

SHIFTING REGIMES

Shifting regimes

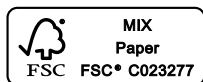
Political disruption and change
in early modern Sweden

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&
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Abstract

This book deals with six critical junctures in early modern Sweden between 1500 and 1810, intense periods of change when the prevailing system of government was challenged and replaced by something different – a new political regime. Drawing on both history and the social sciences, this book presents a new interpretation of Sweden's early modern political history. First, each critical juncture's course of events is analysed, and key political actors' incentives and motives are identified. The impact and effects of each regime shift are explained using three analytical key concepts: state capacity, impartiality, and political participation. Second, the various regime shifts are compared and the long-term effects of the early modern changes on state formation and democratization are discussed. How and in what ways did the turbulent changes in government affect Sweden's subsequent development into a modern, democratic state?

Sweden's conflict-ridden history is highly relevant for understanding the process of state formation in early modern Europe. In comparative studies, sixteenth-century Sweden is sometimes highlighted as a pioneer: a dynastic state that organized an efficient fiscal bureaucracy to finance military expansion. In other contexts, Sweden's representative institutions of the eighteenth century have been an example of participatory or even proto-democratic forms of government. However, the two periods have rarely been compared to explain similarities and differences, or why the first period transformed into the second. This book takes a holistic approach to the period 1538–1810, explaining how and why the shifting regimes influenced political and social development.

The analysis shows the uneven character of the ongoing struggle between Sweden's power elites and social groups demanding political inclusion. The ideal balance between a strong state and an organized society proved hard, if not impossible, to realize in the early modern period. Democratization in Sweden continued to be an uneven process well into the twentieth century.

Sweden's rulers

1523–1560	Gustav I Vasa
1560–1568	Erik XIV
1568–1592	Johan III
1592–1599	Sigismund
1599–1604	Duke Karl (IX) as regent
1604–1611	Karl IX
1611–1632	Gustav II Adolf
1632–1644	Regency for Kristina
1632–1654	Kristina
1654–1660	Karl X Gustav
1660–1672	Regency for Karl XI
1660–1697	Karl XI
1697	Regency for Karl XII
1697–1718	Karl XII
1719–1720	Ulrika Eleonora
1720–1751	Fredrik I
1751–1771	Adolf Fredrik
1771–1792	Gustav III
1792–1796	Regency for Gustav IV Adolf
1792–1809	Gustav IV Adolf
1809	Duke Karl (XIII) as regent
1809–1818	Karl XIII
1818–1844	Karl XIV Johan

Timeline

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| 1520 | Stockholm's 'Bloodbath' 8–9 November. |
| 1523 | Gustav Vasa elected king of Sweden at Strängnäs. |
| 1527 | Riksdag of Västerås, Gustav Vasa takes control over the landed wealth of the Swedish Church. |
| 1534–1536 | The Count's War with Denmark and Lübeck. |
| 1541 | Publication of the first complete Swedish translation of the Bible, the Gustav Vasa Bible. |
| 1542–1543 | The Dacke War, a peasant revolt in Småland. |
| 1544 | The Riksdag of Västerås proclaims Sweden a hereditary monarchy and establishes a Protestant Church of Sweden. |
| 1561 | Estonia accepts Swedish sovereignty, the beginning of Swedish military expansion across the Baltic. |
| 1563–1570 | Seven Years War between Sweden and Denmark. |
| 1592 | Poland and Sweden form a personal union after Sigismund Vasa was crowned king of Sweden. |
| 1593 | The Swedish Church adopts the (Lutheran) Confession of Augsburg. |
| 1598 | Conflict between duke Karl and Sigismund, king of Sweden and Poland, leads to the outbreak of the War of Sigismund. |
| 1599 | The War of Sigismund ends, King Sigismund deposed. |
| 1604 | Duke Karl assumes the name Karl IX, having been confirmed as hereditary king by the riksdag in Norrköping the previous year. |

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| 1611 | Denmark attacks Sweden, starting the Kalmar War. Death of Karl IX. |
| 1613 | Treaty of Knäred between Sweden and Denmark. The fortress of Älvsborg is returned to Sweden for a ransom of 1 million riksdaler silvermynt. |
| 1617 | Treaty of Stolbovo ends the Ingrian War: Russia cedes provinces to Sweden. |
| 1621 | Gustav II Adolf orders the farming out of all Crown rents. |
| 1622 | The controversial 'small customs' tax is approved by the Riksdag. |
| 1630 | Sweden enters the Thirty Years War (1618–1648). |
| 1632 | The Battle of Lützen, King Gustav II Adolf killed. |
| 1634 | The Riksdag approves the new Instrument of Government, drafted by Axel Oxenstierna. |
| 1636 | Foundation of the Swedish Post Office. |
| 1638 | The colony of New Sweden founded on the Delaware River in North America. |
| 1648 | The Thirty Years War ends with Sweden among the victors. |
| 1654 | Queen Kristina renounces the throne to adopt Roman Catholicism. She is succeeded by her cousin Karl X Gustav. |
| 1658 | The Peace of Roskilde ends the war with Denmark, who concedes its Eastern provinces to Sweden. |
| 1668 | The Swedish central bank, Sveriges Riksbank, is founded. |
| 1675 | Start of the Skåne War with Denmark. |

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| 1680 | Karl XI establishes absolute monarchy. The Council of the Realm officially shorn of most of its powers and renamed the Royal Council. |
| 1682 | The king takes control over legalisation, the riksdag loses its powers. A new system of military conscription is introduced. |
| 1697 | Tre Kronor Castle in Stockholm burns down, destroying much of Sweden's national library and royal archives. |
| 1700 | Start of the Great Northern War. |
| 1709 | The Battle of Poltava, the destruction of Karl XII's invading Swedish army by Peter the Great's Russian forces. |
| 1715 | Baron Georg Heinrich von Görtz becomes Karl XII's chief advisor and introduces radical reforms. |
| 1718 | Karl XII killed at Fredrikshald in Norway. |
| 1719 | The accession of Queen Ulrika Eleonora to the throne confirms the end of absolutism. New Instrument of Government laying the foundations for the Age of Liberty. |
| 1720 | The Instrument of Government of 1720 is adopted by the Riksdag, further weakening royal power. |
| 1721 | Treaty of Nystad ends the Great Northern War, Sweden concedes several provinces to Russia. |
| 1723 | The Riksdag Act or <i>Riksdagsordningen</i> . |
| 1731 | Foundation of the Swedish East India Company. |
| 1734 | The Civil Code of 1734 establishes a uniform legal code for towns and rural districts. |

1756	An attempted <i>coup d'état</i> by Queen Lovisa Ulrika and a few loyal nobles to restore absolute monarchy is crushed.
1757–1562	Sweden enters the Seven Years War.
1766	The Freedom of the Press Act is passed.
1772	Gustaf III's coup on 19 August ends the Age of Liberty.
1789	Gustav III amends the constitution with the 'Act of Union and Security', making him a de facto autocratic ruler.
1792	Gustaf III shot at masked ball at the Royal Opera.
1808	Outbreak of the Finnish War.
1809	13 March, King Gustav IV Adolf arrested by military officers at the royal palace in Stockholm.
1809	6 June, the Riksdag approves a new Instrument of Government.
1809	17 September, end of the Finnish War: Sweden cedes Finland to Russia.
1814	Treaty of Paris, Denmark cedes Norway to Sweden.
1867	The Riksdag of the Four Estates is abolished, replaced by a bicameral Parliament.
1918	Decision by the Riksdag to introduce universal and equal suffrage.

Preface

This is a book about the turbulent history of early modern Sweden. Over almost three hundred years, Sweden experienced a series of political upheavals, in which one type of political regime was replaced by a radically different one: the personal rule of the monarch was supplemented by aristocratic dominance, and the ensuing royal autocracy eventually gave way to a parliamentary system of government. The sequence of radical shifts is strangely at odds with the popular notion that Sweden was a solid fiscal-military state with rudimentary representative functions, which slowly evolved into a modern democracy after the last autocratic monarch was deposed in 1809. Puzzled by this, we set out to explore the forces that drove this development and the long-term effects of the recurrent ruptures on state capacity and political participation.

We began in 2018, but our plan for intensive archival studies was soon interrupted by the reality of the pandemic. We are grateful for the help that got us back on track and the opportunity to discuss our work at the political science departments at Lund and Gothenburg universities; at the ECPR Joint Session of Workshops in Mons, Belgium in 2019 and the APSA annual meeting in Washington in 2019, thanks to Jan Teorell; at a conference on dynasty and state formation, arranged by Liesbeth Geevers and Harald Gustafsson in Lund in 2019; at the Congress of Nordic Historians in Gothenburg in 2022; and two conferences in Budapest in 2019 and 2021 on parliamentarianism in northern and east-central Europe in the long eighteenth century. We have received valuable feedback from Karin Sennefelt and Jonas

Nordin, as well as our colleagues at the Early Modern History Seminar in Stockholm.

When things finally began to come together, we were fortunate to receive critical and perceptive comments on our draft manuscript from Martin Almbjär, Harald Gustafsson, Sari Nauman, and Patrik Winton, and things were further improved with the help of the Kriterium editor Peter Haldén and two anonymous reviewers. Our publisher Annika Olsson carefully guided us through the production process and Charlotte Merton was our language editor.

The research was funded by the Swedish Research Council and carried out at the Department of History, Stockholm University. The book is the result of a collaborative research effort. We are jointly responsible for the book as a whole and have written chapters 1 and 8 together. Mats Hallenberg is responsible for chapters 2 and 3, Joakim Scherp for chapters 4 and 5, and Magnus Linnarsson for chapters 6 and 7. Publication has been funded by the Olle Engkvist Foundation and King Gustaf VI Adolf's Fund for Swedish Culture. We wish to express our gratitude to all of the people mentioned above, and to our families and friends.

Mats, Magnus, and Joakim



From the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, Sweden had a succession of strong kings, interspersed with periods of aristocratic elite rule and even early forms of representative government. Contrary to the established narrative of peaceful political change, early modern Sweden appears to have been highly unstable. These shifting regimes are the subject of this book. Credit: Olle Belfrage.

Disruption and change

An alternative history of early modern Sweden

There are different ways of understanding the history of early modern Sweden, from the Reformation to the Napoleonic wars. Sweden could be seen as a stable monarchy that maintained its national independence throughout the period. There was a degree of institutional stability, with the Riksdag, the Swedish Diet or national parliament, maintaining its position as the national political arena, while the town councils and district courts had influence as local institutions of self-government.¹ But Sweden's political history has been marked by recurring conflicts and radical changes in government. From the early sixteenth century Sweden was ruled by a succession of strong Vasa monarchs, but in the following century the aristocratic elite took control over government during the long royal minorities. From 1680, Karl XI established what was effectively autocratic rule, but it was replaced in 1719–1723 by a representative regime with executive powers concentrated in the Riksdag. As political regimes went, early modern Sweden appeared unstable.

In this book, we focus on political conflict and the shifts between different forms of political regime. Who changed the political system, what was the immediate impact, and what were the long-term effects of each regime shift? We test the significance of early modern political upheaval on the long-term historical processes of state formation and democratization. The book is about Sweden, but the Swedish example has relevance for the general history of Europe. Some scholars have

labelled Sweden a model fiscal–military state, a major European power despite its limited resources.² Others have pointed to the ascendancy of representative government, hailing the Swedish Riksdag as a success story like the Dutch Estates or the Parliament of England and later Great Britain.³ There are even some Swedish scholars who claim that early modern Sweden was a unique proto-democracy and paved the way for modern democracy.⁴

Ours is a study of six regime shifts in early modern Sweden, from 1538 to 1810. Each regime shift is analysed as a moment of rapid change, a critical juncture when political relations were reshaped and new forms of government introduced. We are interested in the mechanisms that promoted political change, but also in the long-term effects of each regime shift on state capacity, government impartiality, and political participation. We have set out to determine whether, and if so how, the recurrent shifts contributed to Sweden's state formation and democratization – or whether they were reactionary movements that blocked or even reversed the same processes.

Behind this is historical institutionalism, in which path dependency is a central theme.⁵ In our study, however, we dwell on the element of institutional flux. The critical junctures studied here represent starting points for new forms of political rule, rather than reconfigurations of established regimes.⁶ We argue that the emphasis on path dependence and long-term processes in state formation studies must be supplemented by an approach that addresses the possibilities of radical change. While acknowledging the importance of institutional resilience and inertia, we argue that the recurrent oscillations between royal autocracy, aristocratic rule, and representative government had different but enduring effects on long-term political development. The interaction of continuity and change is a main theme of the book.

Scholars have identified two conflicting traits in the political history of early modern Europe: the development of constitutional regimes in Britain and the Netherlands, and the ascendancy of absolute monarchy in countries such as France and Prussia. Much energy has been devoted to analysing the forces behind this divergence. Barrington Moore picks class structure as the defining force

for democratic development, Charles Tilly has argued that bargaining with different elite groups shaped the character of the state, while Brian Downing has pointed to the mobilization of domestic resources as the precondition for constitutional rule.⁷ The political history of Europe has been packaged into two general narratives, with different outcomes. Both narratives emphasize distinct path dependencies as each step in the historical process determines the next, and there is little room for setbacks or hybridization.⁸

Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson have proposed that the long-term development of European politics should be analysed as a conflict between two principles: on the one hand the demand for a strong centralized state to control violence and provide public services, and on the other the aspirations of society at large to restrict the arbitrary power of rulers. Acemoglu and Robinson claim that European history holds a specific legacy, developing from the interplay of the centralized institutions of Roman government and the popular assemblies of the Germanic tribes. They consider political liberty, or democratization, to be the outcome of a long-term struggle that pitted the political actors who promoted a strong state against those striving to check arbitrary power and promote the concerns of a strong society.⁹

Acemoglu and Robinson note it was an uneven process. The trajectory of democratic institutions is described as a narrow corridor, representing the limited scope for politicians to manoeuvre between a centralized state and an assertive, mobilized society. States that manage to 'stay in the corridor' for a long period eventually implement resilient institutions to protect political liberty.¹⁰ For our purposes, the history of early modern Sweden provides an excellent case to test this theory. Was Sweden a case of successfully balancing the two principles of rule, or was it rather a series of setbacks, pushing the political system in and out of the narrow corridor of reform? We argue that an assessment of this balance, at any given point in history, provides an opportunity to analyse and measure the character of political change. In other words, we introduce conflict as a factor in Acemoglu and Robinson's theory by analysing the dynamics and impact of early modern regime shifts on the general political development of Sweden.

The dynamics of shifting regimes

The main argument of this book is that the recurrent shifts in political regime in early modern Sweden had profound but varying effects on the long-term development of state capacity, impartiality, and political participation. These three key concepts point to the impact and influence of each regime shift on the processes of state formation and early democratization. They are also important for comparing our case studies, and for determining the overall significance of the changes in political regime on the political development of Sweden. The political ruptures may have strengthened state capacity as well as impartiality and participation, but they may also have hindered or blocked any attempts at reform. We use these ideas as analytical categories to explore whether early modern Sweden ever achieved the stable institutional balance between state and society that promoted the further development of the modern state. By focusing on six regime shifts, we propose a more accurate narrative of Sweden's turbulent trajectory from medieval polity to modern state.

The impact of each regime shift varied according to the configurations of power between the ruling executive, power elites, and other collective or individual political actors. The strategic choices made by political actors helped to set in motion the processes of path dependency that, as Capoccia and Kelemen put it, constrained future choices.¹¹ Each critical juncture represented an opportunity for political actors to influence the outcome and change the institutional setting. However, a potentially radical shift might be abandoned or reversed, with no lasting effects on political development. History is not a linear progression, and each political confrontation opened new possibilities for different outcomes. Thus, a critical juncture involves increased contingency, but it does not equate to change.¹² This book, however, is about where each critical juncture resulted in a change of political regime – we explore the relationship between radical change and long-term historical development.

We contend our analysis of Swedish developments will contribute to a better understanding of the general dynamics of political change

in early modern Europe. While Sweden is often presented as a case study in the literature on state formation, it is usually as an example of the fiscal–military state of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The reality was far more complex. We argue that Swedish developments were neither linear nor predetermined. With its sequence of shifting regimes, Sweden serves as an important point of comparison for understanding political development in Europe. Most European states were neither stable constitutional polities, nor rigid absolutist regimes. England experienced periods of strong monarchs with absolutist claims, while the Estates and coalitions of elite groups often challenged the prerogatives of the French kings. Changing forms of rule were the norm rather than the exception. Recognizing the prevalence and impact of early modern regime shifts will help us present a more accurate picture of the developments that eventually led to the creation of modern, democratic states in Western Europe.

Research debates

In making our case we draw on several research fields, including historical institutionalism, economic history, theories of state formation, and democratization. There are overlaps between the various approaches, because the growth of democratic societies is closely related to the development of the modern state and the emergence of the modern market economy.¹³ For our particular purpose, we draw on two main strands of research. The first is the scholarship that has discussed the relationship between state formation, effective government, and political participation. The second is the standard histories of early modern Sweden. We are interested in scholars who have looked at the entire period in order to characterize the Swedish state and society.

State formation and political participation

Previous research on state formation and political participation has established the early modern era as a period of unfulfilled promise – a process of successive strengthening of state structures that never

transformed into a fully fledged democratic system. We would nuance this in two ways.

First, Europe's political development has been described as two distinct but separate trajectories: one leading to absolute monarchy, the other promoting constitutional government.¹⁴ We argue this is a misrepresentation of the dynamics of political change. Politics in early modern Europe witnessed repeated shifts in forms of government, and an analysis of political development must consider this. While acknowledging the impact of path dependency and structural inertia, we aim for a fuller picture by highlighting discontinuity and radical change.

Second, scholars discussing political change usually describe the causal relationship between state capacity and political participation as a one-way affair. Some argue that effective government is a necessary condition for democratic reform, while others claim that effective government cannot be achieved without popular mobilization through representative institutions. We agree with the latter interpretation, but would counter that it is necessary to explore the dynamics of the relationship and the long-term effects. The chains of causation could lead to unexpected results: participatory politics may sometimes promote autocratic forms of government, while top-down administrative reform may eventually open the way for stronger representative institutions.

Francis Fukuyama, in analysing the complex relationship between democratic reform and effective government from ancient times to the present, concludes that states which experiment with political participation without strong administrative structures to rely on often fail to establish a system of good governance. In Fukuyama's grand narrative of political orders, state capacity comes first: rulers who have organized a functioning bureaucracy are more effective in implementing democratic forms of rule than those who have not.¹⁵ This makes early modern Europe an excellent point of study – a period when permanent government bodies gradually replaced the ad hoc forms of rule that had dominated medieval polities. But centralized bargaining in national parliaments and local negotiations played an

important part in European state formation. Our study of regime shifts is an opportunity to critically assess the validity of Fukuyama's analysis for the relation between state capacity and political representation in early modern Sweden.

Peter Haldén claims the series of political orders in medieval and early modern Europe – chiefdoms, feudal lordships, city republics, and princely states – were all underpinned by dynastic kinship. Kinship was important in the Middle East and other parts of the world too, but in Europe aristocratic kinship groups were gradually integrated into the political system through representative institutions and official privileges. While Haldén argues the political order provided social stability to the emerging European state-system, he concedes that kinship was incompatible with democracy. It was not until the extensive noble privileges were abolished in the nineteenth century that the political order of the old regime could be reformed.¹⁶ Haldén thus qualifies Fukuyama's argument that state capacity came first. Inclusive institutions were intrinsic parts of early modern politics in Europe and elsewhere, but participation was mainly the privilege of the aristocratic elite.

Although Haldén stresses the existence of multiple political orders, his interpretation draws on Charles Tilly's influential work on European state formation. Tilly has his own explanation for how and why the many political entities in medieval Europe were eventually transformed into a system of consolidated nation states: war and competition between states forced rulers to establish permanent institutions for mobilizing resources from their subjects. The process accelerated in the early modern period, when sovereigns had to come up with new ways of mustering even larger armies and navies. To do it, they had to bargain with elite groups over resources held as landed wealth or merchant capital. The bargaining process was asymmetrical, as the rulers had greater means of violence and coercion. However, elite groups could use their intermediate position to further their own interests. Over time, the process favoured institutionalized arenas for bargaining such as parliaments, councils, and other assemblies.¹⁷

Tilly's argument is important to this book. If bargaining was a necessary part of state formation, then political participation becomes an instrument for strengthening state capacity, rather than the other way around. Representative institutions were important in many early modern polities and could turn into a locus for popular politics. The English Parliament and the General Estates of the Netherlands are prime examples, but the Swedish Riksdag also held a central position in national politics throughout the period. Tilly's bargaining thus provides an alternative narrative to Fukuyama's administrative reform as a precondition for democratization. This begs the question of the Riksdag's role in the Swedish regime shifts, and how the turbulent changes affected the practices of political representation.

Jørgen Møller argues that representative institutions were initially a response to demands from autonomous social groups.¹⁸ Political assemblies of the social elites were organized to institutionalize the bargaining process. Such representative institutions could impose constitutional constraints on the executive, reducing the risk of arbitrary rule.¹⁹ Møller, like Haldén, holds that the successive embedding of social elites mattered for the resilience of political regimes. He also agrees with Tilly and others by concluding that representative institutions helped to strengthen the financial capacity of states by reducing corruption and providing legitimacy for the extraction of resources.²⁰ Political representation could advance state capacity too, and not just social inclusion and a strong society.

The bargaining between rulers, social elites, and other groups in society was not restricted to the central arenas of power. In early modern Europe, politics was that much a local affair while control over land and people were the prime sources of revenue. Thomas Ertman has stressed the traditions of 'participatory' local government in northern Europe, going back to the popular assemblies of the Germanic tribes. Direct bargaining in local arenas gave rulers the opportunity to bypass the aristocratic intermediates that dominated provincial politics in many parts of Europe. These practices strengthened the bargaining power of the organized groups who were not part of the landed aristocracy.²¹ There was also a confrontational

side to early modern politics. Popular protest and violent insurrection could force rulers to adjust their policies and moderate their claims on local resources. Rulers all over the continent lived in constant fear of revolt, which prompted them to take heed of popular demands to maintain their legitimacy.²²

State formation in early modern Europe was also about popular participation and even tentative steps towards democratization. Sheri Berman holds that the emerging administrative structures of the early modern period were a precondition for later democratic reform. However, Berman also concedes that the institutions of the old regime never grew potent enough to challenge the dominance of the king and the traditional elites.²³ While acknowledging the need for bargaining, Berman still sees the politics of the *ancien régime* as the prerogative of the social elites. This is in line with Perry Anderson and others, who concentrate on the shared interests of absolute monarchs and aristocratic landowners.²⁴ Berman's position may be taken as support for Fukuyama's claim for state capacity first. The representative forms of government that emerged in early modern Europe strengthened the rule of monarchs and the nobility but provided no effective tools for commoners to influence the course of politics.²⁵

We cannot agree with this interpretation, because political representation was a potent instrument for popular politics and a way for strengthening state capacity. Parliaments and the Estates might play a pivotal role in supporting government reform and effective administration, but their bolstering of the powers of the state could take many forms. It is plausible that extended political participation might lead to a wider recognition of political rights, yet extended political participation may also trigger top-down government reform and ultimately end in absolutism and the suppression of political rights. Political, institutional development depended on political participation, but the outcome of the political conflicts we study was not predetermined. They could result in different types of hybrid regimes.

