Alliance” government. Even so, Swedish corporatism is weaker today than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. The previously mentioned decline of the royal commissions is one important example of the reduction of societal consultation in Sweden under the period of review. Overall, most observers today agree that corporatism as a model of governance has been significantly weakened in Sweden.

However, there have also been some tendencies toward increasing societal consultation. The increasing significance of so-called new modes of governance – networks, markets, partnerships and so on – has opened up new arenas for exchanges and communication between government institutions and organized interests. Also, studies show that societal actors now target specific institutions rather than engaging the state as a whole. Unions, for example, still target public institutions that draft policy, whereas business organizations are more active vis-à-vis executive agencies.

#### Citation:

Dahlström, C., E. Lundberg and K. Pronin (2019), *Det statliga kommittéväsendets förändring 1990-2016*. SNS Analys Rapport nr 59. (Stockholm: SNS).

Jochem, Sven (2020), *Das Politische System Schwedens* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS).

Pierre, J. (ed) (2015), *Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), esp. Section 10.

Pierre, J. and B. G. Peters (2005), *Governing Complex Societies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).

Svensson, T. and P-O.Öberg (2010), “Does Power Drive out Trust? Relations between Labor Market Actors in Sweden,” *Political Studies* 58:143-166.

## Policy Communication

Coherent  
Communication  
Score: 9

Improved communications dovetails with increasing coordination among the government departments. During the past couple of years, the government has developed and implemented a more coherent communications strategy. The flow of communication from government departments and the PMO is now carefully controlled such that only a very limited number of officials are authorized to engage the media or other actors outside the core of government.

This strategy is very similar to the communications strategies today used in countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom. It implies that cabinet ministers carefully assess invitations from radio and television and, perhaps surprisingly, frequently decline those invitations if they cannot control the format or if they are to debate with representatives from the opposition.

This strategy has been rather successful; indeed, in some ways it may even have been too successful. Scholars and the media are increasingly objecting to problems in accessing ministers and other representatives of the governing parties. There is also increasing frustration with the GO's tendency to be slow in providing the media with public documents. Even among several agencies there is now frustration about the decreasing access to government departments and government information.

Citation:

Dahlström, C. J. Pierre and B. G. Peters (eds) (2011), *Steering from the Center* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

Erlandsson, M. (2008), "Regeringskansliet och medierna. Den politiska exekutivens resurser och strategier för att hantera och styra massmedier," *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* 110: 335-49.

Jacobsson, B., J. Pierre and G. Sundström (2015), *Governing the Embedded State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

## Implementation

Government  
Effectiveness  
Score: 9

The implementation capacity of the Swedish government is strong. The circa 340 executive agencies are the key actors in the implementation of policy. Over the past few years, the departments have increased the steering of their agencies. Also, performance measurement and management have become increasingly important in monitoring the agencies and the implementation process.

Yet like the challenge of efficient policy coordination, policy implementation is also a challenge under the restrictions of new governance forms. The

relationship between the government and the agencies no longer follows a strict command and control pattern; rather, it is a more interactive form of governance where departments utilize the expertise in the agencies during the early stages of the policy process. This pattern is largely due to the fact that policy expertise is located not just in the departments but also in the agencies.

The total number of staff in the departments is about 4,600, whereas the number of staff at the agency level is about 225,000. To a large extent, and with considerable variation among policy sectors and even specific issues, agencies provide informal advice to government on policy design. In some cases, there is a weekly dialogue between departments and agencies, not just on what departments want agencies to do, but also on matters of policy design. This means effectively that agencies are involved in shaping the policies they will later implement. This arrangement obviously increases the agencies' commitment to a policy, but at the same time it complicates the implementation process.

The main challenge in implementing government policies is not institutional but rather political. Neither the current nor previous red-green coalition government has held a majority of seats in the parliament. As a consequence, policy proposals have had to be negotiated with opposition parties. If all opposition parties unite against the government, the government's proposals will be defeated. The complexity of this parliamentary situation has significantly complicated the policy process, especially as the situation was further exacerbated by the inconclusive 2018 election results. After lengthy negotiations, the red-green government struck a deal with the Center Party and the Liberals in January 2019, the so-called January Accord. Under the deal, the government has agreed to implement several distinctly liberal or neoliberal reforms. Thus, while the capacity of the government to implement its policies remains strong, those policies now represent a rather broad spectrum of the party system.

