Shifting Regimes: Representation, administrative reform and institutional change in early modern Sweden

***Mats Hallenberg*, *Magnus Linnarsson* & *Joakim Scherp*, Stockholm University**

Purpose and aims

How was the modern state formed and by whom? We propose to answer this question by studying the relation between the political and the administrative spheres in Sweden from a long-term perspective, c. 1527-1810. The wider purpose is to analyse the agency behind institutional change by comparing the actions of political leaders with those of major bureaucratic bodies. To study how key decision-makers acted to influence the organization of the state we will focus on so-called "critical junctions", periods when the Swedish state experienced substantial change in a relatively short time. The project will address the problem of shifting regime types, investigating the dynamics of both authoritarian rule and representative government respectively (Lemke & Reed 1996, Elgie 1998, Wahman et al 2013).

The problem of how to build stable political regimes lies at the heart of this study. In contemporary political science and IR studies, the relation between democracy and state building has gained new relevance (Skocpol 1998, Hehir & Robinson 2007, Egnell & Haldén 2013). In the field of international operations, western coalitions have experienced repeated failure when trying to impose democratic institutions in conflict-ridden areas. This has led to a growing awareness that representative government is not enough for building stable democratic states: an effective and non-corrupt administration promoting the rule-of-law might be a necessary precondition for political stability. Accordingly, scholars have debated the origins and timing of good government: Some have argued that effective administrative structures cannot be maintained without democratic representation (Ertman 1997, Sung 2004, Chowdhury 2004). Others have stressed the opposite: a well-functioning state administration may be established under non-democratic or even authoritarian rule (Shefter 1994, Fukuyama 2011 & 2014).

Historical research may provide important clues for solving such antagonisms, while most of today's democratic states have in fact developed from autocratic or semi-representative regimes. Historians have demonstrated the importance of early modern state formation and stressed the role of political interaction in this process (Tilly 1992, Spruyt 1994, Gustafsson 2010). According to the most-favoured interpretation, rulers of western states had to bargain with their wealthier subjects in order to obtain the resources needed for supplying armies and waging war on a grand scale. This means that representative institutions (for bargaining) and administrative structures (for extracting and allocating resources) were formed in the same process: but which came first? In this project, we will address these dynamics by studying the impact of different spheres of government on political regime shifts: Who initiated changes in government: bureaucratic officials or political agents – or was it rather people from both spheres working in conjunction?

Sweden provides an interesting case for two reasons: *First*, modern Sweden is often referred to as a model democracy with a long parliamentary tradition and a high degree of popular trust in the state bureaucracy (Östlund 2007, Teorell & Rothstein 2012). However, it has not been successfully explained whether Sweden managed to build effective administration due to a well-established system of political representation or if it was the other way round. *Second*,

early modern Sweden has appeared as something of an anomaly to historical sociologists discussing the origins of the modern state. In terms of regime type, Swedish politics shifted wildly: from representative regime to royal absolutism and then back again (Tilly 1992, Downing 1992). This project seeks to explain how Sweden managed to develop effective administrative institutions, and eventually a resilient parliamentary regime, in spite of these oscillations.

The project will analyse the relationship between I) the monarch, II) the political sphere, comprising the Riksdag and other representative institutions, and III) the administrative sphere of state bureaucracy. All these groups had an interest in maintaining stable government institutions: monarchs wanted an effective tool for their policies; the Riksdag wanted tax revenues to be used appropriately and bureaucrats acted to safeguard their autonomy. We seek to determine what agents played the decisive role in major shifts of power: the rulers, the officeholders or the representatives of the realm—or the interaction between them. Our research hypothesis is that constitutional changes involving agents operating in both spheres of government produced a strong administrative legacy, which served to minimize the disruptive elements of autocratic government.

The following research questions will be posed:

1. How did agents within different government spheres act to reform legislation and/or political institutions?

2. To what extent were the agents able to win support for their own agenda?

3. What was the relationship between the political and the administrative spheres when it came to promoting institutional change and effective government?