The works of Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson bring us to the relation between top-down rule and participatory politics.²⁶ Acemoglu and Robinson argue that the historic legacy of Europe,

from ancient to modern times, was a long-term process that enabled states to pursue economic development and democratic liberties. While this process furthered a strong, centralized state, it also imposed institutional constraints on monarchical power, eventually creating what Acemoglu and Robinson call a ‘shackled leviathan’.²⁷ Successful democracy requires a strong state to protect its citizens, put rules into practice, and provide effective public services; however, there is also a need for a strong society that can track the practices of rulers and check all attempts to expand the powers of the state at the expense of the many.²⁸ While Acemoglu and Robinson recognize the importance of critical junctures, they emphasize the long-term trajectory of a positive balance between state and society. We test this approach by focusing on political conflict through the lens of early modern regime shifts. Radical shifts may have been more decisive for long-term political development than the supposed balance that Acemoglu and Robinson describe. One of the contributions of this book will be to assess the intersection of long-term, historical trajectories with radical change.

Acemoglu and Robinson also provide an argument for focusing on early modern Sweden. Sweden has a strong historical legacy of local self-government and a national assembly that had a grip on domestic politics throughout the period.²⁹ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this polity was transformed into a fully developed fiscal–military state, which for a time even threatened to become a European superpower.³⁰ Sweden is a prime example of how the state formation–political participation dichotomy evolved.

Sweden in the early modern period

When early modern Sweden has been considered in international historiography, the focus has often been on the first half of the period.³¹ Comparative works on European history usually focus on Sweden’s rise to a major European power from the mid sixteenth century on. Historians have pointed to military reform, effective resource extraction, and the organizational skills of its warrior kings to explain the formidable capacity of the Swedish state. Institutionalized bargaining

in the Riksdag and the legitimacy it gave to a succession of regents have also been called an important part of its fiscal–military state.³² However, the resilience of representative institutions and the oscillations between absolutist and constitutionalist forms of rule have raised problems for scholars who have tried to fit Sweden’s history into a general European pattern. Barrington Moore, Perry Anderson, Charles Tilly, and Francis Fukuyama have all struggled to categorize Sweden when discussing the trajectories of state formation in early modern Europe.³³

Sweden has been referred to either as an exception to the general rule, or as a precedent for other European states. Charles Tilly has argued that ‘no European state (except, perhaps, Sweden) made a serious attempt to institute direct rule from top to bottom’.³⁴ For Tilly, Sweden stands out as an exceptionally well-organized state, capable of controlling local resources in a way no other European state could achieve. Jan Glete prefers to treat Sweden as an example of the general process of state formation, although effective in terms of waging war. According to Glete, the aggregation of interests between the elite groups of society enabled Swedish monarchs to create a strong government organization.³⁵ Similarly, Thomas Ertman considers Sweden a prime example of how a strong national parliament, supported by the long tradition of participatory local government, could boost the formation of a high-capacity state.³⁶

In this book, we make a point of addressing the entire early modern period, something scholars interested in state formation have seldom tackled when comparing Sweden with general European developments. This is also true of national historiography and political history in Swedish. The period is usually divided into *stormakts-tiden* or the Swedish Empire (1560–1721), *frihetstiden* or the Age of Liberty (1719–1772), and *Gustavianska tiden* or the Gustavian era (1772–1809). This periodization was used by the British historian Michael Roberts in several books about Swedish history in the early modern period.³⁷ In one of his seminal works he discusses Sweden as a pioneer of the military revolution and putative great power in the seventeenth century.³⁸ Roberts has also written extensively

about eighteenth-century Sweden, but there his analytical focus is less military organization than parliamentary politics.³⁹ The gaps in the literature are best addressed by comparing the different types of political regimes over a long period.

Each of the chronological periods is a large field of research, too large to cover here. Unfortunately for historians who wish to study the early modern period as a whole, these fields rarely talk to one another.⁴⁰ One reason for that is the basis of this book: early modern Sweden was characterized by frequent regime shifts, and the political system alternated between different forms of rule: personal monarchy, bureaucratic rule, royal autocracy, and representative government, yet Swedish historiography has focused on processual explanations, underestimating the importance of radical change. It is the aggregated lines of research for the political history of early modern Sweden which are discussed here.

A dominant field in Swedish research has been the relationship between the state and its subjects.⁴¹ Much attention has been paid to the ability of the peasantry to influence politics at the local and national levels. More recently other groups, such as the burghers, have been studied in greater detail.⁴² Scholars focusing on the Swedish Empire stress the capacity of Swedish rulers to extract and set aside resources for military purposes. The term 'military state' – introduced into Swedish research by Sven A. Nilsson and developed by Jan Lindegren – is used for the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, geared towards extracting resources from local communities to finance warfare on foreign soil.⁴³ The military state perspective highlights top-down state formation and relegates the peasants to a subordinate role. While monarchs and the high aristocracy reaped the benefits of conquest, the peasantry had to pay the price in taxes and military conscriptions.

In opposition to the military state focus, and inspired by Peter Blickle, Eva Österberg has argued that the relationship between the state and the peasants in Sweden was one of interaction and negotiation. According to this interaction perspective, there was frequent contact between rulers and ruled, and the political culture was characterized by reciprocity and mutual respect. The local institutions of self-

government gave the peasantry legal channels of protest, when facing the weight of the military state.⁴⁴ The system of peaceful interaction has also been used to explain the lack of major uprisings in Sweden after the 1590s.⁴⁵ Österberg suggests that the tradition of organized bargaining in local arenas was a historical legacy that promoted democratization in Sweden in the modern period.⁴⁶ However, the interaction perspective has also attracted criticism for underestimating the unequal power relations that characterized the interactions between the peasants and the state. Scholars such as Erik Bengtsson and Mats Olsson have argued the opposite, claiming that early modern Sweden was extremely unequal in its economics and politics.⁴⁷

Some historians have called for a combination of the two opposing perspectives, arguing that the military state was just as much a bargaining state, capable of implementing its will by negotiating favourable compromises.⁴⁸ The key to successful resource mobilization was interaction – and to some extent, domination – in the local arenas of self-government. While Swedish rulers often had to bargain with propertied groups, the state could be openly repressive and violent towards people without a political bargaining position, such as crofters, farmhands, and the landless.⁴⁹

In Sweden, the Riksdag was the principal arena for national politics throughout the early modern period, and a great deal of research has been dedicated to the emergence and development of this assembly. The Swedish Riksdag was made up of the Four Estates: the nobility, the clergy, the burghers, and the peasants who were landowners or Crown tenants. In the early modern period, the Riksdag was established as a third branch of government alongside the Council of the Realm and the monarch.⁵⁰ The fact that the peasantry and the parish clergy were represented as separate Estates set the Riksdag apart from other European parliaments. The ability of the three lower Estates – priests, burghers, and peasants – to pursue their own issues and influence government policy has attracted much interest.⁵¹ On several occasions they allied with the king to counter aristocratic power. This three-way conflict was a dominant theme in Swedish politics throughout the early modern period.⁵²

Representative assemblies everywhere were increasingly important in the early modern period because monarchs had to bargain for the resources for large-scale warfare.⁵³ Glete claims that the successful interest aggregation through the Riksdag let Swedish monarchs pursue aggressive wars of conquest for a period of 150 years. The centralized bargaining process enabled the government to secure the access to economic and military resources, without having to bargain with local or provincial assemblies.⁵⁴ This perspective is further supported by Joakim Scherp, who has analysed the role of the lower Estates in the Swedish Riksdag in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Scherp argues that the Estate of the Peasants also served to strengthen the other lower Estates, giving them a stronger voice in political matters.⁵⁵

Researchers of different periods have come to very different conclusions about the Riksdag's effectiveness in representing a range of political interests. The Age of Liberty has been described as a period when political mobilization led to increased participation and citizenship was challenged, negotiated, and extended.⁵⁶ Some have pointed to a shift in political culture at the end of the early modern period that even included elements of early democratization.⁵⁷ Writing about sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Sweden, Roberts drew a bleak picture of political representation, dismissing the meetings of the Estates as a chimera that only approved decisions already made by the king and his noble councillors.⁵⁸ Jan Lindegren, while acknowledging the importance of the Riksdag for approving taxes and other revenue, concludes that in the seventeenth century it mainly functioned as an arena for manipulation by the government.⁵⁹ Martin Almbjör, who has studied the Riksdag in the eighteenth century, argues that the peasantry were treated as a second-class by the other Estates for much of the period. Almbjör also discusses the shifts between representative and autocratic regimes, while contending these oscillations indicate a general weakness of the Riksdag as a political institution.⁶⁰

While we acknowledge that the Riksdag was sometimes subordinate to royal and aristocratic interest, we do not think the structural weakness of political representation paved the way for the recurrent shifts in political regime. Rather, we propose to study the role of the

Riksdag in the critical junctures leading to regime shifts and the long-term effects of political turbulence on political representation. We will argue that the recurrent conflicts between different contenders strengthened the position of the Swedish Riksdag as the only political institution that could restore legitimate government after periods of arbitrary rule. Our focus on regime shifts should help explain the fluctuating political strength of the Estates in the early modern period.

An important point when studying political conflict in early modern Sweden is that domestic power struggles always developed against an international backdrop. Sweden was never isolated and was increasingly involved in European power politics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Geopolitical relations were complex and changing, but the problem of financing the wars always played a major part.⁶¹ The Swedish Treasury came to rely on foreign subsidies and the international credit market in order to finance intra-state conflict. The function of the subsidy system is a recent field of research, which involves mapping and analysing extensive international networks of payers and payees.⁶² Foreign influence also played an important role in domestic politics, not least in the eighteenth century, when bribes and rewards from foreign emissaries permeated the daily work of the Riksdag.⁶³ We are aware of the foreign influences on Swedish politics in the early modern period. Our theoretical and conceptual comparative approach, however, focuses on domestic political actors and especially regime change in Sweden. In our analysis we consider international relations and foreign influence as secondary to domestic political conflicts.

By studying three centuries of regime shifts, we bridge the gap between the discussions of the early Swedish power state on the one hand, and the well-developed representative and bargaining institutions of the Age of Liberty on the other. By focusing on six critical junctures that led to shifts in political regime, we address the dynamics of path dependency and institutional change, targeting the interplay of power politics, representative institutions, and popular initiatives. Our interest is whether, and in what ways, early modern Sweden showed signs of early democratization, or if it is better to think of it

as a hierarchical society in which political power often fluctuated, but the foundations of privilege and inequality remained largely intact.

Regime types and critical junctures

The concept of the political regime is widely used in political science. Classical political theory has three main types of political regime: autocracy, where all political authority is concentrated in the hands of the ruler; oligarchy, where members of the dominant elite group rule collectively; and democracy, where the government is appointed by free elections and is accountable to the people or their representatives.⁶⁴ Political scientists use it to determine the status of democratic government in the contemporary world, and have developed the concepts of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes to distinguish between forms of non-democratic rule.⁶⁵ Drawing on this body of work, we define a political regime as a system of government – the rules and sociocultural norms that govern the operations of government and its interaction with society.

There are also scholars who posit the existence in the past of various intermediate forms or hybrid regimes. Samuel Finer coined the terms ‘palace’, ‘nobility’, and ‘forum’ to represent the three classic systems of rule. He also recognized ‘church’ as a specific form of rule in pre-modern Europe. Finer has discussed the impact of militarization on political regimes, inspiring Sven A. Nilsson to advance the Swedish military state of the seventeenth century as a specific type of political regime.⁶⁶ This shows the need for a more diverse typology of regimes, particularly when studying the early modern period.

In this book, we address the specific configurations of power that supported political rule in early modern Sweden. We draw on Klas Nilsson’s model of hybrid regimes, based on the volatile coalitions of monarch, nobility, and the lower Estates.⁶⁷ A political regime where a strong monarch ruled with the support of the aristocracy is dubbed an ‘aristocratic autocracy’; where the king instead leant on the lower Estates it was a ‘popular autocracy’, while early modern Sweden was an example of parliamentary rule conceptualized as oligarchic parlia-

mentarianism.⁶⁸ There was also ‘mixed government’, the regime type where there was a separation of powers between the ruling executive and the representative assembly of the nation or the realm.

While we agree with Klas Nilsson that the political regimes of early modern Sweden were determined by shifting political alliances, the terminology is not always apposite. Autocracy, for example, must be restricted to the specific historical situations when a monarch could rule without the formal support of either the aristocracy or the Estates. We claim that the political history of early modern Sweden is best outlined as the following political regimes:

Princely rule. A strong monarch concentrated authority and executive powers in their own hands, allying when necessary with the aristocratic council and/or the Estates of the Riksdag.

Bureaucratic rule. A strong monarch exercised authority through bureaucratic institutions staffed mainly by aristocratic officials. This regime could also be governed by a temporary oligarchy (regency) in royal minorities.

Royal autocracy. The monarch exercised executive power without being formally constrained by either the Council of the Realm or the Estates of the Riksdag.

Representative government. Executive power was devolved from the monarch to the Estates of the Riksdag.

Restored royal autocracy. The monarch exercised executive power while still courting the lower Estates of the Riksdag and the public.

Mixed government. The separation of powers and constitutional constraints on the ruling executive.

The list is our template for the regime shifts we discuss in this book. We propose that all the political regimes were the product of a critical juncture – a specific historical situation in which radical restructuring of the political system became possible. While recognizing the

importance of historical path dependencies and long-term processes, our focus is the institutional changes implemented by each new political regime in turn. In assessing the long-term consequences of early modern regime shifts, we will discuss the impact of innovation as well as the drifting and layering of political institutions over a long period.⁶⁹

Recognizing the importance of hybrid regimes and political alliances does not mean treating the state as an expression of social interest. We analyse the early modern state as an independent organization with its own decision-making structures. Although political institutions could be temporarily appropriated by different groups in society, the state was more than a passive instrument for the social elites.⁷⁰ Ruling aristocrats often identified themselves as public servants and might sometimes focus on the interests of the state over social privilege.⁷¹

Most of the regime shifts in this book took several years. However, we analyse them as points in time rather than extended political processes, in line with the theoretical assumptions for an analysis of critical junctures. According to Capoccia and Kelemen, a critical juncture should have a shorter duration than the path-dependent process it launches.⁷² This makes perfect sense for early modern political culture, where a radical change in government often provoked organized resistance and pleas for counter-reform that affected the outcome. We therefore study intense periods of change that eventually resulted in a new political regime.

Analytical concepts

This book is about the impact of the recurrent shifts in political regime in early modern Sweden, framed in terms of three key concepts: 'state capacity', 'impartiality', and 'political participation'. These concepts mean we can identify top-down administrative measures and popular initiatives. They also function as analytical categories, helping us to assess the long-term political development by applying Acemoglu and Robinson's theory of the narrow corridor, the race between the powers of the state and societal control. While state

capacity addresses the development of a strong centralized state, impartiality and participation focus on different areas of a strong civil society. Impartiality refers to the formalized, constitutional framework that might constrain the arbitrary power of rulers and protect individual liberties. Participation is about political practices, addressing the groups who participated in political discussions as well as those who were excluded.

By assessing the impact of each regime shift on our chosen theoretical concepts of state capacity, impartiality, and participation we can compare each over time and evaluate the significance for the historical processes of state formation and democratization. We can also analyse the dynamics of political change: reforms that boosted state capacity might improve impartiality, while still hampering political participation. Increasing the powers of the state might reduce the scope for corruption and arbitrary government measures, but did not necessarily encourage bargaining or the mobilization of local interests.

State capacity

Scholars have defined state capacity differently, depending on their research interests.⁷³ Here we draw on the political scientists Johannes Lindvall and Jan Teorell and their conceptual framework for studying political development in a long-term historical analysis. They conceptualize state capacity as political power to address the conditions for projecting this power.⁷⁴ They do so by differentiating between resources and policy instruments. The realization of these assets can be analysed as policy outcomes, the aggregated effect of successfully putting the chosen policy into practice.⁷⁵ Resources and policy instruments alike are historically contingent, because they depend on the current distribution of power in any situation. This makes them central to our analysis of historical change and political development.

Resources are deployed by the state to increase its capacity. Mastering the means of violence was important for early modern rulers. There were also economic means, such as tax and customs revenue; human capital, such as administrative competence; and the control of information and communication channels. To assess state capac-

ity, it is necessary to analyse how political and institutional change affected the regime's economic and military resources, the recruitment of competent officials, and the state's ability to collect and process important information.

Policy instruments are the strategies used by the state to put its policies into practice, and by extension how resources are put to practice. This includes coercive measures, economic incentives, and government propaganda. Coercion and military violence may be effective instruments for making change and forcing opponents to accept the result. However, using force can also create dissent and destabilize the regime. By offering financial recompense, rulers could form alliances and win over potential opponents. Tax exemptions, land grants, and financial privileges were effective means for securing political support from the aristocratic elite, but the executive could also bargain with other groups by promising political influence or social status. In early modern society, such benefits were often more valuable than financial recompense. Propaganda could be a formidable instrument for mobilizing support and promoting government policy. To be effective, it had to be backed by ideological resources, such as religious and legal norms, as well as a communication infrastructure.

The power of implementation is also important to state capacity: to what degree could governments follow up political decisions and make sure that they were adequately executed? Assessing the impact of a regime shift also means analysing the long-term consequences: how, and in what ways, could the political changes be made without delay, and what were the obstacles to resilient and lasting reform?

We follow Lindvall and Teorell by defining state capacity as 'the strength of the causal relationship between the policies that governments adopt and the (intended) effects of those policies'.⁷⁶ That means that state capacity can only be estimated, not measured as such. However, we would argue that by analysing the effects of regime shifts on government resources and policy instruments, we can also accurately describe political development and state formation in early modern Sweden.

Impartiality

Autonomous decision-making and quality of government are key factors in administrative competence. Impartiality is the most important trait according to Bo Rothstein and Jan Teorell.⁷⁷ They define it as the purpose of government officials to solely consider official policy documents and the law of the land when making decisions.⁷⁸ Transparent, predictable performance by the state and its officials can boost economic growth and the well-being of its citizens.⁷⁹ Impartial government also promotes social trust, smoothing the path of human interaction. When the daily business of state falls prey to self-interest, the result is blatant corruption and ‘clientelism, patronage, political favouritism, discrimination, and other forms of “particularisms”’.⁸⁰

Early modern Sweden was no democracy and its government administration could never be impartial in the modern sense of the word. Equity before the law could not be perfect in a kin-based society. Government officials seldom received regular pay, and they were often forced to make ends meet by accepting various forms of recompense – the spoils of office.⁸¹ Despite that, early modern rulers made considerable efforts to stamp out corruption and punish disloyal officials. This was important, since government legitimacy was based on the claim to provide fair arbitration and guarantee every subject would be treated according to their rightful status.⁸² Monarchs just as much as councils and local authorities had to demonstrate their supposed impartiality if they were to be thought legitimate. To some extent they also tried to limit social privileges, the definition of the state’s unequal treatment of its subjects.⁸³

An important part of impartiality is the rule of law, which implies the rules governing society also apply to those in power. The political scientist Barry Weingast defines the rule of law as ‘a set of stable political rules and rights that are applied impartially to all citizens’.⁸⁴ That includes formal legality, checks and balances between different institutions of power, and the protection of individual liberties.⁸⁵ Accepting the rule of law means that monarchs had to accept various legal constraints on their power. Rothstein and Teorell argue that the

rule of law is implicit in impartiality.⁸⁶ The rule of law is also linked to the early modern ideology of constitutionalism, which focused on protecting subjects from the abuse of royal power.⁸⁷ Such measures included transparent administrative practices to promote calculability in the distribution of obligations, and accountability regarding the performance of government officials.

We define impartiality as both the expression of equal treatment by the state and the limiting of governmental power through rules. The latter includes constitutional checks on arbitrary executive power, the promotion of personal security, and certain individual liberties. Thus, we argue that impartiality, like the rule of law, preceded democracy, and that many polities in early modern Europe had such provisions. The question is whether, and to what degree, the fluctuations between different types of political regimes hampered or contributed to the promotion of good governance and transparent administrative procedures.

Political participation

In our analytical model, political participation speaks to the successive broadening of the political community and an opportunity for unprivileged groups to influence political decisions. This process necessarily involves a weakening of social privileges and the introduction of constitutional instruments to safeguard mutual agreements.⁸⁸ The assumption is that political participation has an integrative effect on citizens and state, involving broader segments of the population directly in the decision-making process.⁸⁹ These integrative effects also underpin the ideological claims for conferring legitimacy to a political regime.

David Beetham has identified three dimensions of political legitimacy. The first refers to law and custom, confirming that the execution of power is in full accordance with the established rules of the community. The second refers to shared values and beliefs.⁹⁰ Both the law and religion were overarching ideological instruments of government in the early modern era; however, they could also be used by groups and individuals who wanted to oppose a ruler's policies.⁹¹

The third of Beetham's dimensions of legitimate government was the ability for subjects to participate in political decisions by expressing their consent. Rulers had to be wary of using coercion on their own subjects for fear of stirring up insurrection. Beetham argues that the right to participate in public decisions conferred legitimacy on the regime by giving subjects a stake in government policy. Rulers used such practices to mobilize active support and their subjects could act morally while staying loyal to the regime.⁹²

Early modern states were not governed by democratic regimes, but their legacy – state formation and the successive strengthening of administrative and political institutions – ultimately led to the French Revolution.⁹³ Charles Tilly has a model for studying democratization as a long-term political process, stretching from ancient times to the modern era. He considers broader political participation to be only the first of four necessary elements that constitute modern democracy, the other three being greater equality, both in and among social groups; protection against arbitrary action; and the ability for rulers and subjects to conclude mutually binding agreements.⁹⁴ He adds three clusters of changes that can promote the development of such democratic functions: the integration of status groups into public politics; the insulation of categorical inequality from political arenas; and the decreasing autonomy of major power centres in the political community.⁹⁵ Taken together, the changes address the levelling of status groups and their integration into a national political community, a central feature of early modern politics. It also underscores the claim that institutionalized social privilege was incompatible with democracy.

By addressing both political participation and impartiality as constitutional constraints, it is easier to identify the early stages of democratization, and we can more readily analyse not only the immediate effects of regime shifts, but also the long-term effects on state formation and democratization. We define political participation as including both quantitative and qualitative elements. Greater participation may involve the extension of political rights to new groups, thus expanding the political community, but active participation also

means having a realistic opportunity to influence decisions, driving the integration of both privileged and unprivileged groups.

The method of investigation

There are three stages to our analysis. First, each critical juncture is analysed separately and we focus on the factors behind the regime shifts, the agents of change and their motives, and the outcomes in terms of institutional change and political reform. Second, we compare the regime shifts and analyse differences and similarities. At both stages the ideas of state capacity, impartiality, and participation are central to our analysis. Third, we use the aggregated results in a general analysis of the impact of regime shifts on the political and institutional development of early modern Sweden, concentrating on the dynamics of radical change and its overall effect on state formation and democratization.