Citation:

Jacobsson, B., J. Pierre and G. Sundström (2015), *Governing the Embedded State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Premfors, R. and G. Sundström (2007), *Regeringskansliet* (Malmö: Liber).

Ministerial  
Compliance  
Score: 10

In Sweden, ministers and departments do not implement policy. The task is handled by the executive agencies. A major concern in Sweden is the degree to which ministers can, and should, steer the agencies. Swedish agencies are highly autonomous, but departments can formally steer them by appointing the Director General of the agency, deciding on the regulatory and institutional framework of the agency, and allocating financial resources to specific tasks and programs.

In Sweden, as in many other countries, the relationship between departments and agencies, and the willingness of the latter to implement policies defined by the former, can hinder or enable implementation. In Sweden, the relationship between departments and agencies is an institutional relation, not a personal relation between a minister and the director of an agency. Thus, to the extent that it is meaningful to talk about incentives, they must be organizational incentives. Furthermore, implementing policy is a core role for the agencies, so incentives are hardly necessary.

Citation:

Premfors, R. and G. Sundström (2007), *Regeringskansliet* (Malmö: Liber).

Jacobsson, B., J. Pierre and G. Sundström (2015), *Governing the Embedded State: The Organizational Dimension of Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Monitoring  
Ministries  
Score: 9

Formally, ministries are not very involved in the implementation of policies. It is rather the task of agencies to implement policies. Nevertheless, Swedish ministries still control the implementation process of the agencies. The relationship between ministries and agencies implies monitoring by communication and mutual adaptation, less than through a hierarchical chain of command.

Monitoring  
Agencies,  
Bureaucracies  
Score: 9

Government departments in the GO monitor the activities (not just implementation) of the agencies quite closely. Since the introduction of performance management some 15 to 20 years ago, agencies report to their parent department on their performance targets. In fact, many criticize this reporting, which requires agencies to devote much time and effort reporting on their performance to their respective department, because it is so extensive that it has become burdensome. Recently, there has been a tendency to reduce the number of objectives and performance indicators on which the agencies are to report. This tendency is likely to continue over the next several years.

It should be noted that there is a significant imbalance between the departments and the agencies. The GO has a total staff of about 4,600. The total staff in the agencies is about 220,000. Thus, the steering structures in the system are considerably smaller than the targets of that steering. This state of affairs has encouraged the use of informal communication between departments and agencies to supplement formal steering.

Citation:

Jacobsson, B., J. Pierre and G. Sundström (2015), *Governing the Embedded State: The Organizational Dimension of Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Pierre, J. and J. de Fine Licht (2017), *Myndighetschefernas syn på regeringens styrning* (Stockholm: Statskontoret).

Task Funding  
Score: 4

Unfunded, or insufficiently funded, mandates have been a long-standing issue in Sweden; indeed recent studies show an almost complete unanimity among local governments with regard to their frustration of insufficiently funded mandates. Subnational governments enjoy extensive autonomy in relation to the central government in Sweden. Local governments and their national association, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), have insisted that all tasks placed upon them by central government must be fully funded.

SALAR has made this claim an overarching principle, which it emphasizes whenever the central government delegates tasks to local authorities. Instead of fully funded mandates, though, the central government frequently negotiates the funding aspect of delegated tasks with the local governments and SALAR. From the local authorities' perspective, this problem has become more significant as central government has increased its control over local authorities during the past couple of years, as Statskontoret (the Swedish Agency for Public Management) recently showed.

As a reaction to the large number of asylum-seekers in 2015 and 2016, the former red-green government (2014 – 2018) to a great extent funded the additional work required of local authorities. However, this additional funding does not change the fact that in more routine exchanges between the central government and local government, funded mandates remain usually insufficient. In 2017, much of the central government's support to local authorities to assist their work with asylum-seekers was terminated; it is now up to local authorities to fund these activities. As a result, almost half of local authorities report budget deficits and service cutbacks for 2019, with this situation predicted to continue in 2020.