Survey of the field

Previous research has argued that the different elements of the state-building process were inextricably linked: democracy, a well-functioning public sector and an industrialized economy have been viewed as different aspects of the same development (Gilman 2003; Fukuyama, 2014). However, this approach is now strongly questioned, one reason being that countries with authoritarian regimes, such as China, are considered to have both a more efficient government and a stronger economic growth than more democratic countries such as India (Fukuyama 2014). Seeking a clear image of the relationship between the type of regime and the process of state-building, political scientists, sociologists and historians have been studying the past to reveal under what circumstances state-building and democratization occurred (Moore 1966; Gustafsson 1994; Hallenberg, et al. 2008; Scherp 2013). In international research, this has produced two opposing views on the relationship.

On the one hand, effective government has often emerged under authoritarian rule. If parliamentary rule precedes the development of administrative structures, this often leads to the elected politicians using the administration to reward less deserving political allies, which impairs the quality of administration (Shefter 1994; Fukuyama 2011 & 2014). On the other hand, effective governments may instead be associated with democratic or proto-democratic rule. This is because the elected representatives have good reason to control the administration and minimize corruption, namely that voters want their tax money to be used efficiently (Brewer 1989; Ertman 1997; Sung 2004;). According to this view, the democratic

process therefore enhances the quality of political governance. The voters can discard bad governments, which is clearly not the case during autocratic rule.

Since Sweden in the early modern period alternated between more or less autocratic rule and regimes with a comparatively high degree of popular influence through elected assemblies, it is a suitable case to study in order to discern which kind of regime that most energetically endeavored to reform the state apparatus (Florén 1987; Nilsson 2017). In the end, Sweden obtained a system that ranks high in terms of both democracy and quality of the public sector, making the reasons for this development well suited for historical analysis.

The question is whether it is possible to trace the roots of this development to early modern times, and whether it was the periods of strong representation or the periods of autocratic rule that gave the most important contributions. It is also possible that the differences were relatively minor, once the rudiments of the system were established—which of course begs the question when, why and how this happened.

Some scholars have described early modern Sweden (especially c. 1560–1720) as a topdown military state (Lindegren 1985; Nilsson 1990), while others have emphasized the wide scope for political interaction and bargaining (Österberg 1991; Gustafsson 2000). Compared to similar European assemblies the Riksdag proved to be surprisingly influential for protracted periods of time, and the state administration has been considered particularly effective. This was possible through the efforts of reforming monarchs and non-royal members of the nobility, but also because the political system admitted large groups of subjects an influential role through participation in the Riksdag (e.g. Glete 2002, Almbjär 2016).

Arguably, historical case-studies such as that of early modern Sweden is indicative of how countries may act when they want to reform their states. Though, there is broad consensus that democratic institutions are good in and of themselves, countries with semidemocratic regimes often exhibit greater volatility and higher levels of corruption than both authoritarian regimes and liberal democracies (Gleditsch, Hegre & Strand 2009; Marshall & Cole 2009; Pinker 2011). Hence, a possible lesson from history might be that an effective strategy for reforming states should be to first build state organization, and then introduce democratic reforms.

An illustrative example is the parliamentary system in Sweden during the Age of Liberty (*Frihetstiden*) 1721–1772. On the one hand, the system was able to build on the organizational legacy of bureaucratic rule as experienced during Carolinian absolutism (1680–1718). On the other hand, it is possible that it was the broad representation in the Riksdag that promoted the state-building process. While many similar political assemblies in Europe were populated by elites that, in one way or another, could enrich themselves at the expense of others, there was in the Swedish Riksdag a fourth estate, the peasantry, which primarily consisted of taxpayers whose main interest was to keep taxes low and fight corruption. The peasantry could also gain allies from other estates who found themselves in a similar situation, struggling against dysfunctional aspects of state bureaucracy. By increasing our knowledge of the Swedish early modern state-building process, this project can thus contribute to the understanding of what was, and is, essential for the emergence of a well-functioning state administration.

Project description

The project covers a long period of time during which the state organization and the political system were challenged on several occasions. We assume that different agents tried to use these critical junctions to influence the development in the desired direction. Therefore, we want to analyse the relationship between regime type and administrative reform during the given time periods: How did different agents try to reform legislation, such as decrees, ordinances, rules and instructions, and to what extent were the agents able to win support for their own agenda?