To help compare regime shifts, our six case studies have a similar design. Drawing on Capoccia and Ziblatt, we start by studying the motives and actions of key political actors, individual or collective, paying special attention to those who promoted institutional change.⁹⁶ The monarch normally dominated both the administrative and the political spheres of government. Agents advocating change were sometimes restricted to one of these spheres, but members of the social elites could often combine bureaucratic knowledge and political influence. There were also the lower Estates, who took an active part in politics. We reconstruct the political events at each critical juncture, and study not only decisions and actions, but also proposals and suggestions that ultimately were rejected, before analysing the immediate and long-term impact of radical change to the political process.⁹⁷

The second step is to compare the case studies. The theory says a potential problem for comparing critical junctures is that they occur at different points in time.⁹⁸ For an historical inquiry, however, that is a necessity, not a weakness, because the goal is to analyse political change and path dependency over a period of almost 300 years. In

comparing the cases studies, we return to our key concepts to determine the scope and limits of political change. Finally, the results from the case studies are aggregated over time, and we conclude our analysis with the general features of political and institutional change in early modern Sweden. By analysing the effects of regime shifts in six critical junctures, we can assess the long-term effects of these ruptures on state formation and democratization in Sweden.

The empirical data is drawn from the large amount of historical literature about political developments in each one of the six cases. We have consulted the occasional primary source, including the records of decision-making bodies and the central and local administration. When analysing the political process, we look for political actors who promoted institutional change, while still recognizing those who invested in maintaining the status quo.

The six case studies are what are generally considered the most important regime shifts in Swedish early modern history. All were critical junctures in the system of government, when one type of regime was effectively replaced by another. As such, they are ideally suited to test the impact of radical change on state capacity, impartiality, and political participation. None of them is unknown to historians, who have extensively probed the significance of these upheavals for the general political development. What is new here is our comparison of the cases and our detailed analysis of the aggregated theories and concepts born of years of political and institutional development. Our contribution to the literature on state formation and to Swedish historiography is an analysis of political change over a period of almost three centuries.

The case studies

The first case study, the introduction of princely rule (1538–1544), analyses the transformation of the medieval, oligarchic monarchy into a centralized government organization through the top-down measures put into practice by Gustav I Vasa (r.1523–1560). This critical juncture involved the introduction of continental, bureaucratic practices, large-scale insurrection, and eventually a political compro-

mise sanctioned both by the Council of the Realm and the Riksdag. The new political regime would concentrate economic and military resources in an extensive government organization, controlled by the monarch in person.

The second case study, the making of bureaucratic government (1617–1626), addresses the shift from personal, princely rule to a bureaucratic regime that would continue to function even when the king was absent or incapacitated. It centres on the reforms introduced by the royal chancellor Axel Oxenstierna in the reign of Gustav II Adolf (r.1611–1632), including the creation of permanent government bodies, a fiscal system designed to attract foreign credit, and the effective transformation of the medieval Council of the Realm into an executive government body. The long-term effect of these measures was to integrate the aristocratic elite into the fabric of state administration.

The third case study, shaping royal autocracy (1675–1683), investigates the introduction of absolute rule in Sweden in the reign of Karl XI (r.1672–1697). With passive support from the lower Estates and the important group of lower officials, the young king could secure absolute legal, financial, and administrative power. Karl XI also undertook an extensive resumption of Crown lands, thus depriving the higher nobility of their main source of income. The new system of government saw the king assume the role of first bureaucrat, operating through the administration rather than political institutions.

The fourth case study, the introduction of parliamentary government (1718–1723), analyses the shift at the start of the Age of Liberty. Following the death of the autocrat Karl XII (r.1697–1718) and the disastrous defeat in the Great Northern War (1700–1721), it was left to the Estates to design a new system of government that would curb the arbitrary powers of the monarch. The new constitution transferred legislative powers from the king to the Four Estates, making the Riksdag the centre of politics for half a century.

The fifth case study, royal autocracy revisited (1765–1772), explores the parliamentary upheavals of the 1760s and the political conflicts that helped restore royal autocracy. The opposition in the Riksdag

threatened to tip the balance of power towards a radical parliamentary regime. Attacks on the privileges of the nobility were first blocked by the bureaucracy and then thwarted by a reaction led by the young king, Gustav III (r.1771–1792), who staged an autocoup in 1772. This effectively ended parliamentary sovereignty and was later followed by a *de facto* proclamation of absolute rule in 1789.

The sixth and final case study, the introduction of mixed government (1809–1810), looks at the decisive shift from absolute monarchy to a mixed constitutional regime following the military coup which deposed the last autocrat, Gustav IV Adolf (r.1792–1809). The Estates were instrumental in drafting a new Instrument of Government, circumscribing the monarch's personal prerogative and boosting the Riksdag's legislative powers. The new constitution would frame government policy and political stability in the post-revolutionary period, and remained in place until 1975.

There were other critical junctures in Swedish political history not addressed here, such as the deposition of King Erik XIV in 1568, the civil war of the 1590s, or the political struggles in the 1650s after the Thirty Years War. However, none of these conflicts resulted in a decisive shift of political regime, unlike the chosen case studies, which represent the core political conflicts of early modern Sweden. It is a focus which puts Sweden on par with other polities such as England, France, or even Russia, where political regimes were challenged on several occasions due to radical upheavals.

We have chosen the most important shifts in political regime that occurred in early modern Sweden, a view supported by most Swedish historical scholarship. The analysis covers the classic regime types: princely rule, bureaucratic monarchy, royal autocracy, and representative government. We identify the mechanisms of institutional change from the internal dynamics evident in the six case studies, but ultimately this is a book about the legacy of the regime shifts. The only thing missing is a fully democratic regime – but early modern Sweden experienced nothing of the kind.



David Frumerie, copy of Jacob Binck, *Gustav Vasa* (1542). Binck's lost portrait showed the king in all his splendour, the embodiment of his claim for power that triggered the regime shift of 1538–1544. The device reads 'Gustav, by the grace of God King of Sweden, the Goths and the Vandals'. Credit: Nationalmuseum.

A national monarchy

The introduction of princely rule, 1538–1544

By 1538, Gustav I Vasa (r.1523–1560) had ruled for fifteen years, since his election as king of Sweden by a hastily assembled meeting of the Estates in the cathedral city of Strängnäs. Gustav had started as a usurper, leading an armed uprising against the lawful king, Christian II of Denmark and Norway (r.1520–1521 Sweden). The young king had put down several insurrections, survived an attempt on his life, and emerged victorious from a full-scale international conflict, the Count's War (1534–1536). This war had begun as a Danish dynastic civil war but evolved into a major confrontation between the Swedish monarch and the formidable naval power of Lübeck. Gustav I had also attacked the power of the high clergy and confiscated church property *en masse*, ousting the bishops from the Council of the Realm in the process. With no imminent external or internal threats at hand, the king now had the means to consolidate his position.⁹⁹

In this chapter, we will argue that the events of 1538–1544, from the start of the 'German period' in Sweden's governance to the meeting of the Riksdag (the Swedish Diet) in Västerås 1544, must be analysed as a regime shift that decisively changed the character of political organization in early modern Sweden. Gustav I set out to transform a loosely organized Swedish polity into an extensive government organization under his personal rule. The fiscal and military instruments of power were placed in his own hands, ending the long period of aristocratic dominance that had been the legacy of the late

medieval period. It was a critical juncture that began with top-down administrative measures, followed by wide-ranging fiscal reform. However, the measures provoked violent protest that culminated in open rebellion and a temporary breakdown of royal government in southern Sweden at the end of 1542. Gustav I, however, adjusted his policies and mobilized his political and military support to push through his programme for personal rule.

As the first Vasa monarch, Gustav Vasa is a colossus in Swedish historiography. In traditional narratives he is painted as the nation's liberator and the founder of the Swedish state.¹⁰⁰ The following analysis will focus on the political actors of change and their motives: the king himself, the top bureaucrats, the king's aristocratic in-laws, and the royal family. We will also address the role of the military and administrative rank-and-file, as well as the Estates and the peasantry. While earlier research has focused mainly on the national level, we will demonstrate the impact of local interaction and administrative reform. The long-term effects of this first regime shift will be assessed for its relevance for state capacity, impartiality, and political participation.

State of the art – Gustav I's personal rule

Scholars of sixteenth-century Sweden have analysed Gustav I's reign as a series of domestic and – to a lesser degree – international struggles, culminating in the consolidation of dynastic monarchy on the king's death in 1560. Ivan Svalenius, who published the first full biography of the king in 1950, describes an extended process of political centralization and consolidation, with the meetings of the Estates in 1527 and 1544 among the decisive moments. The British historian Michael Roberts has stressed the cumulative effects of Gustav I's military and administrative reforms, paving the way for Sweden's imperial expansion a century later.¹⁰¹ Lars Olof Larsson has focused on the king's personality, painting him as a ruthless man, wholly intent on monopolizing political power for his own benefit. In Larsson's view, Gustav I's legacy was tyranny and exploitation, not national unification.¹⁰²

While the general academic line has been to assess Gustav's rule as a whole, several historians have pointed to the transformative shifts in royal policy from about 1540. In a study of the king's financial policy, Ingrid Hammarström identifies a significant change from this time: the focus on monetary revenue to pay for mercenary troops was abandoned for directly managed, local transactions-in-kind and an expansion of the government organization.¹⁰³ Sven Lundkvist has emphasized the continental examples that inspired the king to introduce an absolutist form of rule.¹⁰⁴ Harald Gustafsson has identified a decisive shift in international politics in the Baltic area, with the alliance between Gustav I and Christian III of Denmark in 1541 signalling the definitive breakup of the Kalmar Union of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.¹⁰⁵ The reorganization of the fiscal system around 1540 and its radical effect on domestic politics is shown by Hallenberg, a reform also singled out by Jan Glete as the reason for Sweden's transformation into a model of the early modern fiscal-military state.¹⁰⁶

The impact of the regime shift was not restricted to the political and administrative spheres. Martin Neuding Skoog argues this period saw the end of the medieval system of the king coordinating military resources controlled by local elites. Gustav I now completed his project of creating a standing army and a royal navy under his own command.¹⁰⁷ There were also important changes in church policy, with the king officially claiming the role of protector of the Church of Sweden by enforcing a more rigorous Lutheran doctrine.¹⁰⁸ Finally, both Hallenberg and Brilckman have identified important shifts in government propaganda at the time. Gustav I exploited the religious discourse to establish direct relations with his subjects, portraying himself as the rightful leader of the Lutheran nation.¹⁰⁹

Taken together, there are strong arguments for analysing the period 1538–1544 as a regime shift that transformed the Swedish state into an early modern nation-state under the monarch's personal rule. This is not an approach found in the extensive literature about the Vasa regime. Yet this disruptive period disposing medieval institutional structures had an undeniable significance because it created some-

thing new: a national, dynastic monarchy where the royal organization gained supremacy over all other political actors.

The Vasa regime shift around 1540 is also interesting in a wider European perspective. Charles Tilly suggests that the early modern Swedish state was an exceptional case of putting direct rule into practice top-down, and Glete that the Swedish kings Gustav I and Gustav II Adolf were pioneering military entrepreneurs who set the standards for state formation in Europe until the eighteenth century.¹¹⁰ We contend that the rise of Sweden as a European power must be attributed to the fiscal and military measures introduced at this critical juncture. Gustav I and his councillors consolidated the interaction with the peasant arenas of self-government, integrating them into central government while still retaining their status as platforms for local concerns. The personal rule of the Vasa monarch was steadily entwined with the participant local administration that Thomas Ertman identifies as a key factor promoting state formation in Western Europe.¹¹¹

Popular protest and participation were important aspects of early modern politics, and were behind the second part of the Vasa regime shift. The Dacke War (1542–1543) forced Gustav I to adapt his policies, and the fear of peasant uprisings would cast a giant shadow over Swedish rulers for centuries to come.¹¹² Herman Schück has shown the meetings of the Riksdag in 1527 and 1544 were political innovations of fundamental significance for Swedish politics. Although the Estates at first met at irregular intervals, the Riksdag was officially recognized as the national arena where they would decide constitutional matters.¹¹³ The scholars of early modern political assemblies have shown their fundamental role in sustaining the political order, while noting that they seldom challenged the principles of hierarchy and privilege.¹¹⁴ The Swedish Riksdag of the sixteenth century had a vital function as an arena for political interaction between local communities and central government, and it is to the Estates' role in challenging social privilege and extending political rights to new groups we now turn.

The critical juncture of 1538–1544

After some fifteen years as a ruler, Gustav I could act from a position of strength. He commanded a substantial force of mercenary troops backed up by a strong navy. There was a new generation of young noblemen and ambitious commoners who had been groomed for service at the royal court writ large. Gustav's alliance with the nobility had proved resilient and the Crown's finances were boosted by the confiscation of church lands and the influx of silver from the Sala mine. The threat of foreign invasion was no longer imminent since the Danish king had been Gustav's ally since the war in 1534–1536.¹¹⁵ He was ready for the next challenge: to reconstruct the state administration from the top to the local level.

While Gustav I had succeeded in strengthening his position as ruler, he had done so by operating within the bounds of a medieval, constitutional monarchy. Extraordinary taxes and subsidies were first approved by the aristocratic Council of the Realm, then negotiated locally in the provincial and district courts. The crucial meeting of the Riksdag in 1527 may best be described as an extension of the medieval regional assemblies, the *herredagar* (lords' meetings), putting pressure on the local assemblies that had to ratify the agreement.¹¹⁶ The central administration remained limited to a small group of trusted secretaries, supervised by the king himself. His noble followers had been granted large fiefs in the central and southern provinces in reward for their political and military support. The king maintained a core of seasoned mercenary troops at the royal castles, but most of the armed forces still consisted of noblemen's retainers and semi-independent peasant militias.¹¹⁷

Gustav I had struggled to find able administrators who could support his efforts to rationalize government operations.¹¹⁸ Reforming the central administration was a prime target when the king appointed his new chancellor in 1538. Conrad von Pyhy, a professional bureaucrat who had served the Emperor Karl V, arrived in Sweden in August. Pyhy was the first and most prominent of a contingent of German administrators that the Swedish king recruited to his service in the

following years.¹¹⁹ The fact that Gustav I looked to Germany for top expertise and a model for effective government was logical. Rudimentary know-how about accounting and keeping track of economic transactions was widespread among the king's bailiffs and bookkeepers, but the royal administration lacked specialized knowledge about how to organize government operations. Gustav I wanted Pyhy and his ilk to bring competence on judicial and economic matters into the government organization.¹²⁰

The German councillors represented something new in government administration: university-trained scholars, rather than noble magnates or high-ranking clerics. They were experts in Roman law, able to translate the ideological claims of renaissance monarchy into administrative practice. Georg Norman, a commoner from Pomerania who had studied theology in Rostock, soon became the king's right hand in religious matters. Other prominent bureaucrats included the royal councillor and colonel Claus von Hatstedt, the Court Steward Hans Sastrow, the Court Master Gilius von Taubenheim, and Court Marshall Albrekt Silstrang. They were all given *beställning* (fixed salary agreements) with yearly wages in cash and kind, which set them apart from the king's noble servants who traditionally received grants of land in recompense for their service.¹²¹

Chancellor von Pyhy first directed his attention to the administration of justice. The new Government council, Regementsrådet, was modelled on the German Hofrath and its members included Pyhy and Norman as well as twelve aristocratic councillors. There was thus a fusion of 'modern' and 'traditional' elements, reshaping the medieval Council of the Realm into a permanent government body. Pyhy also drafted the instructions for a *Sekrete råd* or special Privy Council (Ger. *Geiheime Rat*) to handle priority matters – foreign policy and national security – though it also had the authority to monitor the dealings of other government bodies. Lundkvist has argued that the government bodies introduced by Pyhy were a dramatic departure in Gustav I's personal rule. The Swedish king now had the means at his disposal to enforce his government's decisions right down to the local level.¹²²

The principle of collective decision-making was a novelty, and Pyhy's ambition was to implement it in all sectors of government. A special Chamber Council was appointed to administer financial transactions and to audit the accounts of various local officials. Remarkably, the members of this collective organ of finance were all young Swedish aristocrats. Gustav I seemed to prefer noble officers when it came to the all-important matter of securing government revenue. However, in subsequent years the ex-cleric Lars Organista would take on the role as the king's right-hand man in the financial administration, to be followed by other non-noble secretaries.¹²³

A measure with even more profound effects on government policy was the appointment of Georg Norman as Superintendent, presiding over a council with the authority to supervise the Church of Sweden and enforce Lutheran doctrine. Norman took on his duties with great zeal, conducting church visitations in the provinces to confiscate objects of worship and banish all forms of liturgy not compatible with the Lutheran faith. Norman also drafted a Protestant church ordinance in 1541, with the central message that King Gustav had been appointed by God to rule his subjects, and that his main objective was to protect the true Christian faith. It also repeated Gustav's claim to have liberated the Swedes from Danish tyranny, comparing him to the biblical Joshua and to St Erik, the patron saint of Sweden.¹²⁴ Gustav I's church policy thus took a sharp turn towards concentrating authority in the hands of the monarch. This also represented an ideological shift: the king now claimed to rule by absolute right, addressing the welfare of his subjects in spiritual and temporal matters.

The initiatives of the German period served to strengthen the state administration by organizing permanent government bodies to support the monarch. This strategy proved difficult to translate into political practice, though. Nils Edén concludes that the new government institutions never achieved the hoped-for permanent status, nor a dominant role in the state administration.¹²⁵ When Pyhy and his noble associate Sten Eriksson were sent on a diplomatic mission to France in early 1542, the new government bodies were left in limbo. The outbreak of the Dacke War that summer effectively broke the

momentum of the German period and the experiment with bureaucratic government. The chancellor was imprisoned on his return to Stockholm and most of the other German administrators were eventually dismissed from royal service.¹²⁶

While the programme for modernizing central government eventually ground to a halt, the fiscal reforms introduced in the same period had a significant effect on the royal finances. Gustav I had previously proposed to compile registers of his sources of income, but the results had only provided estimates of net revenue. From c.1538, there was a sustained effort to map the country's tax base by registering the expected amount of revenue in every district. After 15 years, the royal organization had accumulated enough expertise to complete the project. The bailiffs were ordered to compile *jordeböcker* (land cadastres), a register of properties in each district showing the ownership, extent of the land farmed, and the annual taxes payable. It was a decisive break with the medieval system of collective taxes, where each district or province had provided a fixed sum, allocating the burden according to local tradition. From then on, taxes would be levied on individual farmsteads. The bailiffs had to update the registers every year and send them to *Kammaren* (the Royal Treasury) in Stockholm to verify their accounts of the local transactions.¹²⁷

The land cadastres were the product of local interaction. The details of the negotiations are sketchy, since there were no official instructions or written records documenting the full procedure. It indicates that the initiative for reforming the tax system did not come from the German bureaucrats, but more likely from the king himself. The appropriation of ecclesiastical records gave the king information about not only the church's lands, but also the administrative techniques to manage them effectively. Gustav had also modelled a parallel organization to expand his '*arv och eget*' (family property), confiscating noble and church lands to administer their revenue for his own profit.¹²⁸

The tax reform depended on local knowledge, translated by the king's bailiffs and negotiated by the peasant institutions of self-government. The records indicate that peasant representatives, acting

on behalf of the community, supplied the basic information and approved who would pay what. Implementing the new system was a bottom-up process. The central administration had to follow suit by putting in place more effective auditing procedures. Local records were audited by clerks in the Treasury and then circulated as templates among the bailiffs and scribes. This learning process involved a great many political actors at different levels.¹²⁹ The organization was inspired by continental examples, but the detailed instructions bore little resemblance to the ordinances produced in Germany or France. The obvious conclusion is that Sweden's new tax system was mainly the product of domestic political actors.¹³⁰

Gustav I introduced a direct form of government that was unique in sixteenth-century Europe, as Tilly notes. The king's bailiffs bargained over local contributions, then delivered the surplus and presented their books to central government. While continental rulers often struggled to control their noble intermediaries, the Swedish monarch established direct relations with taxpayers. To achieve it, however, Gustav I had to grant the local institutions of participatory government a central role.¹³¹

Gustav's status as king of Sweden had been contested by various groups, and there were several attempts to overthrow him at the start of his reign. Even as late as 1536 there had been a conspiracy against the king's life.¹³² By that point he had a young royal family to consider. He had married Katarina of Saxe-Lauenburg in 1531, a strategic move to win the approval of the German princes who still regarded the Swedish king a usurper. Less than two years later, however, the young queen died giving birth to Prince Erik (r.1560–1568 as Erik XIV). Gustav I then married Margareta Leijonhufvud, a member of one of Sweden's leading noble families, and Prince Johan (r.1568–1592 as Johan III) was born in 1537.¹³³ Sweden was still an elective monarchy, but the king wanted to secure the position of his descendants.¹³⁴

Gustav I first pressed his claim at a meeting with the Council of the Realm in Örebro in 1540. The aristocratic councillors were prompted to pledge their alliance to the king, also including Prince Erik and all heirs on the male side. Primogeniture was recognized

as a fundamental principle of the realm, setting aside the medieval national law that had proclaimed Sweden an elective monarchy.¹³⁵ Importantly, the Örebro meeting also confirmed the king's authority in all religious matters. The king abolished several traditional religious practices, including the veneration of saints, the use of holy water, and requiems for the dead. Dynastic claims thus went hand in hand with a determined effort to implement the Protestant Reformation from above.¹³⁶

The policy changes triggered a sharp reaction, however. The Dacke War of 1542–1543, named for Nils Dacke, the peasant leader of the rebellion, sent the Vasa regime into a deep political crisis. In the densely forested regions of southern Sweden, royal demands for taxes and the control of uncultivated land posed a genuine threat to local self-governance. The spark was the systematic confiscation of church relics. The peasants first tried petitioning the king, but to no avail. Instead, they mobilized the militias to overthrow Gustav I by force. The local communities were well organized and Dacke's followers soon controlled much of the southern provinces, a fact that compelled the king to negotiate a truce at the end of 1542.¹³⁷

The king used the temporary standstill to get reinforcements. He started recruiting peasant soldiers from other provinces to back up his existing forces, fearing the insurrection would spread further. He also intensified his propaganda efforts, branding the rebels as 'thieves' and 'traitors'. While noble cavalry and hired mercenaries formed the core of the royal military force that finally defeated the rebels in the summer of 1543, the pool of reserve troops consisting of peasant recruits would prove a key investment for the future. By asserting control of local militia bands, offering cash payment in return for loyal service, Gustav I promoted the integration of the peasant militias in the armed forces. This proved to be imperative for the further development of the Swedish military state. Paradoxically, it also meant recognizing the peasants as political subjects, shouldering the responsibility of defending the realm.¹³⁸

In early 1544 the king summoned a Riksdag in Västerås, mobilizing the Estates to support the hereditary claim of his dynasty and

restore the legitimacy of the Vasa regime. The delegates – parish priests as well as nobles, burghers, and peasants – duly accepted the proposition, but their decision indicated that Gustav I was now ready to moderate his absolutist claims. Ivan Svalenius argues that hereditary monarchy was essentially authorized by the Estates. Lars-Olof Larsson is even more explicit: the country's representative institutions – the aristocratic Council of the Realm and the Estates – were from now on the pillars of the new constitution.¹³⁹

The Swedish magnates agreed to concede their traditional right, ratified by Swedish law, to elect their new ruler. However, the declaration in 1544 still offered the aristocratic Council of the Realm a central position in the new system. Should Gustav I die before prince Erik came of age, the regency was to be entrusted to Queen Margareta and four aristocratic councillors.¹⁴⁰ The paragraph placed the aristocracy firmly at the helm in the event of a royal minority. This established a window of opportunity for the aristocratic council that would open on more than one occasion in the next hundred years. This manifestation of patriarchal power also acknowledged the leading position of the dowager queen.