Citation:

Pierre, J. (2014), *Globalization and Governance* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar).

Statskontoret (2018) *Utveckling av styrningen av kommuner och landsting 2018* (Stockholm: Statskontoret).

Constitutional  
Discretion  
Score: 9

Although unfunded mandates have been much debated, central government overwhelmingly respects local autonomy. Local government enjoys extensive autonomy, which is guaranteed by the constitution. Indeed, the strength of local autonomy adds to the fragmented nature of the Swedish political system and sometimes creates problems in governance and coordination. In terms of crisis, extraordinary challenges or when there are major national interests at stake, however, government can increase its pressure on local government, despite the latter's formal autonomy. In these cases, the usual procedure is first to negotiate with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the Regions (SALAR) and, if that proves unsuccessful, introduce stronger

regulatory measures. For instance, in 2015, to what extent the central government should force all local authorities to receive asylum-seekers was thoroughly debated.

Pre-policy studies conducted in 2016 and 2017 show that state control over autonomous local governments has increased gradually during the past several years. Such control reaches not across the board but is generally targeted at specific issues and programs such as education. The former government (2014 – 2018) and its key advisory agencies have had a royal commission and the Public Management Agency review intergovernmental relations in preparation for a reform proposal. With the expected change in the composition of government following the 2018 election, this reform appears to be on hold.

National  
Standards  
Score: 6

Public services have been extensively decentralized over the past decades. Once services are transferred from central to local government, safeguarding national standards and even defining and sustaining those standards becomes problematic. The same problem applies to increasingly privatized services, where the oversight over national standards becomes even more challenging.

Decentralization and local autonomy are essentially institutional choices and, as all choices, these arrangements have their downsides. One of the problems with a decentralized system is that it becomes very difficult to enforce national standards. This became obvious to the government after the extensive decentralization reform during the 1980s and early 1990s. In primary and secondary education, the past two decades have witnessed central government trying to regain some control in order to ensure some degree of national standards. The main strategy toward this objective has been to extensively evaluate the performance of schools and publicize evaluation reports (i.e., to “name, blame and shame” underperforming schools). Thus, government exercises a strategy of steering by auditing. In addition, central government has tried to increase equality among local authorities by revising the general regulatory framework of primary and secondary education, and by targeting financial resources to improve the quality of teaching.

Effective  
Regulatory  
Enforcement  
Score: 9

Much of modern regulation is responsive regulation: it is designed and implemented through a dialogue with the targets of the regulation rather than forcefully imposed. Often, regulatory agencies prefer to use incentives rather than formal rules to elicit the desired behavioral changes among the targets of the regulation. Given that changing behavior is the overarching objective, regulators may use a combination of rules, bargaining and incentives toward that objective. There is no evidence of a systematic bias in this respect among Swedish regulatory agencies.

Citation:

OECD (2019), Indicators of regulatory policy and governance. Europe 2019. Sweden (Paris: OECD).

### Adaptability

Domestic  
Adaptability  
Score: 10

Following Sweden's EU membership, which came into force in the mid-1990s, there has been a sustained effort to adapt government, policy and regulation to EU standards. The bulk of this adaptation relates to changes in domestic regulatory frameworks and policies, a development that does not impact the structure of government.

Estimates suggest that some 75% of the regulations that pertain to Sweden are today EU rules, not domestic rules. This pattern is probably typical for all EU member states. However, Sweden is today among the forerunners in the EU with respect to its adoption of EU directives and decisions. Most of the adaptation has taken place not at the policy level, but on the administrative level (e.g., by integrating domestic regulatory agencies with EU agencies).

Citation:

Jacobsson B. and G. Sundström (2006), *Från hemvävd till invävd: Europeiseringen av svensk förvaltning och politik* (Malmö: Liber).

Zannakis, M. (2010), *Climate Policy as a Window of Opportunity: Sweden and Global Climate Change* (Gothenburg: Department of Political Science).

International  
Coordination  
Score: 9

Sweden has maintained a rather high international profile on a number of issues requiring international collective action. These issues have traditionally included disarmament, human rights, international solidarity and more recently, climate change and a feminist approach to international relations and peacekeeping.