It has been argued that the sequencing of regimes is important in order to obtain a well-governed state. For instance, it has been claimed by some scholars that it is more advantageous to have a functioning bureaucracy in place before democratic reforms are implemented (Teorell & Rothstein 2012; Fukuyama 2014). Others, on the contrary, have claimed that strong bureaucracies were the foundation of dictatorship rather than good governance, and that constitutional governments actually were able to raise more extensive resources due to their greater legitimacy (Moore 1966; Downing 1992; Glete 2002). In the early modern period, government reform could be initiated either by the monarch, by political representatives or by administrative experts.

We will work with the following research hypotheses:

1. The state apparatus could be extensively reformed by initiatives from both spheres of government, but reform projects stemming from the bureaucracy most often resulted in periods of autocratic or semi-autocratic rule.

2. Reform projects stemming from the political sphere often had more volatile effects on government, and were fully dependent on the support of the monarch and/or the residing government.

3. Government reform showed a higher degree of continuity when pursued by political representatives and administrative agents in conjunction, thus providing a stable foundation for an efficient rule of law.

The project consists of selected case studies, focusing on formative moments when the Swedish state experienced thorough administrative reform and/or shifts in regime type. The inspiration comes from historical institutionalism (Steinmo, et al. 1992; Peters 2005). Institutional development is characterized by long periods of constancy, characterised by "path-dependency" (David 2007). However, periods of stability may be succeeded by periods of substantial institutional change, so-called "critical junctions" (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007). At these critical junctions, path-dependence is broken, as different agents intensify their efforts to influence the political system and the organization of state power (North 1990).

The empirical research is organized into three subprojects. Each consists of two case studies, comprising critical junctions when the state organization was challenged and changed. These periods have all been singled out by scholars as witnessing comprehensive administrative reform and/or decisive shifts in regime type (Lagerroth 1915, Lindegren 1985, Karlsson 1994, Sundin 2009).

Subproject 1 (Researcher Mats Hallenberg)

Political and administrative reform during King Gustav I and Gustav II Adolf: This subproject will analyse and explain the organizational reforms implemented in two early stages of the Swedish state-building process. The case studies are:

1) The introduction of the parliament as a central political arena as well as the creation of a nationwide local administration during the reign of Gustav I (c. 1527–1544).

2) Parliamentary development and the introduction of new central government bodies and regional administrative boards under Gustav II Adolf (c. 1620–1635). Special attention will be paid to the relationship between the central government (monarchy, the state council), and local elites and institutions.

Political scientists have often focused exclusively on national parliaments, equating constitutional government with the institution of the Riksdag. In early modern Sweden however, the local representative arenas of *the ting* (eng. district courts) were just as important. They were the places where royal officeholders bargained with peasants or townspeople over taxes and other contributions. Hence, the case studies will focus on the relation between administrative and representative bodies at central, regional and local levels.

Subproject 2 (Researcher Joakim Scherp)

Political and administrative reform from Carolinian absolutism to the Age of Liberty: This subproject will analyse and explain organizational reforms when Sweden went from almost totalitarian absolutism to radical parliamentarism. The case studies are:

1) The intensified and radicalized absolutism during the latter part of the rule of Karl XII (c. 1713–1718). The introduction of Carolinian absolutism in the 1680s concentrated political and administrative power in the hands of the king, and the Riksdag lost influence, since the assembly was reduced to rubber-stamping the king's wishes. After the crushing defeats in the Great Northern War, the government was changed dramatically, and traditional means of revenue as well as well-established institutions were discarded without hesitation by the king and his advisors, notably baron Görtz.

2) The transition from royal absolutism to the Age of Liberty, when a new parliamentary regime was introduced and developed (c. 1719–1723). During this period, the radical absolutism of Karl XII was replaced by a radical parliamentary rule in which the Riksdag became the most powerful institution, and the king was relegated to a symbolic figurehead. Much of the administrative reforms during the 40 years of royal absolutism were naturally questioned, and new reforms were implemented. Many historians have even argued that it was the bureaucrats themselves that organized this political revolution, in order to protect their agencies from royal intrusion. The case studies will, therefore, focus on the many changes in the instructions governing the agencies during this short period, as well as on the debates about the bureaucracy in the Riksdag.