The Västerås Riksdag of 1544 set the stage for Swedish politics for centuries to come. The meeting declared Sweden to be a Protestant kingdom with a Lutheran church. Gustav I was granted the revenue he needed to organize the semi-independent peasant militias into a trained standing army.¹⁴¹ Control of the infrastructure was now firmly in the hands of the monarch, who could no longer be relegated to *primus inter pares*. On the other hand, the new constitution confirmed the positions of both the Council *and* the Estates. Gustav I was the founder of a dynasty, dependent on – but also able to navigate between – the support of the commoners and the nobility.¹⁴² This three-way conflict would remain a dominant theme in Swedish politics for the rest of the early modern period.¹⁴³

Gustav I rallied interest using the political institutions at his disposal: the Council of the Realm and the new arena of the Riksdag. The king came up with the initiative while the Council and the Estates offered their official support. The procedure gave the Riks-

dag precedence over medieval law and established the notion that laws and statutes might be changed – with the Estates’ approval. The Swedish Estates retained the right to elect a new monarch should the Vasa dynasty fail to produce a male heir.¹⁴⁴ In effect, the Vasas were a dynasty by election, bound by contract to the political institutions of the realm.¹⁴⁵

When King Gustav started reshaping the state administration, the first generation of Vasa supporters were already on their way out. A new generation of young noblemen and able commoners were ready to take their place. These men had started their service as young squires in *kungens gård* (the royal household) in the royal castle of Tre Kronor in Stockholm or in the provincial strongholds. Many were petty nobles, who wanted to improve their social status through royal service.¹⁴⁶ As the royal networks of bailiffs and scribes expanded further, the king needed even more able hands to represent him in the regions. The bailiffs must command authority and prove themselves loyal to the monarch. Gustav I preferred to recruit local officials from his own retinue.¹⁴⁷ Like no other Swedish monarch before him (or after), he could staff his administrative organization with loyal men who had risen to prominence under his wing.

The inner circle of trusted servants consisted of young aristocrats who also happened to be the king’s kith and kin. They included Gustav I’s nephew Per Brahe, who started his long, distinguished career as a *Kammarråd* (Treasury Councillor), auditing the records of local officials.¹⁴⁸ Gustav’s marriage to the young noblewoman Margareta Leijonhufvud in 1536 gave him new allies among the magnate families. The queen’s brother Sten Eriksson was his most trusted advisor and worked alongside chancellor Pyhy and the king himself. Queen Margareta’s sisters married leading noblemen and the new in-laws became pillars of the expanding government organization. Gustav Olsson (Stenbock), Svante Stensson (Sture), and Axel Eriksson (Bielke) were all granted substantial fiefs in the southern provinces. They acted as troubleshooters, supervising local officials, bargaining with peasants and townspeople. If the bailiffs were the prime agents of the

expanding Swedish state, the in-laws provided the link between the king and the provinces.¹⁴⁹

While noble privileges remained intact after the regime shift, there were definitely changes that affected the rights of the peasant freeholders. The Estate of the Peasants was recognized as an Estate of the Realm, with full representation in the Riksdag. This political status was remarkable from a European perspective. Meanwhile, the new system of tax assessments introduced by Gustav I allowed for greater calculability in the collection and allocation of tax revenue. The right to address grievances directly to the king also helped increase transparency in the government organization and strengthened the control of local officials.

The consolidation of the Riksdag as the central arena for national politics must be considered a major innovation. Lundkvist has argued that the Riksdag, much like other government institutions, was shaped in full accordance with continental role models.¹⁵⁰ We consider the differences to be more important than the similarities. The Swedish Riksdag comprised the Four Estates instead of the usual three (nobility, gentry, and towns). Not only were the peasants represented as a separate Estate, but the parish clergy also had a voice. The Swedish Estates thus comprised a much broader spectrum of the population than representative assemblies in other parts of Europe.

The rise of the Riksdag was a shift in political culture from the vibrant late medieval situation, with its regional assemblies and unruly market meetings, to a permanent royal administration supported by formal meetings of the Four Estates at the national level.¹⁵¹ However, the Riksdag did not make the local gatherings redundant; quite the contrary, the Estates' decisions still had to be negotiated and confirmed at the local level. The district courts were of paramount importance here. They could be dominated by the king's bailiff and his retinue, unlike the larger provincial meetings that posed greater risk for the local officials.¹⁵² The centralization of the political system was supported by a localized structure for bargaining and communication. This local system promoted trust in government, while local grievances addressed to the king were formulated and sanctioned

by the district courts. Decisions by the Estates were moderated by concessions to local demands. In this way, local affairs and national politics became progressively entangled.¹⁵³

The patterns of personal rule

Agents and motives

The first regime shift in early modern Sweden started as something of an autocoup. Gustav I had ruled his kingdom for almost fifteen years, steering through domestic conflicts and external threats. His greatest achievement thus far had been the Protestant Reformation and the erosion of the church lords' economic and political power. The king persuaded the Estates to support the confiscation of church lands, but in return he had to buy the support of the nobility with grants of land. He now opted to expand and modernize the government organization, drawing the available human capital from both foreign and domestic pools to further his ambitions.

Gustav did not act on his own, though. First, he recruited a core of experienced German bureaucrats to introduce modern administrative procedures to the Swedish state administration. Men like Conrad von Pyhy and Georg Norman brought with them judicial expertise and notions of absolute monarchy that would legitimize the changes to come. Second, the king relied on a group of young aristocrats who worked closely with him and could learn from his German experts. Third, he extended his base of local followers, the officials of common origin who could handle the bargaining in the district courts.

Gustav's project for absolute rule soon ran into serious trouble. The Dacke War threatened the existence of the regime and forced him to moderate his politics. After suppressing the rebels by military force, he turned to the Riksdag to restore confidence and promote trust for his regime. The Estates agreed to his claim for hereditary rule, while granting him the resources to organize and maintain a standing army of peasant soldiers. He also strengthened communications with the local arenas of self-government. Violent peasant protest thus prompted the king to adjust his plans, turning a top-down process

into a broader, more inclusive project. The first Vasa regime shift was an intensive process that spanned royal initiative, violent reaction, and political compromise.

International role models – religious and administrative – obviously inspired the regime shift, but inter-state conflict did not play a prominent role in the political process. Gustav I strengthened his personal rule without provoking reactions from other powers in the Baltic region. However, international relations remained a sensitive point for the Vasa monarchy. The north German princes were sceptical about the Swedish ruler, and the failed alliance with the French monarch contributed to the downfall of chancellor von Pyhy. However, Sweden's relative diplomatic isolation might be used as leverage in national politics. Gustav I repeatedly used the threat of foreign intervention to promote the further exploitation of domestic resources.¹⁵⁴

State capacity

The regime shift of 1538–1544 resulted in a remarkable strengthening of state capacity. Implementing a new procedure for auditing written records, collecting taxes, and supervising local operations was important. The medieval system of collective obligations was replaced by an intricate form of taxation which assigned tax liabilities to individual peasant households, or rather their farmsteads. This intervention had two major results. First, it gave the central administration an extensive information base containing up-to-date knowledge of the economic health of the country. Second, the new system established a direct relationship between the king and the individual peasant freeholder. The peasants bargained directly with the king's representative over taxes and other dues, without noble intermediaries. Fiscal reform thus provided the state administration with economic resources and better tools for collecting and processing information.

Administrative reform depended on the human capital Gustav I had carefully nurtured since he came to the throne. The Vasa regime rested on an extended network of bailiffs who represented royal authority in local communities. The organization was further strengthened and expanded following the regime shift. The dispersed

networks of local agents that had constituted the medieval polity was finally integrated into a hierarchical royal organization.¹⁵⁵ Military resources were now concentrated under royal command. The peasant militias that had played a decisive part in local conflicts were reorganized as a standing army, providing military support for the regime in the provinces. Local magnates could no longer muster the forces to challenge the hegemony of the king. Peasant troops under royal command would soon be a powerful instrument for Swedish territorial expansion in the later sixteenth century.

Gustav I's network of local agents also functioned as a policy instrument, transmitting government propaganda and strengthening the legitimacy of his personal rule. The Vasa regime relied on direct communication with the local arenas of self-government. The district courts became the main arenas for bargaining over taxes and concluding political agreements. State formation in Sweden was not a case of 'state capacity first'; rather, the project to increase state capacity – that is to create compliance with taxes – could be achieved only by integrating representative institutions in the system of government. The question 'Which came first?' must be answered by 'both'.

Administrative and military reforms came thick and fast, supporting the argument that this was a genuine regime shift. The local network of bailiffs continued to expand and was increasingly complex. The system with individual taxes levied on peasant farmsteads would remain the public purse for centuries to come, and the royal infantry formed out of local militias were eventually reorganized as provincial regiments. Crucially, Gustav I and his successors continued to collect information on local sources of revenue, putting together a body of knowledge that would be the basis for further fiscal reform in the following century.

What the new Vasa regime gained in quantitative support it may have lacked in qualitative expertise. The educated German experts recruited by the king never fulfilled their mission. Most were eventually replaced by domestic agents, working under the close supervision of the monarch himself. Gustav I also failed to integrate the aristocratic elites in the daily business of government. Ultimately,

the state administration depended on the personal qualities of the monarch, and this situation would hamper executive power in Gustav I's successors.

Impartiality

The effects of the regime shift on impartiality and the rule of law were somewhat mixed. On the one hand, the new fiscal and administrative system strengthened literacy and calculability in government. Implementing written records, cadastres of taxable property, and auditing procedures brought legal certainty to the fiscal system. The amount of revenue to be paid each year was fixed for the individual peasant household, and further adjustments had to be negotiated and sanctioned by the local or provincial courts. The participation of the arenas for self-government increased the transparency of the fiscal system and guaranteed a minimum of influence for the peasant taxpayers.

The fiscal system was backed up by a grievance process, whereby peasant communities retained the right to complain directly to the king about perceived irregularities. This medieval institution was further developed by the Vasa regime, the king channelling local protest into legal procedure by providing written resolutions to all forms of local grievances. This strategy for engineering compliance was further bolstered by a determined use of local commissions and special courts to investigate allegations of corruption or mismanagement. By promoting communication with local agents and arenas, Gustav I strengthened the public dimension of his personal rule. Yet the concentration of executive power in the person of the monarch indicated that the central control of local affairs would be limited. Corruption remained a problem when the local administration expanded, as demonstrated by the number of bitter complaints directed against royal officials.

The judicial system saw no major attempt at reform in Gustav I's reign. The medieval Law of the Realm remained intact, and its application remained a matter for the provincial and town courts. If anything, political control was tightened by the royal appointment of district judges, which threatened to undermine the autonomy of

the local courts. This development, however, was never completed and the Vasa regime made no systematic attempts to intervene in the dispensing of justice locally. Nevertheless, the new institution of hereditary monarchy bolstered the status of both the aristocratic Council of the Realm and the Four Estates. Collective political rights were now codified and extended to burghers and peasants, in addition to magnates and clerics. Swedish society, of course, remained hierarchical, but now with the commoners' distinctive voices being heard. Finally, the Riksdag of 1544 introduced constitutional restraints on the monarch, in the form of a more detailed Act of Succession. Hereditary monarchy came at a price, though, which meant greater leeway for negotiations between the ruler and the political groups in his country.

Political participation

The first Vasa regime shift did not result in any significant erosion of social privilege. Although the exclusive position of the church institutions had been successively undermined, the social status of the aristocracy remained intact. One might even argue that the 'new aristocracy' could command an even more exclusive social position, being relatives of the king by marriage and his chief advisors. However, the aristocratic supporters of the Vasa regime shift were never allowed permanent positions in the royal organization; rather, they were used as troubleshooters, responsible for ad hoc solutions when the ordinary administrative system failed. The aristocratic Council of the Realm saw its traditional intermediate position weakened, as the monarch could now turn to his own organization to address administrative matters.

The introduction of hereditary monarchy in 1544 strengthened the monarchy and weakened the role of the provincial magnates, who lost the right to reject or approve the rulers of Sweden. The new constitution thus elevated the Vasa monarchs over their aristocratic peers, while recognizing the role of representative institutions. The Riksdag allowed both peasants and parish priests a voice in political matters, alongside the burghers and noblemen. Although the Riksdag

was not formally recognized as a permanent institution of government, the regime shift established the meetings of the Estates as the national arena to decide on constitutional matters. The Riksdag would demonstrate remarkable resilience throughout the early modern period, offering political actors the means to restore constitutional rule in times of domestic strife and international crisis.

Perhaps the Vasa regime shift in fact extended social privilege to a whole new group: the peasant freeholders. The right to pay taxes directly to the king might not appear a social advantage today, but it established the peasantry as a legitimate force in the country's domestic affairs. The peasants were represented at the Riksdag, and their local organs for self-government were integrated into the new system of government. The same could be said also for the town courts, representing the political voice of the burghers and urban craftworkers. Due to its local connections, the Riksdag could be a formidable instrument for interest aggregation by the monarch, but also a channel for legitimate protest from the lower Estates.

Broadening political participation potentially weakened the position of the traditional elites. This opened for the three-way conflict so characteristic of Swedish politics in subsequent centuries, as the monarch could choose support from either the nobility or the lower Estates. What the new constitutional law failed to provide was effective instruments to prevent arbitrary rule by the monarch. Gustav I might have moderated his claims to absolute rule, but the strong position of the monarch was a threat to Sweden's representative institutions for years to come.

Coda – The first Vasa regime shift

The series of dramatic events spanning the 'German period' to the Riksdag of 1544 fundamentally changed the character of Swedish government. Gustav I secured the military and administrative resources he needed for a system of personal rule. But the great peasant uprising of 1542–1543 forced him to abandon his plans for a permanent government administration modelled on continental examples. Instead,

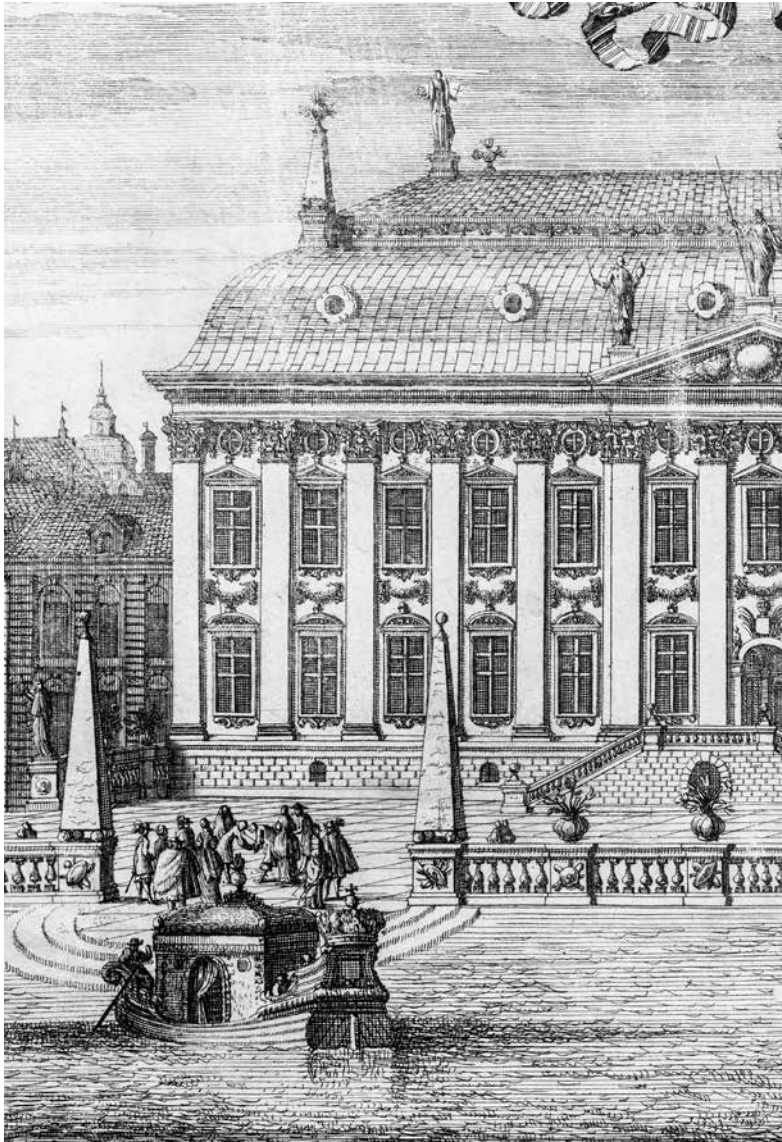
Gustav I opted to rule by consent, with the Council of the Realm and the Estates, and an extensive royal organization under his own command. The result shifted the balance of power in favour of the king, at the expense of the provincial magnates who had dominated politics for centuries.

The country's representative institutions had supported the regime shift, but they were relegated to the margins in Gustav I's personal rule. The king at first tried to introduce absolute forms of government, supported by the aristocracy and a small contingent of German experts. His ambitious reform programme eventually backfired, and the Dacke War meant he had to turn to the Estates to restore the legitimacy of his regime. The Riksdag was instrumental in implementing personal rule, but political representation had no permanent role in the new system. The Estates would not be called again until 1560, when Gustav was on his deathbed. Peasant resistance may have played a decisive role in changing the policies of the new regime, but the Estate of the Peasants did not establish itself as a major political force until the turn of the seventeenth century.

The regime shift of 1538–1544 introduced new institutions of government that would form a backbone of Sweden's state administration right up to the modern period. The new constitutional law supported primogeniture and secured the exclusive claims of the Vasa dynasty. The tax system was reorganized to promote central control and was backed up by an extensive local administration, operating through the local arenas of self-government. From 1544 the king commanded a standing army of peasant soldiers that would continue to grow, eventually becoming the Swedish armed forces. The communication channels between central and local arenas that Gustav Vasa relied on were the linchpin of the Swedish monarchy in subsequent centuries.

The Vasa regime shift strengthened the executive powers of the monarch and state capacity. Hereditary monarchy, however, also created a window of opportunity for the representative institutions that would open wide on the death of Gustav I. Monarchical rule depended on informal alliances with the aristocracy and the Estates, and Gustav's successors found such relations hard to sustain. The small cadre

of loyal secretaries who supervised an extensive local organization were stretched to the limit. The resurgence of international conflict mid-century put stress on the system of government, and eventually provoked new waves of disruption.



Jean Le Pautre, *Palatium Ordinis Equestris Lacum Mäler versus* (1670–1674) from *Suecia antiqua et hodierna*. Riddarhuset, the House of Nobility in Stockholm, was established by an ordinance drafted by Axel Oxenstierna in 1626, to mark the exclusive status of the Swedish nobility. The ordinance also secured the dominance of the aristocratic families by giving them the leadership of the Estate of the Nobles. Credit: National Library of Sweden.

Aristocratic interventions

The making of bureaucratic government, 1617–1626

Following the ascension of Gustav II Adolf (r.1611–1632), the Swedish state embarked on an intensive phase of institutional change. While the local administrative structures introduced by Gustav I Vasa were mostly retained, they were supplemented and subordinated to new bureaucratic institutions at the central and regional levels. The first Vasa regime shift in 1538–1544 had strengthened monarchical rule by creating a centralized fiscal–military organization, controlled by the king and a handful of loyal secretaries. The regime shift of 1617–1626 was also staged from above, but involved multiple political actors and profoundly affected the effectiveness and endurance of the system of government. The result was a bureaucratic fiscal–military state that combined domestic stability with territorial expansion in the following decades.

Gustav I's reforms had created an extensive system of government where executive power lay firmly in the hands of the king. This system of personal rule was further developed by his successors, but the combination of international conflict and domestic strife put the regime under increasing stress. The Nordic Seven Years War (1563–1570) drained government finances, and the Twenty-Five Years War (1570–1595) with Russia pushed the Swedish state close to bankruptcy. The military operations had to be supported by extraordinary taxes and the mass conscription of peasant soldiers. While the peasantry shouldered the lion's share of the burden of war, the

monarchs ultimately depended on the political support of the lower Estates. The aristocratic opposition, centred around the Council of the Realm, was generally sceptical of military adventures and often at odds with the Vasa rulers.¹⁵⁶

The situation deteriorated further in the rule of Karl IX (regent 1592–1598, r.1598–1609). The disastrous defeat at the hands of the Polish infantry at Kirkholm (Salaspils in Latvia) in 1604 left the Swedish army in a shambles. Karl's dynastic conflict with his nephew Sigismund of Poland prompted the Swedish ruler to deploy increasingly coercive methods to extract resources. This was potentially fatal to the regime, as Karl had courted the support of the commoners to depose Sigismund and win the crown. By the early seventeenth century, political support for the Vasa regime was at a low ebb and the fiscal–military system seemed to have reached the point of collapse.¹⁵⁷

When Karl IX died in late 1611, his legacy for his only son and heir, Gustav II Adolf, was not to be envied. Sweden was at war on three fronts, with Denmark, Poland, and Russia. Danish troops controlled the important fortress of Älvsborg, Sweden's only west coast port. Karl IX had alienated most of the aristocratic elite by his ruthless persecution of Sigismund's supporters.¹⁵⁸ To claim his right to rule, Gustav Adolf had to sign an Accession Charter in 1611 – the *kungaförsäkran* – restricting royal power and acknowledging the rights of the Council of the Realm to participate in all matters of government. This document has been regarded as an extension of the late sixteenth-century constitutional programme, drafted by the aristocratic opponents of the Vasas' personal rule.¹⁵⁹

Gustav II Adolf, however, turned out to be a successful ruler. In 1617 he joined forces with his chancellor Axel Oxenstierna to introduce reforms that would change the character of the government organization. While the king concentrated on his duties as military commander, Axel Oxenstierna designed the fiscal and administrative measures necessary to sustain the Swedish war effort.¹⁶⁰ When the king was killed in battle, the new system of government of bureaucratic bodies was codified in the Instrument of Government from 1634.

Although this constitutional order was never ratified by a monarch, it continued in place until replaced by a new constitution in 1719.¹⁶¹

We argue that the transformation of the system of government must be understood as a radical regime shift rather than an extended political process. The regime shift created a new form of permanent government organization, capable of functioning without the presence of a monarch. This critical juncture involved the principal agents of the state, but it also engaged groups hitherto not so active in state affairs: merchants and clergymen. Unlike the first regime shift, political developments in the time of Gustav II Adolf cannot only be attributed to the ruler's personal ambition. Rather, dynamic interactions caused individuals and groups with sometimes conflicting interests to invest in the new regime.