Sweden tends to look at itself as an international broker and coordinator, though it may exaggerate its capacity in this regard. Certainly, Sweden, together with several other smaller nations, exerts some degree of international influence through "soft power."

Citation:

Aggestam, K. and A. Towns (2018), "The Gender Turn in Diplomacy: A new research agenda," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* (DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2018.1483206).

Ingebritsen, C. (2006), *Scandinavia in World Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield).

Jochem, S. (2020), *Das politische System Schwedens* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS).

Pierre, J. (ed) (2015), *Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

## Organizational Reform

Self-monitoring  
Score: 9

Institutional arrangements of governing obviously cover a wide array of arrangements. As indicated earlier, it is astounding in many ways to think that Sweden has transformed politically from a pre-democratic system to a democratic state, embedded in an international union such as the EU, with only a minimum amount of institutional and constitutional reform. Such a transformation testifies to the capacity of institutions to accommodate change. Given their institutional capacity to adapt to external change, institutional arrangements as such are rarely assessed.

The cabinet and government departments were reformed (i.e., merged and/or abolished) during the 1980s and 1990s, but today most observers seem to agree that this type of reform rarely solves any problems. Instead, the main institutional monitoring and reform takes place at the agency level where the number of agencies has decreased by about 25% over the past five to six years. While some agencies have been abolished, the bulk of reduction has come from mergers. There are about 340 agencies in the Swedish administrative system. This reduction in the number of agencies says very little about the extent of regulation; in some ways it is a numbers game aiming to communicate the image to the voters that the government is cutting back in central bureaucracy. That having been said, there is more or less continuous assessment of the agency system and the performance of agencies in service delivery and policy implementation.

Agencies are monitored fairly closely, so much so that a couple of recent royal commissions have recommended that agencies should not have to provide data on their performance with the same frequency as they do today and that the system should allow for more variation among agencies in this respect. The red-green government that came into power in 2014 has launched a process of reducing the number of performance indicators that agencies are requested to provide data on. These efforts are part of a larger project to replace New Public Management models of public sector management with a more trust-based model of management. Several reforms of this kind were developed in 2016 and 2017 and scheduled to be implemented in 2018 and 2019. Given the prospect of a change in government after the 2018 elections, this reform is now pending.

Citation:

SOU 2007:75 Att styra staten – regeringens styrning av sin förvaltning.

SOU 2008:118 Styra och ställa – förslag till en effektivare statsförvaltning

Institutional  
Reform  
Score: 9

While the structural design of the Swedish system looks almost identical to how it did a century ago, there have been substantive changes in the modus operandi of institutions at all levels of government, particularly concerning the relationship between institutions. Perhaps most importantly, coordination among government departments has increased. Furthermore, the agency system is continuously reviewed, and the structure of the system is reformed (e.g., through mergers of agencies). Finally, department steering of the agency has increased, formally and informally.

It is fair to say that the design and functionality of the system is continuously assessed. Over the past decade, issues related to steering and central control have dominated reform ambitions. Again, governments have not hesitated to alter the configuration of departments or agencies when deemed necessary to reflect the changing agenda of the government.

## II. Executive Accountability

### Citizens' Participatory Competence

Political  
Knowledge  
Score: 9

The Swedish population has a strong interest in politics. Election turnout is still very high by most international comparisons. The turnout in the 2014 general elections was 85.8%, which was an increase of 1.2 percentage points from the previous election. In 2018, the turnout increased even further to 87.2%, which is remarkably high compared to other European countries. Swedish voters tend to decide very late for which party to vote, which may be interpreted as the voters' desire to gather as much information on political parties as possible before they make their final decision.

The definition of high or low levels of political knowledge is obviously a relative measure. Official data on the knowledge level of Swedish voters is not available. It can, however, be assumed that voters here are not significantly more – or less – knowledgeable than their colleagues in comparable countries.

Recent studies suggest that if voters had been more knowledgeable on political issues this would have changed their party allegiance. Increasing levels of knowledge should reduce the support for the two major parties – the Moderates and the Social Democrats – while most of the other, smaller parties would have benefited. This is a purely hypothetical study, as the perfectly informed voter does not exist.