Subproject 3 (Researcher Magnus Linnarsson)

Political and administrative reform from the Age of Liberty to the 1800s: This subproject will analyze and explain organizational reforms in conjunction with two regime changes. Both events have been considered crucial in Swedish political history. The case studies are:

1) The change of power in the parliament in 1765 and the subsequent political conflicts leading up to King Gustav III's coup d'état (c. 1765–1772). This critical junction involved a purging of the bureaucrats when the balance of power changed in the Riksdag in 1765. The bureaucracy, whose members were largely appointed by the previous ruling party, revolted against the new regime and refused to carry out the orders given to them. The reforms of the state apparatus, however, could not hide the flaws of the corrupt system and it all culminated in 1772 in Gustav III's coup and a new form of government, proclaiming a system with strong royal power.

2) The coup of 1809 when King Gustav IV Adolf was overthrown and a new form of government introduced (c. 1809–1810). This critical junction brought major changes in the bureaucracy and the central place of the Riksdag in Swedish political life has been secure ever since. The Council of State (*Statsrådet*), semi-political, semi-bureaucratic in its character, replaced the Council of the Realm (*Riksrådet*), the latter dating from the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the king kept control over the bureaucracy, and its officials could not be discharged except after being tried and found guilty by a court of law. Thus, the case studies will focus on the relationship between political regime shift and administrative reform.

The debates about the changes in conjunction to the abovementioned critical junctions will be studied through the minutes from the Riksdag, the Council and the administrative boards (Riksdagstrycket; Kanslikollegiums arkiv, Rådsprotokollen, Swedish National Archives, RA). The results of these negotiations, in turn, will be analyzed through the legislation: decrees, ordinances, rules and instructions for the central state administration (Årstrycket; Riksregistraturet; Styffe 1852 & 1856), as well as in submissions and reports on how this legislation should be designed and implemented (Kollegiers skrivelser till Kungl. Maj:t, Kanslitjänstemännens koncept och mottagna skrivelser, Memorial till riksdagståndens, skrivelser i Ständernas plena och kanslier, and Riksdagsacta, RA). Furthermore, we will use grievances to the Riksdag and the resolutions given upon them, as well as petitions and correspondence to the local governors (Allmogens besvär, Klagomålsregister, Kammarkollegiets arkiv, RA).

From our own research, we are well acquainted with these kinds of sources (e.g., Hallenberg & Holm 2016; Linnarsson 2010 & 2017; Scherp 2013). Our source material mainly originates from the political and administrative spheres, i.e., the king, the representatives and the officeholders. We consider this an advantage, since the objective of the project is to study key-agents in these two spheres. Protests against contemporary politics are less present in the sources, but still a part of the analysis, as we use grievances and petitions, as well. Altogether, this source material is the most appropriate for a study of political conflict and the changing facets of debates about the administrative system, enabling comparisons over time and providing a framework for the analysis of government institutions.

In connection with the selected critical junctions, there have been discussions about institutional changes and these sources include deliberations about how the administration should be organized. By using an extended time perspective, we propose an inclusive approach to the entire period 1520–1810. The project will study "reforms and regimes" on two levels: first, the political discussion in the political arena, and second, the practical outcome by examining and analysing reforms in the state administration. An older tradition of research focused on description of the state apparatus (Hildebrand & Edén 1931–1938; Wieselgren 1935). A recent line of research has taken a more problematizing approach (Frohnert 1985; Lennersand 1999; Asker 2004). Furthermore, the role of government officials within the state has been investigated in different contexts (Hallenberg 2001; Harnesk &

Sjöberg 2001; Cavallin 2003). Consequently, there is a solid base of research to draw from. However, most of the previous research has been largely unconcerned with institutional change over longer periods of time. Our project will therefore contribute to a fuller understanding of the interaction between political control and bureaucratic independence.

Our method aims for a close analysis of the decision-making process to determine how different groups of agents tried to push for institutional change. Each case study will be processed as follows:

1. We will start by describing the major institutional changes in the political and the administrative system during the period.