State of the art – The Swedish Empire

Gustav II Adolf's rule and the rise of Sweden as an imperial power has long been a favourite subject for scholars. Until the mid-twentieth century, Swedish historians focused mainly on the personal achievements of the king and his chancellor. The latter had originally supported the aristocratic programme aimed at constraining monarchical power. Nils Ahnlund argues that the national crisis following the Danish victory in the Kalmar war forced Gustav II Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna to join forces against Sweden's enemies. The political achievements of the Swedish government were explained as the effect of (re-)establishing national unity in the face of external threats.¹⁶² This was further developed by the British historian Michael Roberts, who hailed the king as a military reformer and pioneer of the military revolution that would transform warfare in early modern Europe and around the world.¹⁶³

Sven A. Nilsson argues that Sweden's transformation into a well-organized military state was driven by internal conflict rather than by external threats. Military reform depended on fiscal resources, which forced the king and the chancellor to cooperate to effectively exploit the peasantry. From 1617 the shift was on its way, with Gustav II Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna organizing the Swedish state for

territorial expansion.¹⁶⁴ This potentially left the government at odds with the Swedish aristocracy who wanted to claim land and labour for themselves. The conflict was settled by integrating the aristocrats into the emerging bureaucratic system and offering to share the spoils of war with them.

Jan Lindegren builds on Nilsson's approach to analyse the early modern Swedish state as a complex system for the exploitation of domestic resources to facilitate military expansion. Interestingly, while describing a system that remained in place for almost a century, Lindegren puts great emphasis on the reforms introduced around 1620.¹⁶⁵ Likewise, Jan Glete, while advocating a structural perspective, focuses on Gustav II Adolf and his chancellor's reforms when explaining Sweden's transformation into a major European power. Glete maintains that the Swedish king should be understood as a skilful military entrepreneur, briskly reorganizing the state administration while maintaining political support for the new regime.¹⁶⁶

The military state perspective thus points to the period around 1620 as a critical juncture in the development of the Swedish state. In opposition to this, scholars studying domestic social conflict and political interaction have generally opted for a processual approach. Eva Österberg claims that early modern politics must be analysed from a social perspective, highlighting local negotiations and interactions rather than high politics.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Nils-Erik Villstrand has focused on local relations although with much greater emphasis on social conflict.¹⁶⁸ Øystein Rian, who has compared the development of the Swedish and Danish 'power states' in the seventeenth century, underlines the systematic character of Swedish government in the early modern period. While both Scandinavian polities were transformed into effective fiscal-military states, the Swedish state was much more systematically organized than its Danish counterpart, capable of intervening in local affairs regularly.¹⁶⁹

The historiography of the Swedish Empire has increasingly favoured structural explanations rather than the traditional grand narrative of master politicians. The net effect of this has been to underestimate the room for radical change, analysing early modern politics as a

continuing process of state formation and social mobilization. The political scientist Klas Nilsson takes another approach, focusing on the successive regime shifts that transformed the early modern Swedish state. Although he does not address the case of Gustav II Adolf, Klas Nilsson points to the relevance of fiscal reform and political mobilization. Access to what he calls ‘non-proprietary revenue’ – foreign subsidies and loans, regalian rights, and revenue from crown domains – sustained the autonomy of monarchical rule at certain critical junctures in Swedish history.¹⁷⁰

We argue that the regime shift of 1617–1626 had far-reaching implications in two areas of political rule. First, the financial and administrative institutions founded by Gustav II Adolf and his chancellor would ensure a robust administrative system for almost two centuries, despite recurrent political upheavals. Rather than depending on foreign subsidies, the fiscal and military capacity of the Swedish state made the regime attractive both as an ally and as a creditor.¹⁷¹ Second, this stability of government at the same time cemented a structural conflict between the monarch and the high nobility over who should control the extensive government organization. This interplay of bureaucratic consolidation and political instability in turn ensured the lower Estates had a say, using the political and constitutional channels offered by the Riksdag (the Swedish Diet).¹⁷²

It is less evident, however, how to delineate this critical juncture from the following period of implementation and political development. Many scholars have pointed to 1634 and Axel Oxenstierna’s Instrument of Government as the climax of the administrative reforms. The document, presented after Gustav II Adolf’s death in battle, outlined a bureaucratic system based on five government agency boards, each headed by an aristocratic president. Although never ratified by a monarch, the 1634 Instrument of Government would serve as a blueprint for the central administration for the rest of the century. Ahnlund sees Oxenstierna’s draft constitution as the culmination of a long political struggle to re-establish national unity. The balance of powers with the five government agency boards was testament to the successful alliance between the king and his aristocratic chancellor.¹⁷³

This interpretation has been challenged by Sven A. Nilsson and other historians, who point to the conflicting motives of the king and the leading aristocrats. Nilsson claims that the 1634 document was part of a concerted effort by the high nobility to restore their constitutional position after years of monarchical rule.¹⁷⁴ From this perspective, the Instrument of Government was a determined attempt to roll back the previous regime shift in favour of aristocratic dominance. This ultimately left the second Vasa regime shift a failed project, incapable of surviving the absence of a monarch.

We agree with Johan Holm's assertion that the 1634 Instrument of Government is best understood as Axel Oxenstierna's strategic move to consolidate the military state project. Holm identifies 1617–1626 as the formative period, when the chancellor and the king joined forces to establish a strong, centralized state. The following period, ending in the death of the king in 1632, saw the implementation of the expansive policies typical of 'the extreme military state'. The Instrument of Government was drafted by the chancellor to ensure the political system was secure in the event of the king's sudden death. Gustav II Adolf's military exploits placed the king on the frontline, and his death in battle in 1632 had not been totally unexpected.¹⁷⁵

The 1634 Instrument of Government thus meant a codification and an institutionalization of a system of government that had already been implemented. The actual regime shift took place in 1617–1626 and the Instrument of Government was designed to secure the system for the future. The Instrument of Government was an answer to the lingering question of who should control the formidable powers of the military state: the monarch, the aristocracy, or even the Estates?

The critical juncture of 1617–1626

The critical juncture of 1617–1626 started with a financial crisis that prompted the king and his chancellor to introduce measures that changed the character of the Swedish state. They transformed its fiscal administration to promote monetization and attract foreign capital. Central government institutions were strengthened, while a new pro-

vincial level of administration was introduced. This expansion of state power was made possible by integrating aristocratic and merchant networks and the extensive organization of the Church of Sweden into government administration. However, swiftly implementing top-down policies required political support, a fact that compelled Sweden's rulers to recognize the need for representative politics and institutionalized bargaining. The result was a bureaucratic regime controlled by the king and the leading aristocrats, where the Riksdag and the Council of the Realm were transformed into permanent institutions with separate functions.

'War made the state, and the state made war.' Charles Tilly's much-quoted aphorism is spot-on for seventeenth-century Sweden.¹⁷⁶ War – and the cost of waging war – drove the reshaping of its government organization after 1611. The war against Denmark had come to its dismal conclusion in 1613, with a peace treaty that forced Sweden to pay the gigantic sum of 1 million riksdaler silvermynt to reclaim the key fortress of Älvsborg. The Swedish campaigns to the east, however, had been more successful. The Treaty of Stolbovo in 1617 brought it new territories, and Sweden now controlled the whole eastern coastline of the Baltic Sea from Tornio in the North to Riga in the South.

The Accession Charter of 1611 had left Gustav II Adolf at odds with the aristocratic members of the Council of the Realm. However, the cost of war and impending financial ruin compelled the king and chancellor Axel Oxenstierna to concentrate on strengthening the state administration.¹⁷⁷ Paying the ransom of Älvsborg required an extra property tax levied nationally and innovative strategies for obtaining credit. The tax was duly collected, but the government also had to negotiate loans from aristocrats and leading merchants, against payments in Swedish copper that could be sold on European markets. The precarious financial situation was an incitement to engage the noble and merchant elites in the managing of Sweden's public debt.¹⁷⁸

The Crown's financial problems promoted the internationalization and commercialization of the Swedish economy. Swedish merchants could not provide enough credit, so the government had to establish

permanent relations with the leading merchant houses in Amsterdam. This mobilization of external resources included human capital, as several highly competent merchants and administrators were persuaded to move permanently to Sweden.¹⁷⁹ If we apply Immanuel Wallerstein's analysis of the world system, the Swedish state campaigned for promotion from periphery to semi-periphery by offering trading privileges and the exploitation of natural resources to attract foreign capital.¹⁸⁰

A decisive step was the leasing out of Crown rents. In 1621, Gustav II Adolf ordered that all Crown rents should be farmed out to merchants or officials able to guarantee a fixed sum of expected revenue in advance. The bailiffs were ordered to abandon their rural homes to set up as merchants in the nearest town.¹⁸¹ From now on the peasants had to pay their taxes and dues to a burgher-cum-contractor no longer living in the district.¹⁸² The Swedish peasants effectively lost their right to bargain directly with Crown representatives and were compelled to seek redress by petitioning the king or the county governor. The Swedish state, on the other hand, secured direct, regular payments without having to manage the cumbersome process of transforming payments-in-kind into ready cash. The tax contracts also established formal relations with merchant creditors and business entrepreneurs. These included foreign experts such as the Flemish industrialist Louis de Geer, who would play a leading role in financing and developing Swedish weapon production.¹⁸³

Jan Lindegren has emphasized the crucial role of merchants in the emerging Swedish military state. They were involved in tax collection, traded the peasants' produce, and generally fuelled the transformation of use-value into exchange-value for the benefit of the state.¹⁸⁴ In the following years, the government introduced monetary taxes to support the continuing war effort: a livestock and property tax in 1620, the 'little toll' in 1622 (an internal excise duty), and a mill tax in 1624 (levied on all peasants for grinding their grain). All these taxes were bitterly opposed by the peasants, but were nevertheless swiftly implemented and substantially increased the government's monetary resources. They were supposed to be temporary but, apart

from the mill tax, became part of the peasants' collective tax burden for centuries to come.¹⁸⁵

Lundkvist has argued that the Swedish state in the 1620s reached a peak in tax income. The regime shift thus directly affected the state economy and imposed considerable burdens on the tax-paying peasantry.¹⁸⁶ Despite this, the new extractive regime was effectively implemented with no major upheavals. This may be attributed to the interactive nature of the Swedish tax system, where the peasants could act through legal channels to influence the distribution of the fiscal burden. True, there were occasional riots and violent protestations, but these involved mainly politically marginalized groups: discharged soldiers, farmhands, and rural craftworkers. The freeholder peasants concentrated on formal complaints discussed in the Riksdag and seem to have been reasonably successful in adjusting the fiscal burdens to local needs.¹⁸⁷ And the commercialization of the economy had its benefits, as the peasantry were now paid for their labour that had previously been coerced from them.¹⁸⁸

For the king, military reform came first. While the Accession Charter formally restricted the king's executive power in domestic politics, Gustav Adolf's role as commander-in-chief gave him substantial leeway to create structural changes. In his *Krigsordning* (Military Ordinance) from 1620, the king envisioned an extended conscription system for recruiting peasant soldiers: the parish clergy were ordered to keep registers of all households and individuals, carefully noting all births, deaths, and departures from the parish, and to pass the relevant information to the recruiting officers.¹⁸⁹ The combination of local knowledge supplied by the clergy and the administrative skills of state officials helped refine the information base on which the Swedish military state relied. Human capital and information capacity were instrumental in increasing tax revenue and military means.¹⁹⁰

The new recruits were integrated in provincial regiments, standardized military units where they would train and fight side by side with their peers. Glete has argued that the new army organization promoted cohesion among soldiers, helping to transform the old peasant militia into an offensively-oriented war machine. The army

was in turn supported by a strong navy, financed mainly by the Swedish peasantry through taxes and labour obligations negotiated at the Riksdag. The military effort was underpinned by an effective interest aggregation that could guarantee general compliance despite increasing burdens.¹⁹¹

Since the mid-sixteenth century the clergy had read out the occasional *böndagsplakat* (announcements of days of intercession) in church. In Gustav II Adolf's reign these became regular events, used by the government to inform congregations about the course of the war. The king had a formidable instrument for propaganda reaching all his people in the country attending Sunday services.¹⁹² The integration of new groups such as merchants and clergymen in a state-dominated system marked a significant change from the early Vasa regime. State organization was no longer a matter for the king and his personal servants, but for all the politically organized groups in Swedish society.

Oxenstierna's administrative reforms promoted active participation from the aristocracy in the daily business of government. This involved the transformation of the aristocratic Council of the Realm into an executive body, supporting the monarch's policies. It also meant the creation of new government bodies, led by nobles who now became top bureaucrats.¹⁹³ While promoting administrative skills and bureaucratic procedure, this policy also helped boost the social status of the central administration. The reforms had started with the judicial system, which was gradually expanded and centralized by the introduction of new appellate courts: the Svea Court of Appeal in Stockholm in 1614, the Åbo Court of Appeal for Finland in 1623 (in modern Turku), the Dorpat Court of Appeal for Sweden's Baltic provinces in 1630 (in modern Tartu), and the Göta Court of Appeal for southern Sweden in 1634.

Although the king insisted he was free to impose his will on court proceedings, the new system still marked an advance in terms of impartiality and the rule of law. Local decisions could be appealed to the royal courts. The district courts were ordered to submit yearly summaries of all the cases heard, and these registers were duly

scrutinized by legal experts in the central courts. The system thus furthered a professionalization of the legal system, in what has been dubbed 'a judicial revolution'.¹⁹⁴ The new court system also required investment in education, as a cadre of young assistants received their practical training at the appellate courts.¹⁹⁵

The pace of administrative reform accelerated in 1617. That year saw the first legislation regulating the Riksdag, followed by a string of ordinances for the regional and local administration.¹⁹⁶ The ordinances of October 1618 reorganized both the royal Chancery and the Treasury; the former as an operative centre run by the chancellor himself, the latter as a collegiate board. The instruction for the Chancery stipulated a rudimentary hierarchy and a strict division of labour. The government archives were entrusted to one Peder Månsson, who was to keep a record of all documents.¹⁹⁷ Historians have labelled Månsson the first national archivist.¹⁹⁸

While the Chancery kept records of government correspondence, the Treasury Board was responsible for recording all fiscal transactions. The instruction from 14 October 1618 marked a definitive break with the traditional way of administering the state finances, because it stipulated that a group of six people would assume collective responsibility for auditing the accounts, making estimates, and keeping records.¹⁹⁹ From 1619 the Treasury Board compiled estimates of yearly expenses for parts of the administration, although a *riksstat* or budget was not attempted until 1638. The clerks also produced *generalböcker* or overviews of state income (later called *rikshuvudböcker*), as well as *personalstater*, or lists of payments and the allocations of resources to government officials.²⁰⁰ The central administration thus expanded on the information base of local tax records that had been the backbone of Gustav I's fiscal reforms. The new administrative structures would remain in place for centuries, a living legacy of the second Vasa regime shift.²⁰¹

Fiscal reform required political consent, and the county governors were assigned the task of giving legitimacy to the new system of monetary taxes. The office of governor had medieval origins, but the position was now formalized as an integral part of the royal

administration.²⁰² A royal decree from 1620 stated that the governor, together with the local bishop, should summon the peasants to explain that the new tax was just and fair. The parish priests were charged with compiling tax registers, while the governor was responsible for supervising the transfer of local resources to the royal Treasury. The systematic cooperation between officials at different levels was a key feature of the Swedish tax system throughout the seventeenth century.²⁰³ Another decree in 1620 made the county governor formally responsible for auditing the local tax records.²⁰⁴ This was an important reform, for Swedish monarchs had often been wary of ceding control over local revenue to powerful magnates. From now on, the governors were royal officials first, noble landowners second.

The slew of new tasks meant there was a further increase in administrative staff. In July 1624, a new office was introduced to strengthen the provincial administration: the *bokhållare* (bookkeeper) who would be responsible for auditing all records. Meanwhile, there was an attempt to standardize the accounts according to international best practice. The wealthy Dutch merchant Abraham Cabiljau was appointed to introduce Italian bookkeeping when compiling the central administrative records. Through intensive interaction with local and regional officials, modern methods of bookkeeping were implemented on all levels of the administration in the 1620s. The new bureaucratic regime was effective in adapting specialist skills and administrative competence.²⁰⁵

The correspondence of the Treasury Board provides evidence that the county governors took their assignments seriously. They sent regular reports to Stockholm on all their dealings with noble and common subjects as well as various local officeholders. In Swedish historiography, the founding of the provincial boards in 1635 is normally regarded the decisive reform in provincial government. We argue that the 1635 ordinance for the county governors must be regarded as a codification of established procedure, as the provincial level of administration had been functioning according to the same principles for more than a decade.²⁰⁶

The expanding state administration required educated officials to work for it. The top positions were reserved for the aristocracy, while the leading bureaucrats functioned as patrons who helped fill the lower echelons of the state administration with their own clients. The chancellor helped place relatives and personal retainers in offices at different levels. The emerging patron–client system would guarantee a steady stream of hopeful candidates, eager to jump at the chance of rising through the ranks.²⁰⁷

The qualitative effects of the influx of human capital into the state administration was somewhat mixed. On the one hand, the state administration obviously benefitted from competent officials and permanent administrative bodies organized into a hierarchical system. Glete shows the Swedish state administration functioned as a ‘power container’, offering career prospects and economic benefits for competent individuals.²⁰⁸ On the other hand, the fact that the model was based on aristocratic privilege meant that corruption and nepotism would always play a part in the state administration. Johanna Thorelli’s research indicates that the aristocratic officials sometimes found it hard to navigate between government business and personal affairs.²⁰⁹ These factors remained a problem throughout the early modern period, and demands for an impartial government administration would have great resonance in the centuries to come.

In this regime shift, the representative institution of the Riksdag was generally assigned a passive role of confirming or mediating government decisions. The proposed Riksdag Act of 1617 was primarily a top–down programme to bring order and efficiency to the Estates’ unruly sittings. The king would open the meeting and declare his proposition to the full assembly. The Estates would then convene separately to prepare their joint declarations in writing. What was novel was that the Estates had to argue their position in plenum at the closing meeting held in the royal castle in Stockholm. The proceedings put the lower Estates at a clear disadvantage, because their representatives lacked the formal training and had not been part of the initial negotiations between king and council.²¹⁰

This strategy to rationalize political proceedings failed. The Estates insisted on their right to meet separately and formulate their own opinion despite external pressure.²¹¹ The government had to find other ways to agree harsh economic measures. The monetary taxes of the 1620s were often sanctioned by separate committees, rather than by a full Riksdag. Such meetings normally included representatives from the senior Estates, strategically excluding the peasants who must accept the decisions at face value.²¹² One might conclude that the Riksdag was necessary for establishing the military state, but that the meetings of the Estates threatened to become exclusively an instrument for the projection of royal power.²¹³

The legitimacy of the new regime still required the taxpayers' consent to guarantee the extraction of resources, however. The government was soon faced with formal complaints, first discussed in various local assemblies, and then forwarded to the king by the representatives of each Estate. Tax-farming and monetary taxes were the prime targets of the commoners. The meetings of the Riksdag became a way to steer the waves of protest into legal channels. This was even more important as the Swedish elite lived in fear of peasant uprisings, and violent protest was still common in some local settings.²¹⁴ Royal resolutions at the Riksdag generally denounced the abuses of landlords and contractors and offered compensation in the form of temporary tax exemptions. If the Estate of the Peasants could voice their complaints and receive mildly favourable answers from the king, the legitimacy of the regime could be kept intact. Institutional change ultimately depended on the communication of peasant complaints, and the moderating effect of favourable royal resolutions.²¹⁵

While the Riksdag retained its position as the central political arena, the Council of the Realm effectively became an executive government board, acting on behalf of the king. This was imperative, as the king himself was often abroad on campaign. The transformation began in 1617, when Gustav II Adolf started to attend council meetings in person to secure the consent of the councillors. The king also had Johan Skytte, the head of the financial administration, elected to the council as a counterweight to the nobles. With the king presiding

over meetings and his loyal bureaucrats by his side, Gustav II Adolf could effectively bend the old aristocracy to his will. To vote against the monarch was not an attractive option.²¹⁶

With the king dominating council meetings and claiming the right to appoint the speaker of the Estate of the Nobles, there was little room left for any aristocratic opposition. Nils Ahnlund has argued that the effective separation between the Estate of the Nobles and the Council of the Realm was well under way before Riddarhusordningen, the ordinance of 1626 that formally established the Estate of the Nobles as a political institution. While still members of the Riksdag, royal councillors had no vote in their Estate's proceedings. From now on, royal councillors would be recognized as government officials rather than personal representatives of the leading families. They were obliged to shoulder government responsibility, in full support of their warrior king.²¹⁷

All the changes in tax administration, army organization, and central control functions were swiftly put into practice, seemingly without major upheavals. From this perspective, the regime shift must be considered a success. However, considering the effects on impartiality and political participation, the outcome seems less clear-cut. Lindegren has argued that the formalized conscription system, requiring yearly grants by the Estates, in the long run helped secure the political position of the Estate of the Peasants.²¹⁸ The constitutional position of the Riksdag remained insecure, though. The king required the Riksdag to approve taxes and military obligations, but with a strong monarch at helm there was little room for independent action by any of the Estates.

The state as a joint venture

Agents and motives

There are several important points to consider when comparing events in 1617–1626 with the changes 80 years before. The first regime shift had been initiated by the king himself, Gustav I, in close cooperation with a small cadre of top bureaucrats. However, the Dacke War put a

stop to the alliance between Gustav I and his German experts. Instead, the regime shift was imposed by a strong alliance between the king, the top aristocracy (who were the king's in-laws), and the Estates. This alliance, formed by necessity rather than strategic planning, proved able to implement government reforms while strengthening state capacity, impartiality in government, and representative institutions.

The second Vasa regime shift was also orchestrated from above, by Gustav II Adolf and his top bureaucrats, led by chancellor Axel Oxenstierna. The collaboration between king and aristocracy proved vital not only for implementing government reform, but for the further development of the system of government. Effectively, this meant the integration of the landed, aristocratic elite into the very being of state power. The new bureaucratic regime offered lucrative rewards in the form of land grants and other benefits of high office. The role of the Riksdag, meanwhile, was more passive. The members of the Estates took no decisive action on their own, but mainly supported the government agenda. The Riksdag and the local arenas for self-government played an important role in implementing and adapting the reforms, but the commoners' political representatives mainly played a reactive role at this juncture.

When Gustav II Adolf ascended the throne in 1611, the resurgence of an aristocratic, constitutional regime seemed a possibility. But the intensive period of reform in 1617–1626 turned the tide and left its mark on government for years to come. We argue that the development of the military state must be analysed as the direct result of the regime shift instigated by Gustav II Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna in the years following the king's coronation in 1617. The 1634 Instrument of Government was essentially a codification of instructions and practices introduced around 1620. When an aristocratic regency assumed power in 1633, the new bureaucratic regime had already been operating for years.

While the first regime shift was primarily driven by internal conflict, the second regime shift was fuelled by external threats from the outset. Sweden was at war on three fronts, which compelled the key political actors – the king and the aristocracy – to collaborate to

impose reform. Ultimately, the imposition of extraordinary taxation to recover the strategic west-coast fortress of Älvsborg paved the way for financial reform, and eventually transformed the system of government into a bureaucratic military state. Foreign creditors and international experts turned out to be necessary components of the new regime, a military state jointly managed by the Swedish monarch and the aristocratic officials. Internal reorganization, then, was a precondition for obtaining the foreign subsidies needed to sustain Sweden's progress in the Thirty Years War.²¹⁹

State capacity

The effect of the regime shift of 1617–1626 was a dramatic increase in state capacity in terms of resources, policy instruments, and the power of implementation. The influx of human capital was perhaps the most conspicuous effect. Although the reform programme was launched from inside, by the king and the chancellor, the implementation required the active support of foreign experts in capital, administration, and industrial enterprise. The Swedish government organization became increasingly transnational in character, using the resources of Dutch merchant capitalists and expert bureaucrats as well as Scottish tradesmen and military entrepreneurs.²²⁰ Whereas Gustav I was forced to abandon his programme to reshape government administration with the help of German experts, Gustav Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna successfully put their policies into practice by tapping into the international network of experts-cum-adventurers.