## Citation:

Andersson, Ulrika, Anders Carlander, Elina Lindgren, Maria Oskarson (eds.) (2018), *Sprickor i fasaden* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

Oscarsson, H. and S. Holmberg (2014), *Svenska väljare* (Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer).

Oscarsson, H. (2007), "A Matter of Fact? Knowledge Effects on the Vote in Swedish General Elections, 1985-2002," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30:301-322.

<http://www.val.se>

Open  
Government  
Score: 9

Strictly speaking, given the extensive rules about public availability of government documents, government does not have to actively publish material but rather simply ensure that it is available. Thus, withholding information that would be relevant to an assessment of the government's performance would be difficult. True, there may be incentives for government to seek to avoid the public disclosure of sensitive information, but to do so government would have to produce the legal justification for such an action.

### Legislative Actors' Resources

Parliamentary  
Resources  
Score: 9

Members of the parliament can collectively monitor all aspects of government activities. They can find some support for these and other activities from the parliament's (Riksdag) administrative support (Riksdagens Utredningstjänst, RUT). RUT conducts inquiries requested by groups of members of parliament. Individual members of parliament in Sweden receive rather little administrative support; instead, support is given to the political party organizations within parliament.

Obtaining  
Documents  
Score: 10

Parliamentary committees (or indeed any persons) have the right to review all public documents in Sweden unless they are classified or part of an ongoing decision-making process.

In this respect, the Swedish system leaves very little to be desired. The problem, instead, has been the execution of these rights. In the annual reviews conducted by the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Affairs (KU) during the past several years, the committee has severely criticized the government's central office (Regeringskansliet) for not providing documents, or for being exceedingly slow in doing so. The media, too, has been critical of the government in this respect.

Summoning  
Ministers  
Score: 9

Parliamentary committees summon ministers who appear and respond to questions. This is most frequently the case with the annual review conducted by the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Matters, but has been used by other committees, too. Except for very few cases, summoned ministers will appear in parliamentary committees. A few years ago, there was extensive

media attention on a couple of instances when former cabinet ministers declined to appear before a parliamentary committee.

The hearings occur regularly and are often broadcasted by public service television. The results of the hearings are published and accessible to everyone.

Summoning  
Experts  
Score: 10

Parliamentary committees may certainly summon experts. They do not usually do so as part of the regular deliberation of the committees, but rather in the form of a public hearing on some specific issue.

Task Area  
Congruence  
Score: 9

There is a high degree of congruence between government departments and parliamentary committees, but no perfect overlap. This is of course no coincidence. The configuration of government departments is more flexible than that of parliamentary committees, which has undergone very few changes over the last several decades. Ensuring that the committee system matches the GO's organization in departments is essential to the efficiency of both institutions. Furthermore, the GO and the parliament (Riksdag) staff have regular meetings to ensure that the parliament and individual committees are not overloaded with government bills, but that there is a steady flow of bills across the year.

## Media

Media Reporting  
Score: 9

Sweden has dropped somewhat over the past couple of years in terms of newspaper circulation. Most newspapers are experiencing a gradual shift in subscriptions from conventional print to digital formats. The overall quality of the political coverage provided by Swedish media is good, if not extremely good.

Public service radio and television in Sweden is still central to the media system. There have been discussions and Commissions concerning the future of public service but thus far no major changes have been put on the agenda. The only reform worth noting is that public service radio and television is now funded through the tax system and not, as was previously the case, by annual fees.

Compared to many other countries, the coverage is presented by journalists who are experts on Swedish politics. The level of analysis is good and, for the most part, balanced. There is obviously sometimes less professional coverage, too, but taken together, the quality of Swedish newspapers is very good.

Citation:

Andersson, Ulrika, Anders Carlander, Elina Lindgren, Maria Oskarson (eds.) (2018), *Sprickor i fasaden* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

## Parties and Interest Associations

Intra-party  
Decision-Making  
Score: 8

Politics in Sweden is party politics. The political parties shape public discourse on political issues and control public decision-making at all levels of the political system. All the major parties have developed extensive party organizations, in part supported by state subsidies. Party membership has historically been high but has declined over the last couple of decades. Elected delegates from all constituencies make decisions on party policy and programs at national conferences. These meetings are increasingly public events, used not only as forums to make decisions, but also to market the party politically. Beyond that, however, rank and file members are very rarely consulted or invited to voice their opinions on daily policy issues.