2. In the next step we will study political debates as well as administrative negotiations in order to identify the key actors involved in the process.

3. Lastly, we will analyse the role of the political and the administrative spheres in promoting institutional change: the government agencies which opted to transform the system, as well as the bodies who promoted stability. The importance of agents who were able to operate in both spheres will also be discussed.

In studying political discourse, we will look for arguments advocating change and for recommendations for maintaining the existing system. We will pay special attention to references to the political community of the realm, ideas of good governance and the rule of law. By studying political agency from an institutional perspective, we will be able to pin-point both the agents promoting radical change and the stabilising forces within the system.

Significance

The project holds international relevance for the current discussion on state building and democracy, as it targets the relation between administrative institutions and political representation. Our research will also contribute to the understanding of agency and regime shifts, discussing how authoritarian rule may be transformed into representative government. This relates to the contemporary issue of how nondemocratic countries might build functioning state administrations. We need to understand the historical development of a country like Sweden, now considered to have a non-corrupt and effective government (Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2014) as well as being one of the world's most democratic countries (Democracy Index 2010). Current debates also include whether public services work best when under the control of policy makers, using rules and regulations, or whether it is better to let government employees organize the administration themselves, according to their professional skills.

Much of the previous research has studied the Riksdag itself, and the administration on its own. Few studies have attempted to link these two fields together, to obtain answers to questions about how the state changed and how it operated during the early modern period, as well as how the proto-democratic system functioned. This project, therefore, consists of a necessary combination of two different lines of research. Additionally, the need for a long-term perspective on administration and policy changes has been emphasized (e.g. Premfors 1999). Among political scientists, the period from 1800 and onwards is usually singled out as particularly significant (Rothstein 2011). However, there is reason to start the investigation further back in time, as the bulk of existing research has a bias to modern times (e.g. Nilsson 2000; Wittrock 2004; Sundell 2013)

Compared to previous research, we will not use the early modern period merely as a negative contrast to today's democratic society, but as an important background period in which essential parts of today's political institutions were formed. It is a well-established fact that political institutions develop over time, and that many of us take them for granted even though we might not know where they came from in the first place (Fukuyama 2011). Even so, historians often study shorter time periods, and thus risk missing the long evolutionary development (Elgán 2010; Guldi & Armitage 2014). In our case, this concerns political institutions that worked for an extended time and therefore affected political decisions pertinent to the organization of government and administration.

Preliminary results

All three researchers have previously studied political institutions and the state administration in Sweden 1500-1800. Mats Hallenberg has recently published a book on the impact of bargaining on the state formation in Sweden in the Early modern period (Hallenberg & Holm 2016), while Magnus Linnarsson will publish a monography on the political debates in the riksdag concerning the organization of public services in Sweden c. 1620-1990 (Linnarsson 2017).

An example from Linnarssons ongoing research may further demonstrate the potential of the proposed project. In 1723, the Riksdag debated a proposal to farm out the custom duties, due to the lack of funds in the state treasury and to the widespread abuse in the customs administration. The proposal, however, was met with hesitation amongst the members of the Riksdag. A deputation was elected to present arguments pro and contra, and the Riksdag eventually decided that the customs should stay under state administration.

Despite the decision in the Riksdag, the state customs were indeed farmed out in 1726 to a merchant consortium (Sw. *generaltullarrendesocieteten*). The driving force behind the decision was the State Administration—in effect, the Riksdag was run over by the bureaucracy. When the Riksdag was assembled in 1726 they faced a fait accompli, and eventually had to accept the changes made to the organization of the custom duties. This example highlights how administrative reform and representative institutions interacted, and counteracted, to initiate political change.

The results of the project will be published in one joint monograph, co-authored by the project participants, published in English at an international publishing house. The research project has obvious international relevance, and the results will hopefully appeal to international scholars of history and political science. The decision to write a joint monograph is determined by the design of the project. The three subprojects are linked to each other, and to fully interpret and understand the development, the analysis has to be presented together. Apart from the joint monograph, the results from the project will be presented in two or three articles in scientific journals. The preliminary planning also includes the organizing of a workshop, together with invited experts on the field of research.

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