The recruitment of administrative and commercial experts, as well as the continuing incorporation of noble networks, brought more human capital into state institutions. The tax-farming system enabled the further integration of merchant entrepreneurs and small-town burghers into the system of government. The expansion of human capital was also boosted by the systematic participation and interactions between parish priests and peasant representatives. Finally, the means of violence controlled by the state were reinforced and multiplied. Effective administrative control enabled yearly conscription to sustain large armies, while special expertise and cash payments

facilitated the building of warships and navy transport ships. The fiscal support for a naval organization controlled by the monarch was extraordinary by European standards.²²¹

Information control was helped along by the parish clergy. Tax-farming and monetary taxes – and the favourable export price for copper – strengthened the financial base of the state and enabled the government to obtain the necessary credit. The systematic processing of information was furthered by the establishing of a provincial level of government and the introduction of modern principles of accounting. The new institutions expanded and refined the knowledge base for the central control of local resources.

The Swedish state also acquired sharper policy instruments by opening new propaganda channels and strengthening the institutions for negotiating taxes and conscription. Negotiations took place in the district courts, and grievances were forwarded to the county governors and the king presiding at the Riksdag. Implementation powers were strengthened accordingly, by state officials and various social groups working together systematically at all levels of government. That most of the instructions drafted by the chancellor and other top bureaucrats were swiftly put into practice bears witness to the effectiveness of the reforms.

Impartiality

The effects of the regime shift were less clear-cut when it came to government impartiality and the rule of law. Plainly, the bureaucratic procedures introduced by Axel Oxenstierna – formal instructions, collective decisions, the systematic monitoring of transactions – failed in limiting the scope for royal discretion in matters of government. Gustav II Adolf claimed the right to intervene in judicial affairs and council proceedings, whenever it suited his own agenda. The king was also willing to curtail the participation of the Estates by enforcing the ratification of new obligations through smaller committees. Far from imposing constitutional restrictions on the king, the new regime extended monarchical rule.

Yet the introduction of courts of appeal obviously strengthened individual rights to judicial redress. The professionalization of the judicial system also boosted consistency in proceedings and verdicts. The monetization of the economy offered better security and regular compensation for government officials as well as taxpayers.²²² Aristocratic patronage and the potentially disruptive effect of tax-farming, however, still left scope for malpractice. For the high officials, the distinction between private and public matters remained blurred, although there was a far greater requirement for diligence and correct accounting. In terms of strengthening individual rights, it is hard to identify any real effects of the second Vasa regime shift. The provincial auditing of tax records furthered calculability and transparency in government, but that was potentially threatened by the tax farmers' tendency to pursue their own gain at the expense of the taxpayers.

The strengthening of impartial jurisdiction and transparency in government may be better understood as an extended process of institutional change. True, the reforms of Gustav II Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna promoted the development of an institutional memory, which might have boosted calculability and transparency in matters of taxation. The room for corruption was still considerable, however, as demonstrated by the many complaints against tax farmers and conscription officers. The reforms of 1617–1626 established a better framework for maintaining rule of law, but protection of civil rights and liberties still had a long way to go.

Political participation

Representative institutions remained important throughout the critical juncture of 1617–1626, and in some ways strengthened their position. The Riksdag was repeatedly called on to sanction new taxes and army conscription, and the district courts were engaged in levying taxes and conscripting soldiers. The new bureaucratic regime could not do without the active support of the Estates. However, although the Riksdag met regularly, the scope for independent action by the lower Estates was limited by the strong alliance between Gustav II Adolf and the aristocracy. The monarch controlled the agenda, and

the commoners were consistently pressured into accepting financial exploitation. Even so, the practice of petitioning the king and receiving a favourable hearing at the Riksdag was maintained and even strengthened. This communication channel between the peasantry and the monarch was important for maintaining the legitimacy of the new regime. The interaction between local arenas and national institutions of government would remain fundamental to Swedish politics.

The political participation of the four Estates was officially recognized, but the political community was not enlarged to include new groups. Political rights were not universally applied, and there was no coordinated opposition to tackle noble privileges or the system of government. It is possible to contend that the proliferation of administrative institutions led to intensified bargaining between taxpayers and their superiors, broadening the scope for political participation. The need to conscript peasant soldiers could have secured the long-term participation of the Estate of the Peasants at the Riksdag. However, these political channels were open only to taxpayers, meaning the peasant freeholders who controlled and cultivated their own lands. The daily practices of the military state may have widened the social gap between the peasant freeholders and the marginalized groups in local society, who were effectively excluded from political proceedings.²²³

Rather than questioning social privilege, the new political regime cemented the fundamentals of Estate-based society. Integrating the aristocracy into the system of government gave the social elite every opportunity to promote nepotism and personal gain, while still claiming to act for the common good. The magnates' alliance with the king came at a cost, though. The Council of the Realm was transformed into a government board and no longer acted as the locus of aristocratic opposition. There is ample evidence that the aristocratic officials took their role as public servants seriously, but the military state offered them plenty of room to twist government business to align with their own personal interests.

It is also debatable whether the regime shift strengthened the constitutional instruments to safeguard mutual agreements. Most ordinances drafted by the chancellor were never ratified by the king,

and the constitutional position of the Estates remained unclear – in theory if not in practice. While the system of government prevailed for half a century, there would be recurring conflicts about who should wield executive power and control the administration. The alliance between the king and the aristocracy could not be taken for granted, and its foundations might be undermined whenever the monarch was weak. In 1680, this struggle for supremacy led to a new critical juncture that would shift the political balance of the Swedish military state.

Coda – The second Vasa regime shift

The idea that events in 1617–1626 were a regime shift rests on two premises. First, Sweden's government organization had all but collapsed in the last years of Karl IX's reign. The personal system of rule that Karl insisted on maintaining could not mobilize the resources or the political support needed to counter the impending crisis of war. Second, the reforms introduced from 1617 were already implemented in the first half of the 1620s. The tax system was changed to secure a steady flow of monetary income, and a provincial level of administration was introduced to control the widening range of transactions. The system was in place by 1626, although it would be subject to further changes in subsequent decades.

The representative institutions of government were important arenas for negotiation, but generally restricted to a passive role. The expanding military state depended on quick decision-making, and the king opted to dominate the Council of the Realm and the meetings of the Estates. This development, however, was challenged on the king's death in 1632, when the aristocratic minority government needed the support of the Estates to seem legitimate.²²⁴ The regime installed by Gustav II Adolf and his chancellor was neither all autocratic nor all constitutional; rather, it was a novel, hybrid regime – a populist aristocratic autocracy – where a strong monarch could ally with the aristocracy, while still cultivating the support of the lower Estates. The prime mover of change was international conflict and the dynastic ambitions that fuelled organizational innovation.

When it came to institutional change, the regime shift involved the creation of new government institutions as well as the drifting and layering of old ones. The scope for change was obvious in the administrative sphere: new government agencies, a provincial level of administration, tax-farming, and systematic bookkeeping. While the system of leases was eventually abandoned after the death of Gustav II Adolf, the new administrative institutions would remain the pillars of government for the rest of the early modern period. There was also a successive layering of existing institutions. The new courts of appeal were integrated in the existing national framework and district courts. An already extensive local administration was regulated in new ways, and the local infantry was incorporated into provincial regiments. The country's representative institutions were retained but given new functions. The path dependency from the first Vasa regime shift favoured central control of local resources and this would remain a legacy of the bureaucratic regime created by Gustav Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna.

The second Vasa regime shift strengthened state capacity, while its immediate effects on impartiality and political participation were moderately positive. The regime shift in 1617–1626 created a fiscal–military state that could operate independently of the monarch's presence. For the rest of the century, the main bone of contention would be the matter of who should ultimately control this organization, the king or the aristocracy? With the lower Estates generally siding with the monarch, the result was a three-way conflict sustained by the demands of war. This institutionalized instability would characterize Swedish politics for the rest of the century and beyond.



Johan Philip Lemke, *Karl XI (1655–1697) i slaget vid Lund* (n.d.). The king's leadership in the Skåne War and heroism at Lund cemented his status as the nation's saviour and laid the foundations for Carolinian absolutism, which centred on military strength and military-style order-giving, including in the civil administration. Credit: Nationalmuseum.

War and peace

The making of royal autocracy, 1675–1683

In the 1680s Karl XI gained absolute power over the Swedish state and its empire. This was a major event in Swedish political history, and it left deep marks on Swedish society. Carolinian absolutism, as it is called, was a conscious effort to change the government of Sweden by transferring power from the Council of the Realm and the Riksdag (the Swedish Diet) to the king. The oligarchy of aristocratic families that had prospered in the seventeenth century was shattered, and the Riksdag lost all real influence on policy. Pervasive reforms enhanced the state capacity, and Karl XI successfully presented himself as the saviour of the realm. This regime shift had major implications for the trajectory of Swedish history at a critical juncture.

Swedish imperial expansion between 1620 and 1660 had led to increasing tensions in society. The incessant wars meant soaring taxes and the endless conscription of young men. These burdens fell hardest on the poorest, and above all the peasantry. Meanwhile, the top aristocrats did well: they won land in the new territories and were rewarded with grants of Crown land for their contributions to the war effort. The peasantry grew increasingly fearful, believing they would be reduced to a life of servitude under noble dominion. The aristocrats wielded great influence on the formulating of policy through the Council of the Realm, and, because they held all the great offices in the state apparatus, on the implementation of decisions.²²⁵

In the reigns of Gustav II Adolf and his daughter Queen Kristina the aristocracy were the monarchs' most important allies, even though the Crown sometimes allied with the commoners. One such occasion was Kristina's Coronation Riksdag in 1650. The three lower Estates made common cause against the Estate of the Nobles and demanded the resumption of Crown land, reduced privileges for the nobility, and checks on the nobles' alleged abuses of power. For short-term political gain, Kristina encouraged the commoners, who in response wrote a submission which amounted to a political programme. This programme laid out a plan for Crown finances that differed from the policies of the first half of the seventeenth century, and it revolved around the recovery of Crown land from noble ownership. Even though the queen ultimately rejected it and once again allied with the nobility, the programme was not forgotten.²²⁶

Kristina's immediate successor, Karl X Gustav, concluded Sweden's wars of expansion. He also decided on a partial resumption of Crown land, though it was not fully implemented at the time of his death in 1660. His son and successor, Karl XI, was four years old, so regents governed in his stead. Being aristocrats from the Council, they did not carry on the resumption policy. This hampered their ability to wage an active foreign policy: attempts to raise extra taxes needed for the armed forces were met by demands to implement Karl X Gustav's resumption programme. So, there would be no new taxes. To raise funds for the Crown, the regents allied with France's King Louis XIV who paid generous subsidies. The alliance was criticized by the lower Estates, since they feared it would increase the risk of war. They were proved right: Louis called for the promised Swedish assistance against his enemies in 1674. Sweden then suffered defeat in a minor battle against the Elector of Brandenburg at Fehrbellin, which crushed the myth of the invincibility of its army. The period of peace that had begun in 1660 had harmed military preparedness, leaving the armed forces insufficiently trained, equipped, and supplied.²²⁷ Thus there were certainly internal tensions that with the benefit of hindsight seemed bound to lead to open conflict. But it was an external trigger, the war

of the late 1670s, that was the immediate cause of the regime shift, and without it the outcome could have been very different.

State of the art – The introduction of absolutism

The idea that absolutism existed in name only has been advanced by some historians, often with reference to the case of King Louis XIV.²²⁸ The power of *Le Roi Soleil* has been shown to be less than godlike because he sometimes had to take the interests of bureaucracies, social groups and the like into account. We would counter that the rejection of absolutism as a political reality comes from setting the bar for what counted as absolute rule unreasonably high. If there were no such thing as absolutism, the Swedish regime shift of the 1680s would not have been significant. But it unquestionably was – as all contemporaries acknowledged.

There is general agreement among historians that Karl XI of Sweden did indeed appropriate massive prerogatives for himself. He was given the power to legislate as he wished; he had the right to revoke and grant Crown possessions at will; the powerful armed forces of the Swedish Empire were at his personal command; he was given powers to tax at will (in wartime or under threat of war, under conditions he himself could define). Simultaneously, and correspondingly, his competitors – aristocratic magnates in the Council of the Realm and beyond – were stripped of power. The Council lost virtually all political power, and the magnates' economic resources were confiscated. The Riksdag also lost its power after it had helped the king to defeat the aristocrats – the king's policies were given legitimacy by parliamentary 'answers' to leading questions posed by the king.²²⁹ In a way it paralleled how the Napoleonic government of France used plebiscites to gain legitimacy for its constitutional changes.²³⁰

Thus, autocracy seemingly had popular support through the Riksdag. But on closer inspection the king's supporters in the Estates regarded the introduction of absolutism as a price they would pay to emasculate aristocratic power, rather than a goal in itself.²³¹ The political scientist Brian Downing considers the Swedish autocracy a special

case and labels it 'populist absolutism'.²³² It should be noted, however, that the Swedish absolutist kings conformed to a centuries-old pattern of rulers alternately seeking support from nobles and commoners.²³³ Thus, as the historian Sten Carlsson has argued, even if some of the richest magnates lost wealth and power, the nobility as a group were confirmed as Sweden's ruling class in the absolutist period.²³⁴ The populist element also pertained only to the process of giving legitimacy to what Karl XI's proposed. In other contexts, the official ideology ascribed divine right to the king: he answered only to God.²³⁵

Social historians of a deterministic persuasion, such as Stellan Dahlgren, have argued that the main event of the regime shift was bound to happen, come what may. That was because the aristocracy were losing their grip on the state apparatus by the 1670s and absolutism was on the rise across Europe.²³⁶ We cannot agree, however, as the magnates could have remained in power if peace had been maintained for some time after Karl's accession to the throne. He would probably have continued to rely on the aristocratic advisors he trusted in his first year in power. The aristocrats would then have continued to hold higher office – they still did in the 1670s – and entrench their power in a way that was compatible with expanding royal power.

Historians have debated whether autocracy brought greater efficiency to the Swedish bureaucracy. It has been claimed that the military was strengthened and that the bureaucracy became more efficient, and some have even described it in the language of Max Weber's ideal type of rational bureaucracy.²³⁷ This ideal too had an element of impartiality – and impartiality was seen as a feature of the Swedish absolutist state, just as it was in the Wilhelmine Germany of Max Weber.²³⁸ The dynamics of the Carolinian regime shift hold at least some of the answer.

The critical juncture of 1675–1683

In the wake of the Battle of Fehrbellin in 1675 the Danish army invaded Sweden's southern province of Skåne and its possessions in Germany. The Riksdag was assembled in Uppsala for Karl XI's

coronation when Denmark declared war. The declaration caused an immediate uproar among the Estates, with all their anger directed at the regents and the Council rather than at the young king. They asked how the aristocrats were planning to wage the war they had been dragged into by their alliance with France. Both the Riksdag and the king had discharged the regents from personal liability when the king's minority had ended in 1672; now the discharge was revoked. The Estates, led by such fierce anti-aristocrats as Mayor Olof Thegner and Bishop Johannes Terserus, demanded and were granted the right to appoint a parliamentary committee that would rigorously scrutinize the regents. Karl XI, meanwhile, showed no interest in punishing the regents. He was eager to go to war and earn martial glory to match his predecessors – the monarchical persona that Gustav II Adolf had fashioned demanded that Swedish kings led their armies into battle. The downfall of the regents (and the Council) was the initial step towards absolutism, even though its main beneficiary seemed utterly uninterested in changing anything.²³⁹

Still, the fact that the king left Stockholm and went to the army's headquarters in southern Sweden meant most of the leading aristocrats lost contact with him, further undermining their position. Karl started to rely on councillors with a different outlook. Intrigues and accusations against some of his once most trusted advisors made him suspicious, and so did the Council's clumsy attempts to regain influence. The most prominent of Karl's new advisors, the resourceful and strong-willed Johan Gyllenstierna, was himself from one of the old aristocratic families and was openly loathed as an apostate by his peers. Gyllenstierna was in favour of strong royal power, and perhaps should be regarded as the mastermind behind the moves which entrenched Karl's absolute rule. In practice, absolutism began when decision-making was concentrated in the king, and he was in the field.²⁴⁰

Apart from the Council's isolation and the war powers of a royal commander-in-chief, the war gave Karl's absolutism another priceless asset: legitimacy. The members of the regency government and the Council of the Realm were blamed for the war itself and the disas-

trous losses in its early stages. The Swedish navy suffered devastating defeats, and the army could not stop the Danes from occupying the key areas in southern Sweden. In the bloody Battle of Lund in December 1676 the stakes were high for the Swedish army, who would have a hard time recovering if they lost. But they prevailed, in part thanks to a bold action by the young king who took a handful of men and charged across the battlefield to link up with the rest of the army. The narrative was clear: the aristocrats were the problem, the king was the solution. However, the outcome of the war was still far from decided.²⁴¹

The Danes were eventually forced to abandon southern Sweden, but the occupied Swedish possessions in Germany were only returned to Karl XI after the French King intervened. In the peace negotiations, Louis XIV insisted Sweden should keep them, and the Danish King had no alternative but to accept that the war had ended in a draw, even though his forces had won overall. Would Karl's prestige have been the same if Louis had not saved him from substantial territorial losses? Perhaps, but it might not have stopped the road to absolutism even so. The king would not have been seen as a saviour, but the aristocrats would still have been blamed. The Estates might have acted with greater confidence and independence, and would have continued to gain power rather than losing influence. Either way, the Skåne War underlined a key feature of the Swedish Empire – how much it depended on strong allies, and above all France.²⁴²

As the historian Göran Rystad has argued, the legal framework of absolutism was the codification of the system established during the war. The king and his new advisors had simply taken charge of the state apparatus.²⁴³ Regarding the political changes, the pattern set at the Riksdag of 1680 was repeated at the following Riksdag in 1682–1683: Karl caught wind of something an aristocrat said that seemed to question his absolute power. The king's loyal servants in the Chancery formulated some tendentious questions to put to the Estates, with no prizes for guessing the answers Karl wanted. The Four Estates duly gave the 'correct' answers. This procedure – the formalization by the Estates of a regime change that was already in place – closely resembled the adoption of the Instrument of Govern-

ment in 1634. The first round of questions concerned whether the king was constitutionally obliged to obey the advice of the Council of the Realm, and whether he was bound by the Instrument of Government of 1634. This was directed at the aristocratic Council. The Council was under attack from the parliamentary commission that audited the policies in Karl's minority – a result of the Estates' demands in 1675. It was a purge that saw the confiscation of significant amounts of property and the discrediting of almost an entire generation of leading men from the high nobility. The king's wishes were popular among the lower Estates. But there still were debates, especially in the Estate of the Clergy, that indicated that absolute political power was not the lower Estates' primary goal; rather it was the price they had to pay for the king to carry out their financial plan.²⁴⁴

It was in 1680 that the financial plan was set in motion: the resumption of Crown goods in noble possession. The lower Estates were encouraged by the king's advisors to revive their demands from 1650. The proposal originated in the Estate of the Peasants, but was accepted even by the Estate of the Nobles – though only after a fierce debate. All the Estates were optimistic it would make any extra taxes unnecessary. Their hopes were quashed, because Karl XI needed large sums to build a new naval base, Karlskrona, in the south of Sweden. The navy had suffered catastrophic losses against the more advanced Danish naval forces, and substantial rearmament was needed along with better organization and maintenance. The results were more than satisfactory, and by Karl's death in 1697, Sweden's navy was on a par with Denmark's.²⁴⁵

In 1682 it was the turn of the army. The reform built on earlier practices that were now progressively implemented across Sweden. The previous system entailed the forced conscription of men who were rarely trained until war broke out. This had contributed to the initially poor results in the 1670s, after a peace that had lasted 15 years. Under the new system, volunteers were given a small farmstead and were expected to practise with their units multiple times a year. Even though this meant an increased burden on the peasantry, they still preferred it. The resultant *ständiga knektehållet* (lit. permanent pro-

vision of soldiers) was predictable and made freeholders *skattebönder* (tax peasants) more attractive as employers. The nobility resisted and appealed to the traditionalism of the Estate of the Peasants, but their speaker curtly replied that the new order required new laws. In the years after 1682, the Crown and the peasantry in various provinces came to agreements to regulate the implementation of the new conscription system. While these negotiations were important for the legitimacy of the system in the eyes of the peasants, it was a threat to peasant participation at the central level – the Estate of the Peasants had been key in accepting forced conscription when the Swedish Empire was expanding – and now this function disappeared. Yet in the end the peasants were given a permanent role in the Swedish state because they upheld the conscription system until it was replaced in 1901.

The army was strengthened both in quality and quantity by the reform, and the armed forces' preparedness was substantially augmented. With a large trained standing army, Karl XI could embark on a peaceful foreign policy with equanimity, safe in the knowledge that peace was no longer a threat to Sweden's security. He had also earned his share of martial glory in the Skåne War. There was peace for the rest of his reign, which made him increasingly popular among the chronically war-weary Swedes. At the same time the Riksdag's power waned, and indeed its relevance – agreeing to successive waves of conscription had been one of the Estates' most important jobs in the seventeenth century.²⁴⁶

The Riksdag of 1682–1683 agreed the resumption of more Crown land, again in answer to leading questions. In effect, the Estates were asked to give the king sovereign rights over resumptions – and grants of land. That worried the lower Estates. They did not want the king to grant land as he saw fit. Voices in the Estate of the Clergy said they liked and trusted the current king's policy, but what if a successor started handing out land as freely as Queen Kristina had? Evidently the lower Estates' and Karl's interests differed. Karl, however, tolerated no limitations on his power, and demanded that grants of Crown land to faithful servants remained a royal prerogative. Inevitably, the commoners folded – though they still saw it as a victory, since further

Crown land was returned. But as in 1680, it did not mean that the king stopped demanding new taxes.²⁴⁷

Another important decision in 1682 was the transfer of all legislative power to the king. A statement from an opposition nobleman, Anders Lilliehöök, which implied that the Riksdag had the right to participate in legislation, provoked a reaction from Karl who promptly put leading questions to the Estates. Lilliehöök's statement had concerned only administrative law, but the king and his advisors cunningly included general law in their questions. While monarchs had often exercised the right to make administrative law by themselves, a constitutional tradition dating from the Middle Ages gave the subjects' representatives the right to participate in making general law. The Estate of the Nobles was induced to condemn Lilliehöök's statement, since he was one of their number, and it acquiesced to the king's legislative prerogatives. When it was the lower Estates' turn, they meekly agreed to the royal prerogative to make administrative law, but remained silent on the question of general law. The king now declared that he had the power to make general law all by himself, but if he saw fit, he might graciously ask the Estates for their opinion. The effect was plain at the next Riksdag in 1686: Karl XI put a new law, the Church Law, before the Estates. It was a *fait accompli*. While Karl remained popular among the lower Estates, it was as much despite his power grab than because of it. There were no recorded expressions of enthusiasm about this cornerstone of absolutism from the lower Estates.²⁴⁸

Another blow to the Estates' influence was the curb put on their freedom of speech at the Riksdag of 1682–1683. It began when the king heard his royal father's will had been criticized by members of the Estate of the Nobles, and what they said had been noted down in the minutes. He demanded that the minutes of all the Estates be scrutinized for insubordinate speech. When it was found, Karl XI took his usual approach, putting a straightforward question to the Estates: did they regard the men who had slandered his father to be honest patriots. Since everyone who had spoken out of turn was in the Estate of the Nobles, the lower Estates saw their chance to gain favour with the king while doing down the nobility. The commoners

insisted the nobility should be punished collectively, while the nobility thought only the culprits should pay for their transgressions. In the end, only the most outspoken critic was singled out for punishment, and he was treated comparatively leniently. What mattered more was the king took excerpts from the Estates' answers to his question and tacked them on to an Act that effectively ended free speech in the Riksdag. From then on, members of the Riksdag were prohibited from criticizing the king and his decisions.²⁴⁹

Earlier decisions had emasculated the Council of the Realm's and the Riksdag's functions, which were increasingly taken over by the king: army conscription was no longer decided by the Estates, legislation was a royal prerogative, and the resumption of Crown land gave Karl XI financial autonomy.