Candidate selection, too, is an internal party matter. Voters do have the opportunity to indicate support for specific candidates, however.

Over the past years, the internet has played a role in making the decision-making process within the major parties more open. The Social Democratic party, for instance, discussed some issues of the party's platform in blogs and on its homepage. In such instances, even those who are not members of the party can join in the formulation of the party's platform.

Association  
Competence  
(Employers &  
Unions)  
Score: 9

Sweden has a long corporatist tradition. Although corporatism as a mode of governance has declined, economic interest associations are still important players in the policy process.

The major business interest organizations and unions are certainly very capable of analyzing the economic situation and presenting policy proposals. As organized interests, they obviously pursue their respective agendas, but overall, the expertise and policy capacity of the major interest organizations is impressive. During the global economic crisis, for example, the interest associations showed a high degree of responsibility by not counteracting the crisis management of the government.

:

Garsten, C., B. Rothstein and S. Svallfors (2015), *Makt utan mandat: de policyprofessionella i svensk politik* (Stockholm: Dialogos).

Jochem, S. (2020), *Das politische System Schwedens* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS).

Pierre, J. (ed) (2015), *Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), esp. Section 10.

Association  
Competence  
(Others)  
Score: 9

For noneconomic interest associations, their capacity to conduct analysis and produce relevant policy proposals varies significantly depending on their size.

For instance, in the environmental policy field, the major interest organizations have large staff that conduct high-quality studies and present highly relevant

policy proposals. In other policy fields, small interest associations do not have the staff to produce high-quality policy proposals. Yet, if we assess the quality of noneconomic interest associations over the very broad range of all Swedish interest associations, most of them produce high-quality policy proposals.

Citation:

Jochem, S. (2020), *Das Politische System Schwedens* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS).

Pierre, J. (ed) (2015), *Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

### Independent Supervisory Bodies

Audit Office  
Score: 10

For a long time, Sweden was one of the few countries where the audit office reported to the government and not to the parliament. In order to conform to international standards, such as the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), this institutional arrangement was changed in 2003. For all intents and purposes, the audit office now reports to the parliament. The mandate and mission of the audit office is such that this represents the only chain of accountability. In this respect, the constitutional role and mandate of the audit office is now in harmony with INTOSAI standard.

The audit office underwent a major crisis during 2016, culminating with the resignation of the three national auditors. The crisis did not trigger a revision of the constitutional mandate of the audit office, but the parliament did point out that they wanted a “closer relationship” with the audit office. After the crisis was resolved and three new “national auditors” were appointed to lead the national audit office, the institution resumed its work. It now delivers high-quality audits and appears to exhibit the integrity and autonomy necessary to pursue its mission.

Citation:

[www.riksrevisionen.se](http://www.riksrevisionen.se)

Bringselius, L. (2013), *Organisera oberoende granskning: Riksrevisionens första tio år* (Lund: Studentlitteratur).

Bringselius, L. (ed.) (2017), *Den statliga revisionen i Norden: forskning, praktik och politik* (Lund: Studentlitteratur).

Ombuds Office  
Score: 10

It is fair to say that Sweden invented the ombudsman institution. Sweden currently has seven ombudsmen who focus on the following: legal matters, gender equality, consumer matters, discrimination, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, matters related to disability and matters related to children.

The ombudsman for legal matters (JO), which has been around the longest, is appointed by the parliament, while the government appoints the other ombudsmen. Some of them are their own agencies.

Assessing the effectiveness of the ombudsmen is a difficult task. Their mission is not only to follow up on complaints but also to form opinion in their area of jurisdiction. Their position in the political system and in society appears to be quite strong.

Data Protection  
Authority  
Score: 9

The Swedish Data Protection Agency (Datainspektionen) is charged with the task of protecting personal integrity. To that end, it handles complaints as well as conducts its own inquiries and inspections. It works closely with similar agencies in other EU member states and with EU institutions.

Citation:  
<https://www.datainspektionen.se/other-lang/in-english/>

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