The regime shift of 1675–1683 meant that the brake on royal power was removed and the institutional framework was remade as the king wished. Karl XI nevertheless agreed to work within the framework of the existing law, and he could afford to be gracious and merciful. And royal mercy was the best opponents could hope for, since he recognized no other limits to his rule than the word of God.²⁵⁰ The implications of the new system were still being worked out at Karl's death in 1697. The pattern of royal interventions persisted: anything that might infringe on his royal rights or upset him in any way and he stamped on it. For example, he heard of a small island in Sweden ruled by a baron as a feudal fief, with no regard for his royal rights. He took swift action, and in 1691 ordered the county governors to identify and investigate any similar cases.²⁵¹ Karl was also active in the administration and the judiciary, and many of the changes in the state's administration bore the signs of his relentless micromanagement.²⁵²

The road to absolutism

Agents and motives

The principal agents of absolutism fall into three groups. The first group consisted of Karl XI, his advisors, and his loyal officers and civil servants. Many of Karl's closest allies came from humble backgrounds

and were raised to high office and noble titles. This group, the lesser nobility, in the end took control, because of the actions of the king and his advisors, and it later stabilized the regime, with loyal government employees to the fore.²⁵³ The second group was the aristocracy who had dominated the Council of the Realm, high government agency, and the military command. They were as rich as they were related by marriage. Many families had roots in the medieval nobility.²⁵⁴ The third group was the parliamentary opposition to aristocratic families' dominance. This group dominated and was almost synonymous with the three lower Estates in the Riksdag. But many of the Estate of the Nobles also counted with this group.²⁵⁵

What did the three groups want? The first group wanted the king to have absolute power and to strengthen state capacity, especially the military's capability – two linked objectives, as they saw it. The second group were conservative and wanted to keep the system as it was, with vast political and economic resources in aristocratic hands, and since they were under attack from the other two groups they realized it was not the time for further power grabs (even if they had tried as recently as Karl XI's minority).²⁵⁶ The third group wanted to change the social and financial system along the lines of the lower Estates' programme of 1650: they wanted a strong Riksdag as a defence against the aristocrats and a channel for grievances, and they wanted strong monarchs who could rely on their own resources. While royalist, there were no signs that the third group had absolutism among their goals.²⁵⁷ This last statement goes against much of the received historiography, which sees the third and first groups' goals as being of a kind.²⁵⁸ It was the third group who set the wheels of change in motion in 1675.

State capacity

The military was strengthened by the reforms that accompanied Karl XI's road to absolutist rule. In 1697 the army numbered 61,100 men.²⁵⁹ Its numerical strength even in peacetime and the high quality of the well-trained, voluntary troops made it one of the better armies – perhaps the best – in contemporary Europe.²⁶⁰ The king

was personally invested in his army, and spent a great deal of time on his travels exercising troops.²⁶¹ Like the armed forces, the civil administration grew because of Karl's determination to strengthen the Swedish state.²⁶²

At the same time, the state raised unprecedented resources from taxes and the resumption of Crown land. The recovered land was earmarked: both civil and military salaries were paid from the income from specific parcels of land. It was a rigid system, but until the beginning of the Great Northern War (1700–1721) it ensured there were regular payments to everyone from enlisted men to the highest officials – something that had been sorely lacking up to Karl XI's reforms. The higher revenues were now also dealt with more competently than before. Proper budgets with allocation plans for the various branches of the state were efficient, and made it easier for the king to be informed on and implement policy.²⁶³ In order to increase the king's control of the state budget, in 1680 the new Statskontoret (Budget Office) was hived off from Kammarkollegiet (the Treasury Board), as were the auditors, who were similarly detached from the Treasury Board to become the independent government agency and court, Kammarrevisionen (the Audit Office).²⁶⁴

The absolutist regime's actions led to financial problems down the road. Autocrats were generally untrustworthy borrowers and had an unnerving tendency to punish lenders rather than pay them – no surprise, then, that they had to pay higher rates of interest than constitutional governments did. In the Swedish case, the king ignored legality and simply rewrote contracts and loan agreements on the resumption of Crown land, a large chunk of which was collateral for loans. Fortunately, Karl could still borrow from the central bank, which was controlled by the Estates.²⁶⁵ Another problem typical of autocratic governments, especially in agrarian societies like Sweden, is that they filled their coffers in peacetime, but spent wildly when war broke out. That was exactly what happened in the Great Northern War: the Treasury was full to begin with, but was emptied during the lengthy conflict.²⁶⁶

Apart from the Audit Office and the Budget Office, there were other changes to the bureaucracy. The agency that regulated trade was abolished, and a few new agencies were founded. There were also fundamental organizational changes in the government agencies, starting at the top. The highest officials had been powerful – five of them had formed the regency governments in the long minorities of Kristina and Karl XI – and had titles with the prefix *riks-* ('of the Realm'). Now they were demoted to mere 'presidents'. Each government agency was run by a *collegium* or board, many of whom were members of the Council of the Realm, chaired by the top official. Now the officials' authority over their own organizations suffered, because the king could, and did, interfere in their business as he saw fit. Within the agencies was less collegial discussion and more order-giving. It was common for Karl XI to bypass the government agencies by appointing special commissions to investigate matters he thought important. He was also active in allocating business between the various government agencies. And he was generally the one to take any decisions – after input from the experts in the government agencies.²⁶⁷

The king was as qualified as one could ask for in his position, and arguably the most competent royal administrator-in-chief since Gustav Vasa, but did the human resources at his disposal improve after the regime shift? True, military officers and civil officeholders were recruited from a significantly larger pool. Noble birth had given a substantial advantage at all levels, but men of humbler origins were given career opportunities in Karl XI's reign. And the king was in a position to do so because he had full control of all appointments. Many a commoner reached high office, even if members of the old aristocratic families were still in the running – as long as they were loyal to the regime. When a commoner reached a certain position in the military or the civil service, they were automatically ennobled: they were made barons if they were county governors or the like, and counts if they reached the highest ranks such as field marshal or the Royal Council (the new name of the Council of the Realm). Still, we should not exaggerate the differences, as many talented commoners

had risen through the ranks earlier in the century as the Swedish state apparatus expanded. The real novelty may have been that the newly made counts and barons did not form aristocratic clans with a hold on political, economic, and administrative power as the old families had done. Their sons and grandsons often struggled unsuccessfully to secure an office of the same rank as their fathers.²⁶⁸

The absolutist regime was in no way anti-noble, and even though the old families bitterly resented the rise of new families, the Estate of the Nobles was reinvigorated by the new blood. The ennobling of 'new men' saw the nobility strengthen its monopoly on high office. Even though some of the rich and powerful had less revenue, most noblemen gained from the stable payment of salaries that characterized the new system. Noble privileges were left largely untouched, although the king could have changed them if he had wished. But Karl relied on the newly ennobled officials, both in the administration and for political support.²⁶⁹

In the long term, though, the absolutist kings could not count on the new nobility to favour absolutism. For one thing, subsequent generations rarely progressed as far in the ranks and so had less to be grateful for. Peter Englund has shown the new nobles shared meritocratic ideals. However, subsequent generations found the existing aristocratic culture alluring and started to identify with the traditions of the Swedish nobility – after all, they had a shared interest because they enjoyed the same privileges. It might not be an insuperable problem, however, if the absolutist kings could continue to recruit loyal men of humble birth to high office.²⁷⁰

Another question mark is what we know about administrations in autocracies: they are usually corrupt and skewed by the fact that loyalty rather than competence is the criterion for appointments. This may have been the case in Sweden too. Autocracies also concentrate decision-making in the hands of the autocrats, which make the people who function as their gatekeepers powerful. They use their position to extract bribes from petitioners so their business reaches the autocrat's ear.²⁷¹ Such people existed in Sweden too: Erik Lindschöld in

Karl XI's reign, for example, or Carl Piper in the reign of Karl XII, who both became rich.²⁷²

The Swedish administration deviated from the Weberian ideal in many other ways. It was not meticulously regulated – the rather loose form of the agencies' instructions lived on into the era of absolutism, and the description of each official's tasks was vague. The education system rarely prepared students for practical work, and advancement was based on years in office rather than qualifications. Long experience was often helpful when performing one's duties, but had the less fortunate result that sons of noble families were enrolled in state office at an early age to get a head start.²⁷³

If there was one element of Weberian bureaucracy that the Swedish absolutist system conformed to it was the hierarchical mode of governance. Hierarchical order-giving replaced a system where negotiations and decisions by consent had informed every level of government, from the district courts and the Estate of the Peasants all the way to the Royal Council and the government agency boards. The *modus operandi* of the absolutist system was order-giving rather than negotiation. Subordinates did best if they asked their superiors to be gracious to them, rather than claiming they had a right to this or that. Negotiations of various sorts still took place, but politics and the bureaucracy became more like the military – which was perhaps not a coincidence in the militarized world of Karl XI.²⁷⁴ Central government also tightened its hold on the provinces in Karl's reign – the correspondence between the central agencies and the county governors increased markedly.²⁷⁵

As for information control and propaganda, the absolutist regime had excellent tools. Ever since the early seventeenth century, the government had had a firm grip on the information space. Clergy and county governors had to pump out state propaganda. They read out special letters and new legislation that the government wanted publicized, usually in the parish churches and district courts. The printing presses were also firmly controlled by the state, who since the king's minority had a system of censorship in place. Not that the challenge was great. Sweden did not yet have a vibrant society of educated people

eager to express themselves in print; it fell far behind the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, and many German principalities in this respect. Since political opposition in the Riksdag and the Council had been shut down in the early 1680s, these outlets closed too.

The clergy seem to have been willing to spread government propaganda, since the regime enjoyed great legitimacy among the Swedish population. Apart from the top aristocrats, there was widespread support for the resumption of Crown land and the new conscription system. The king was seen as the nation's saviour because of his actions in the Skåne War, and most of his subjects welcomed his peaceful foreign policy. His interventions in administrative and legal matters were probably also appreciated.²⁷⁶ Even though the king liked to intervene in his subjects' business, he was not interested in meeting individual demands through the standard channels for petitions and grievances so important for the legitimacy of earlier regimes.

The social control that the Crown exerted over its subjects in this period may have been somewhat exaggerated by historians. After all, early modern states did not have the latter-day autocracies' efficient tools to monitor their citizens' behaviour. That said, it was not that easy to hide from the eyes of the king's officials. At a local level, the repression of sin by the clergy reached its peak in the years of Carolinian absolutism. And the clergy regularly communicated government propaganda to the king's subjects.²⁷⁷ The clergy started to keep ever more detailed records about the population from the cradle to the grave – Karl XI's Church Law of 1686 obliged them to do so – and they toured their parishes and examined each parishioner's knowledge of the Lutheran faith.²⁷⁸

The clergy's records, combined with the already extensive and steadily expanding records of the land surveyors, gave the authorities an unusually fine-grained picture of the country's resources. Because of the resumption of Crown land and the new conscription system, maps were brought up to date on the orders of Karl XI, and in time the land surveyors were organized in a separate government agency.²⁷⁹

Widespread popular support meant that it was easier to put policies into practice. The fact so many officials owed their position and

steady income to the king made them more willing to implement his policies. They were probably eager to please, too, and put in some extra effort. If they failed there was a risk that Karl would punish them. The military was more competent than before, and the same may have been the case for the civil administration. Karl XI took pains to see his instructions to the state apparatus were implemented. On the regional and local level, where the majority of reforms faced reality, he strengthened the provincial administration and appointed competent governors.²⁸⁰

Impartiality

The Carolinian brand of autocracy was impartial in some respects. Noble birth did not matter that much to Karl XI when he judged people. He did not give precedence to aristocrats when they were in conflict with commoners. An important step towards impartiality was that the old aristocratic families now no longer ‘owned’ the state – their network of family relations and patron-client partnerships no longer decided who would get offices or which government policies would be adopted.²⁸¹ The state had been anything but neutral in its interactions with this powerful clique before the introduction of absolutism – nor had it been seen as such. Georg Stiernhielm, the low-born poet, put it eloquently in his poem *Hercules* of 1658. He described how the cobweb of the law only ensnared the ‘little people’, likened to puny mosquitoes, while the lords like strong wasps broke free.²⁸² Karl XI did not even treat the members of his extended family favourably, and they were deprived of Crown land just like all the other landed aristocrats. This showed, and may have been intended to show, that the king treated his subjects justly and equally.²⁸³

The aristocratic families had dominated the Swedish state ever since it was founded, often as junior partners to the kings. Abolishing their quasi-ownership of the state was a major event and an important turning-point in Swedish history. This was made possible by the fact their resources were no longer necessary for the state to function. But it did not determine the course of events on its own: it would have

been possible to continue with the close collaboration between Crown and aristocracy that had characterized the early seventeenth century.

Since the king was an arch-bureaucrat, it has been supposed that the civil administration was made in his image. The administration of Carolinian absolutism is supposed to have approached high levels of efficiency, leaving a legacy that lasted into the modern era. However, that was far from the case – and Karl himself would probably have been the first to admit it. And to the extent the bureaucracy was efficient, it was probably because of the king's keen supervision.²⁸⁴ There are folk tales of Karl XI 'the Greycoat', travelling his realm incognito in plain clothing (hence the sobriquet) and, learning of the ill treatment of the common people, punishing the guilty officials and aristocrats.²⁸⁵ There is some truth to it, given the king's multiple commissions of inquiry he sent out to investigate alleged malpractice.²⁸⁶ There was the other side of the coin, of course, for the stories were full of corrupt and oppressive officials, and did not bear witness to a country where the administration was impartial and competent. Still, the king was there to keep them honest, and there were the steady salaries, which may have led to a reduction in corruption after the introduction of absolutism.²⁸⁷

Karl XI was extremely interested in the law and tried to act as a fair, impartial judge. In many respects he endeavoured to bring about the rule of law. Not only was he invested in the dispensing of justice, he also instituted *Nedre Justitierevisionen*, a division of the Royal Council which sat as a high court. Karl himself often participated in proceedings.²⁸⁸ In his reign the slow-burning judicial revolution gathered speed. Professional jurists came to dominate legal proceedings even at the district level, where it had previously been handled by lay judges. The *häradsövdingar* (district judges) had been nobles who only collected a salary and left it to *lagläsare* (lay assessors) to do the actual work. Since the lay assessors had no salary to speak of, they often took bribes to compensate. Karl XI changed that. From then on, a district judge had to live in his district and was supposed to be active as a judge. He also had to have legal training. Another move in the same direction was the ban on the practice of deciding a case

based on oaths taken by twelve men attesting to the credibility of the accused, a practice that helped the well-connected at the expense of 'marginal' individuals. Thus, even though the reforms significantly reduced the influence of laymen in the district courts, professionalization on balance probably meant the trials were conducted with more impartiality.²⁸⁹

In other respects, the rule of law was lacking. The interpretations of the Law of the Realm, the legal basis for many of the questions put to the Estates, were often tortured and misleading. The law was interpreted in the king's favour. To build a new platform for absolutism there were plans for a new law code, the drafts of which show that constitutionally the monarchs could rule virtually without restrictions. However, no one seems to have been in a rush to issue the constitution, which probably can be explained by the fact that Karl XI so dominated Swedish society even without it being codified in new legislation.²⁹⁰

Another shortcoming was corruption of the type that autocracy typically generates, and that Carolinian absolutism certainly suffered from. Loyalty over competence may have been a factor in appointments, eroding impartiality. It was distorting justice to buy the opportunity to be heard by the king or gain favours from his officials, but it was practised in absolutist Sweden as before. However, there was also a new type of corruption connected to the resumption of Crown land: the nobles had a greater incentive to enrich themselves through their offices now their landed estates were not as extensive as before. They accepted bribes, for example from petitioners or foreign embassies.²⁹¹ Another effect of the resumption that imperilled impartiality was an emerging practice: sale of offices. Apart from greed (and ensuring of an old-age pension of sorts), it was fuelled by status-seeking. Karl XI replaced noble birth with office, set down in a meticulous ranking of every state office as a criterion for precedence at official and private events. It made sense to buy one's way into high office for reasons of social prestige. These sales, called *ackord*, were the source of much resentment and were even prohibited by the king, but seem to have been widely practised.²⁹²

Political participation

The autocratic system stripped away much of the participation in the decision-making process. The Riksdag lost in both clout and relevance. The king could decide most things without the participation of the Estates. Up to 1693 he could in practice impose taxes and get the Riksdag to accede to them, and after 1693 he did not even have to bother to do that, since the Riksdag gave him the right to introduce a war tax whenever he judged it necessary.²⁹³ After the formative years of the absolutist system in 1675–1683, the Estates met in 1686, 1689, and 1693. The sessions became shorter and shorter, more political theatre than anything else, though we should not underestimate the sense of tradition and continuity it conveyed. Much looked the same in the political sphere – royal councillors counselled, the Riksdag debated – even though everything had changed. Appearances mattered, however because the old forms gave legitimacy to the new content.²⁹⁴

The Riksdag still was important to the lower Estates in particular as an arena where they could present their grievances directly to the king. Karl XI, however, far from encouraging it, tried to stem the flood of grievances and petitions. In the Petitioner's Edict of 1681, he ordered that complaints should be handed in to lesser officials and forbade subjects from handing in petitions about matters that had already been decided. Only appeals against the appellate courts and government agencies would be tolerated. To show he meant business, the Petitioners' Edict was read from church pulpits twice a year.²⁹⁵

When the district courts were taken over by jurists and state officials, their status as arenas for popular decision-making waned. The same went for local government in towns and cities, which was increasingly subordinate to and dominated by state officials. It should be added that the government takeover of regional and local arenas was not new, being a continuation of developments earlier in the seventeenth century. But the process accelerated in the era of Carolinian absolutism.²⁹⁶

The Riksdag was important both when abolishing the aristocrats' power and conferring legitimacy on the new absolutist regime. Though

the victory of the king was never in doubt when he put his leading questions to the Estates, it was still important for the new regime to obtain this parliamentary stamp of approval. Later, however, the Riksdag lost that importance. Karl's legitimacy rested more on his actions and his status as the nation's saviour from internal and external enemies, than on the continuation of Riksdag sessions. The incessant propaganda and firm control of the information space made it less important to pursue an interest aggregation by negotiation, as earlier rulers had done. Karl could take advantage of the interest aggregation from decades earlier, when the third group of political actors, the parliamentary opposition, had agreed on a financial programme. Karl never explicitly removed the influence of the Riksdag in the way the Council was ostentatiously deprived of power – and correspondingly the Estates never formally gave up their claims to influence decisions. This was in part possible because the Riksdag's power rested on informal rather than formal regulation.²⁹⁷ But it was also clear that the Estates did not actually want to give up power, and only did so implicitly, to reach their political goals in alliance with the king.²⁹⁸

Coda – Karl XI's regime shift

The prevailing view is that the new absolutist system augmented state capacity, even if that theoretical term is generally not applied. With some important exceptions, that view is confirmed here. It was the case that the state became stronger after the regime shift in 1675–1683, and the shift was important in strengthening the state. That the king gave a unified direction of the reforms was probably an important factor.

But the main weakness of the system was that it was so dependent – too dependent – on the king's active participation in governance. It was a stark contrast to the system instituted by Gustav II Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna, codified in the Instrument of Government of 1634, which made it possible to rule Sweden without an adult king. In the 1680s Karl XI in part reversed that and made much of the strength and efficiency of the state apparatus conditional on his active partici-

pation. That Karl was an energetic administrator, a reasonably skilled officer, and an impartial judge exacerbated rather than ameliorated this in the long term. The hereditary succession ingrained in most royal autocracies made it all but certain a competent administrator king eventually had less – often much less – skilled successors. The achievements of administrator kings such as Philip II of Spain, Frederick II of Prussia, and Frederick IV of Denmark were largely wasted by incompetent successors who were unwilling or unable to control the state apparatus.²⁹⁹ It might have happened in Sweden too, and in a way it did, because Karl's son and successor was abroad for most of his reign.

We could object to the positive picture of Swedish state capacity on the grounds it was not sufficient to prevent Sweden losing the Great Northern War. But this overlooks the fact that Sweden would not have had its military successes in the seventeenth century without substantial help from abroad – allies who provided subsidies and military support. And in the Great Northern War that support was largely lacking.³⁰⁰

Even though there were built-in weaknesses, as a social and political system Carolinian absolutism worked remarkably well in Karl XI's reign. True, some embittered aristocrats wanted their land and power back, but even among those families there were new generations working to advance themselves in the system, not to overthrow it. Magnus Stenbock was one of Karl XII's most trusted generals, and was loyal to the end, even though his father had suffered the loss of both prestige and income under Karl XI. The nobility were strengthened by the 'new men' in their ranks.³⁰¹ And the commoners were content with the system, which they saw as more equitable since the perceived threat from the aristocrats had retreated. It is abundantly clear the new equilibrium resulted from the abolition of the old system in 1675–1683. The important factor was making the monarch the linchpin of the system, while relegating the Estates and the Council to political insignificance. They became part of the regime's bureaucratic machine. The great military reforms would scarcely have been

possible without the determined actions by the king and depended on the political takeover at this critical juncture.

An indication of the stability of the system was the ease with which 15-year-old Karl XII took power when his father died in 1697. There were feeble attempts to reverse the resumptions, but they were soon quashed. The absolutist system was not challenged. The minorities of Gustav II Adolf, Kristina, and Karl XI had been used by the aristocratic Council and the Estates to gain influence, but nothing of the sort happened in 1697.³⁰² Without the endless destruction of the Great Northern War, and with more conscious dynastic planning by Karl XII the system might have lasted as long as absolutism in neighbouring Denmark – to the mid-1800s.³⁰³ War thus made Carolinian absolutism, and war brought it down.

The long-term legacies of the absolutist system are easy to detect. First, the dominance of powerful aristocratic magnates ended abruptly, never to return. This was of crucial importance since the existence of an oligarchy and inequality is generally associated with political upheaval and discontent. The Swedish peasants remained free from feudal dominance, and other social groups did not have to live in the shadow of overmighty lords. The aristocratic monopoly on appointment to high office in the expanding state apparatus was abolished, and careers were opened to talented people (and loyalists) of humbler origins. This delighted the clergy and the burghers. Swedish society became more equal and the state more impartial when it was no longer dominated by a few aristocratic families.

Second, the new conscription system and the fixed salaries introduced under Karl XI remained in place until 1901, which was remarkable. Not to say it worked well all that time. The salary system was based on income from specific parcels of land, and ensured that all officials and officers received their pay far more regularly than before. In the Age of Liberty, the state budget of Karl XI's last full year on the throne (1696) would serve as a model for all budgets.³⁰⁴

What these two lasting legacies had in common was that they had the firm support of the commoners and state-employed nobles who made up the parliamentary opposition. The financial policy of the

resumption of Crown land was taken directly from the lower Estates' 1650 programme. The new conscription system, with its focus on predictability and voluntariness, was welcomed by the peasantry – both tax peasants and their servants. The 'democratic' recruitment to offices was applauded by educated commoners. Thus the lasting elements in the impressive state capacity of Karl XI's Sweden derived from a mobilizing of society.

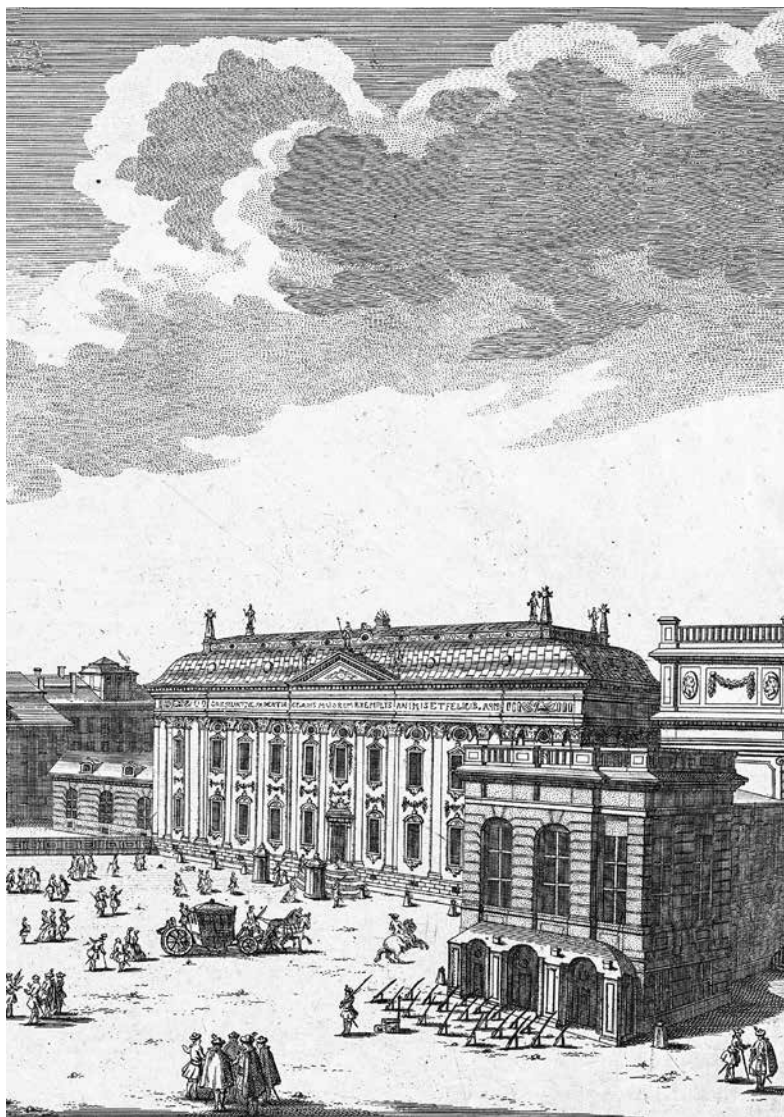
The claim that Carolinian officials were the forerunners of the impartial bureaucracy of the late nineteenth century is not convincing, however. The Swedish bureaucracy of the eighteenth century is not regarded as particularly efficient – which would be necessary if there were to be a causal chain connecting the age of Karl XI with the age of Oscar II (1872–1907), when corruption among officials was low.³⁰⁵ In sharp contrast to the praise for the efficient bureaucracy of Karl XI, there is the criticism of the bureaucrats, painted as corrupt, who allegedly overturned the absolutist regime of Karl XII (see Chapter 5).³⁰⁶ Even if it is probable that withheld wages induced officials to take bribes in Karl XII's reign, why would bureaucrats prove to be so corruptible if they had been unwaveringly impartial only a few years earlier?

Much of the success of Karl XI's reign rested on his personal way of governing, rather than on the system that he introduced. The system to a large degree hinged on Karl's incessant interference and watchful eye. It would not, and could not, last. Corruption was everywhere: loyal servants promoted over competent ones; bribes to get access to the king; fees extorted by a swelling army of officials; nobles compensating for the loss of their manors by selling offices.

Centralized control meant Sweden became more hierarchical (at the same time as noble birth meant less than before). No group or institution had the right to be heard; the population was at the mercy of the king and the men he delegated power to. Grovelling and begging was the best way to achieve one's ends, not arguments, negotiations, or demands. The state had cowed society, which had few ways to counterbalance the Crown and its demands. As Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson show, there are many historical examples of

lower social groups who gave direct or indirect support to autocratic regimes because it gave them the upper hand in confronting social elites, with harmful long-term effects for both state and society. In Sweden, as in many other countries, this was particularly the case when polarization poisoned political conflicts. Acemoglu and Robinson have also pointed out that landed elites – such as the Swedish seventeenth-century aristocrats – were intransigent because they did not have the option to move their holdings if they lost political power.³⁰⁷

The Carolinian period has been widely admired in Sweden almost since the day absolutism crumbled. Karl XI and Karl XII have been heroes for Swedes of all classes and political ideologies.³⁰⁸ The image of stern, plainly clad kings who were both strong-willed and idealistic, competent and just, has lived on, and it has been assumed their subjects shared those attributes. For many Swedes, the Carolinian era has taken on the character of an ancient heroic age not dissimilar to how the Greeks of the Classical era viewed the mythical age of the Trojan War. Even as Sweden was democratized, Carolinian absolutism was believed by many to have been the pinnacle of Swedish achievement.



Johan Snack, *Utsigt af Riddarhus Torget i Stockholm* (1773–1787). Riddarhuset, the House of Nobility, was a power centre in the Age of Liberty, home to the Secret Committee and the Estate of the Nobles. The public square outside and the restaurants and coffee houses that surrounded it were almost as important, and were where citizens mixed with politicians from all the Estates as an interest in politics increasingly spread to ordinary people. Credit: National Library of Sweden.

The Estates take over the state

The introduction of parliamentary government, 1718–1723

The sharpest constitutional U-turn in Swedish history was in the years 1718–1723 when Carolinian absolutism was replaced by constitutional government, dominated by the Riksdag. It ushered in the fifty-year period (1718–1772) known in Swedish historiography as *frihetstiden*, the Age of Liberty. The term was found in the contemporary political discourse, because liberty was recognized as the defining element of the post-absolutist system.³⁰⁹ The Riksdag (the Swedish Diet) became the real seat of power, especially when it was in session. It convened at regular intervals and its sessions could last a year or more. Between meetings of the Estates, the Council of the Realm was the highest authority, but was supposed to follow instructions on policy handed to it by the Estates. The Council minutes were scrutinized by the Estates, which could hold councillors responsible for their advice and their votes. This moderated the councillors' enthusiasm for taking their own initiative.³¹⁰

The monarch, meanwhile, was merely a voting member of the Council with two votes instead of one. He or she also had the deciding vote. Successive Accession Charters in the Age of Liberty spelled out that the monarch, with the rest of the Council, was supposed to agree with the Estates' decisions. The monarch's freedom to make civil or military appointments was also severely restricted.

In Swedish historiography, the end of Carolinian absolutism and its replacement with parliamentary rule is one of the clearest exam-

ples of radical political change. Absolutism was discredited in the eyes of many Swedes. By the time Karl XII died on the battlefield on 30 November 1718, autocracy had become more, not less, severe. The Great Northern War had been raging for 18 years and had transformed Karl XI's absolutist system. After the crushing defeat against the Russians at the Battle of Poltava in 1709, Karl XII and his closest advisors had come up with ever more novel ways to extract resources from the realm. New taxes, new military conscriptions, and increased government control of the economy meant that the burdens of war increased in the 1710s. The Swedish Empire now had to rely almost solely on the resources of Sweden proper.³¹¹

The result was significant change to both the political regime and the administrative apparatus. These unpopular policies were associated with Karl's closest advisor since at least 1716, Baron Georg Heinrich von Görtz. Görtz was not a member of the Royal Council, nor the government agencies that since the seventeenth century had handled finance and foreign policy, yet he exerted tremendous influence.³¹² Had Karl died before Görtz arrived on the scene, the result might have been reformed absolutism, not a revolution of the kind seen in 1719. Karl's and Görtz's radicalism elicited a radical reaction from their opponents.

The most important political channel of the previous century, the Riksdag, was effectively abolished in the reign of Karl XII. With it the possibility to hand in grievances had vanished. Karl XII himself refused to summon the Estates. When he learned that in his absence the Royal Council had convened the Estates anyway in 1710 and 1713, he ordered that they be dispersed immediately. In the sessions, as long as they lasted, the Four Estates abolished one of the king's new taxes, said they longed for peace, and generally voiced a different view of society than was current in the Swedish military state. The Estates argued that policy ought to be directed at improving the king's subjects' material welfare.³¹³

The radical phase of Carolinian absolutism in the latter part of Karl XII's reign thus all but abolished political representation for his subjects, and the Riksdag and *häradsting* (district courts) were

mothballed. Abolishing the district courts was part of dismantling the legal framework in place until Karl XII's accession.³¹⁴ It began at the top, with the king's refusal to swear a royal oath or agree to an Accession Charter. He was thus not bound by any legal obligations and answered only to God.³¹⁵ The instruction allowing the newly appointed *ordningsmän* to pass sentence without trial also breached the principles of the rule of law. The unfettered power of the king's first minister Baron von Görtz and his finance agency, *Upphandlings-deputationen* (the Procurement Committee), pointed in the same direction. Likewise, many expedients that Görtz and Karl introduced in the king's final years were regarded as illegal and immoral by Görtz's many detractors.³¹⁶ Karl also tried to portray himself as a just king who never discriminated. Everyone was equally subject to the monarch's will – the nobility were not as favoured in his reign as in the previous centuries. When he introduced a new property tax in 1712, all subjects were supposed to pay at the same rate proportional to their assets, regardless of rank.³¹⁷ The king wanted to appear an impartial protector of his realm, above the interests of the great and the good.

By now, groups who had been Karl XI's key supporters – the lesser nobility, the clergy, and the burghers – had lost faith in absolutism.³¹⁸ Thus a high level of state capacity was maintained – on balance, the new government instruments helped keep the armed forces relatively strong – but at a tremendous political cost.

State of the art – The transition to parliamentary rule

We cannot agree with three interrelated claims about the regime shift that are common in the historiography of this period.³¹⁹ First, that the political system resulted from an aristocratic reaction against absolutism, because it had taken their land and privileges.³²⁰ Second, that the only political agents supporting it were bureaucrats dissatisfied with the reforms in the final year of Karl XII's reign.³²¹ Third, that the constitution was framed as a coherent, unified vision of the political system.³²²

While there is some merit to all these claims, they arguably share the same flaw: that the revolution was the work of a single group with a single vision of how things should be. It is more correct to say that the constitution, the political system, and the administrative system resulted from the dynamic interplay of many political actors and groups of actors. This is only to be expected if events are categorized as a revolution rather than a *coup d'état* by a small clique – a complete overturn of the previous political system creating a window of opportunity or critical juncture for numerous political actors. As many historians have suggested, it was a revolution rather than a coup, partly because of that dynamic. While a *coup d'état* often has a narrow social base, the greater part of the Swedish political nation arguably was united behind three demands: first, that absolutism should be abolished; second, that the radical government reforms of the previous era should be annulled; and third, that there should eventually be a general peace, and in the meantime the costly Norwegian campaign launched in 1718 should be abandoned immediately.³²³ Almost every political actor of importance, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, considered it necessary that the pressing political issues be worked out by the Riksdag.³²⁴ The virtual unanimity behind these policies is borne out by the fact that they were all almost entirely unopposed, which is striking given the previous regime had stood for the exact opposite policies. But there was no consensus on what kind of political system would replace absolutism, and the differences were not resolved until 1723, after a long period of internecine strife typical of political revolution. Two loose factions evolved: the 'Aristocrats' and the 'Constitutional Monarchists'.

There is general agreement among historians that the period that began with the death of the absolute king in 1718 and ended with the introduction of the Riksdag Ordinance, the last of the new laws, in 1723, were the formative years for the entire Age of Liberty. However, this view has been challenged of late. The historian Erik Bodenstein has argued that politicization characterized the entire Age of Liberty, but he notes the direction the process was given by the framing of the constitution in 1718–1723.³²⁵ The pattern of increased participa-

tion in politics that Bodenstein observes resulted from the decisions and practices developed in those formative years. Thus, his view is compatible with our claim that this period was a critical juncture, followed by decades of path dependence in which the system evolved according to the basic principles set in that formative period.

The critical juncture of 1718–1723

The constitution of 1719 included an Instrument of Government and an Accession Charter, both signed by Ulrika Eleonora on the day of her election as queen of Sweden. How the new constitution was framed was not well documented, most likely because to have been involved would prove dangerous in the event of an absolutist restoration. Most historians agree about the broad outline, though. The future speaker of the Estate of the Nobles, Pehr Ribbing, began work clandestinely with the elderly Carl Gustaf Gyllencreutz when Karl XII was still alive, probably around 1715–1716. According to their secretary, Adam Fredenstierna, whose later recollections remain the best source, they studied Swedish and foreign constitutional documents and the works of political thinkers of different periods. If there were a disputed succession after the king's death, they wanted to have a draft of a new constitution ready that would restore liberty to Sweden. And it appeared likely to be needed, since Karl XII was known for taking risks on the battlefield rather than securing the dynasty's future in the marital bed.³²⁶

On the king's death, the draft was shown to men from various social backgrounds and political views for comment.³²⁷ At that point, 'Aristocrat' Ribbing realized (*i*) they needed to rally support for the new constitution among prominent members of the entire political nation, and (*ii*) there was support to be had, even in the formerly royalist lower Estates and court circles. The support of the clergy and the burghers would be crucial for the new constitution to pass the Riksdag. Ribbing also used this inclusive principle when as speaker he influenced who would sit on the commission that condemned Karl XII's principal advisor Baron von Görtz.³²⁸ Thus, a diverse and

representative assembly both framed the new constitution and condemned the old system embodied by Görtz.

While the majority thought the absolutist system had to be replaced, it was far from obvious what should replace it. Fredenstierna says that the ambition was to reinstate Sweden's ancient freedoms – but what did that mean? Other drafts of constitutional documents are known of.³²⁹ It was a time of openness, a critical juncture when the political nation had the opportunity to reframe the way Sweden was governed. When the drafts of the constitutional documents were discussed, new ideas were thrown out, some of them fanciful – even when debating time-honoured practices such as how to legislate the right to be ennobled.³³⁰ To reconnect to our theoretical framework, political actors knew they were at a critical juncture that demanded change.

The framing of the constitution has been seen by some historians as a reactionary cut-and-paste job, harking back to a supposed aristocratic golden age of the early seventeenth century.³³¹ However, constitutional experience of the pre-absolutist state was only one of the sources of inspiration. The Instruments of Government of 1634 and 1660 were important, but they were not simply reinstated in 1719. Contemporary and later commentators have also claimed that the aristocratic faction wanted to reinstate the Council-dominated monarchical republic of the later Middle Ages. It is unclear what that might have entailed, but the 'Aristocrats' were not keen on basing the constitution only on the medieval Law of the Realm.³³²

The common goal that had held together 'Aristocrats' and 'Constitutional Monarchists' was the overthrow of absolutism. Now their differences became visible. And the eventual outcome was that both the Council and the monarch were the losers, because the 'Constitutional Monarchists' were hostile to the Council, while the 'Aristocrats' feared and mistrusted monarchs. This left the door wide open for the Riksdag, which was viewed favourably by both sides. The Accession Charter of 1719 spelled out that the queen was expected to agree with the decisions made by the Estates. And since the monarch was part of the Council, compliance with the Estates went for the Council as well.³³³

The settlement of 1719 was not to last. Ulrika Eleonora was not as cooperative as the 'Aristocrats' wished and continued to exert considerable influence, both on foreign policy and on the appointment of civil servants and military officers. She also approved new and enhanced noble privileges, which would be a bone of contention between commoners and nobles for years to come.³³⁴ The 'Aristocrats' scored another win in 1720, when, in return for accepting Fredrik I as the new king, further royal concessions were ratified in the new Instrument of Government and Accession Charter. Many in the Estate of the Peasants refused to sign it, and insisted Fredrik ought to enjoy the same powers as Gustav II Adolf and rule as a constitutional monarch. The three lower Estates also opposed the growing dominance of the Riksdag's *Sekreter utskottet* (Secret Committee).³³⁵ Arvid Horn dominated this Committee as well as the Estate of the Nobles and the Riksdag as a whole. He left the government agencies to work out their new instructions by themselves, and he deflected the commoners' attacks on the nobility's privileges.³³⁶

The administrative system was immediately overhauled. In December 1718 the bureaucratic reforms of late Carolinian absolutism were abolished, and it was the dead king's sister and her closest allies who oversaw the changes. The new government agencies that Karl XII and Baron von Görtz had created were abolished, and the older ones were reinstated.³³⁷ But the new regime was open to keeping some recent features. When the new *Kansliordningen* (Chancery Ordinance) was discussed, the officials instructed to draft it were asked to keep whatever might be valuable from earlier examples, which included Karl XII's ordinance of 1713. Much of it was duly retained in the new ordinance of 1719, for example the office of Chancellor of Justice only created six years before.³³⁸ Decision-makers realized that, as with the constitution, they had to adapt the government to new circumstances. Above all, it was loudly proclaimed in every new set of instructions that a return to absolutism was unthinkable and had to be prevented. It was included in the oaths which all government officials had to swear.

In 1720, Arvid Horn gave the government agencies the task of proposing reforms to their own ordinances. The order was issued by the Secret Committee, which Horn chaired. Hidden from the ordinary members of the Riksdag, the Secret Committee was dominated by 'Aristocrats', and the whole affair seemed to be the sort of *fait accompli* the 'Aristocrats' faction was infamous for in 1719 and 1720 – according to the 'Constitutional Monarchists'. When the lower Estates were notified, they were suspicious and insisted that what the government agencies proposed should be examined by the next Riksdag. They got their way.³³⁹

Some parts of the new ordinances were against the interests of all three lower Estates, and they reacted against the proposed intrusions on local self-determination by county governors and central government. Centralization had been the hallmark of absolutist rule, and the commoners had probably expected to get rid of it in the new system. The practice of getting the bureaucrats to help decide was in fact an old one that predated the absolutist system.³⁴⁰ It is not clear what was controversial besides the secrecy and the centralizing tendencies, so likely the general distrust of the 'Aristocrats' played a part.

The staffing of the administration and the military was a bone of contention between commoners and nobles, and both fought hard for a greater share of the offices to be reserved for their respective Estates. They fought over it to a standstill, which in itself was a victory for the nobles, even though they had tried for even greater privileges. They had one advantage, which was that most military officers retained by the armed forces when peace returned were noble. Fewer aspiring men of common birth were given the chance to enjoy the privileges of nobility as the Age of Liberty went on, because the ennobling practices that had maintained the social contract in the reign of Karl XI were ended – a reaction to Ulrika Eleonora's and Fredrik's record-pace ennoblements between 1719 and 1723, which irked the Estate of the Nobles so much they eventually put a stop to it. From then on, men from noble families were once again to dominate state office, public and military, in a slow process with beginnings in that early revolutionary phase of the Age of Liberty. This development in the

human resources available to the state hardly increased the quality of the administration.³⁴¹

By 1721, Sweden had finally concluded peace with all its enemies, and the highly militarized state now began demobilizing. Twenty years of incessant war had been costly in human lives and treasure. And while Karl XII had been willing to venture everything to keep the Swedish Empire together, apparently few of his subjects shared his ambition. The costs of keeping a large army and a large navy could not be met and so they were cut. A great many soldiers were let go, regiments were abolished, and military exercises reduced.³⁴² As the future would show, the remaining units were far less effective than they had been in their heyday under Carolinian absolutism.³⁴³ The once cutting-edge conscription system stagnated because of the lack of proper equipment and training. In many ways there were still considerable resources available, but they ended up serving the officers' private interests rather than providing security for Sweden.³⁴⁴ In the course of the Great Northern War the system to pay civil servants set up in the reign of Karl XI had been abolished, and the bureaucrats' salaries had been wholly or partially withheld or replaced with financial instruments, which they viewed with scepticism.³⁴⁵ Karl XI's system was now restored, and the state budget from the last full year of his reign, 1696, was declared to be the model for all budgets. That meant that a large proportion of state revenue was earmarked to cover particular costs.³⁴⁶ The loss of much of its Baltic empire meant Sweden's revenue was lower, and the new regime had to tackle the huge debts incurred in the war.³⁴⁷

At the next Riksdag in 1723, the 'Aristocrats' suffered several setbacks. A few of the new ordinances were scrutinized and changed. The privileges were returned to what they had been before 1719. And it was finally obvious that the resumptions of Crown land and the new conscription system would not be reversed, as the 'Aristocrats' had wished.³⁴⁸ The royals suffered an even worse defeat, though, when King Fredrik, working through the Estate of the Peasants, made a power grab in a (clumsy) move that resembled a *coup d'état*.³⁴⁹ The other three Estates rallied to defend the constitution, and the king's

reputation suffered a massive blow. Royal ambitions were thwarted until Fredrik's death in 1751.³⁵⁰ The 'Constitutional Monarchists' had to adjust to the new situation, and their response was to try to work through the Riksdag and confront the Aristocrats there, without royal support. They succeeded in making the Riksdag the supreme power in the country. The revolutionary phase was over in 1723 and a new political equilibrium was reached. The Estates of the Nobles, Clergy, and Burghers now had united behind the new constitution and the Riksdag's sovereign power; the royal family and the Estate of the Peasants remained the focal points for opponents to the new system.

An important consequence of the confirmation of the Riksdag's sovereign power was the much overdue regulation of its proceedings. The amount of business increased because of the tasks the Estates took upon themselves. They were the real national government when they were in session, and they scrutinized the minutes of the Council, which served as the governing body between parliamentary sessions. When the Riksdag was prorogued, the Estates left instructions for the Council, and the minutes would show if they had been followed. The councillors answered to the Riksdag and could face legal repercussions for their advice.³⁵¹ The Estates were also supposed to examine the minutes of the government agency boards. They also dealt with the government's propositions and the innumerable petitions and grievances handed to the Riksdag by estates, agencies, corporations, and private citizens.³⁵²

The Riksdag's organization had to be overhauled because it risked being overwhelmed by its workload. It was acknowledged that regulation was needed, and the Riksdag of 1723 passed a *Riksdagsordning* (Riksdag Act) – the first in Swedish history (apart from the one suggested but never adopted in 1617). Multiple committees with specific areas of responsibility were set up. In 1723 this was not new, but the arrangements were formalized that year. There was also the new *Urskillningsdeputationen* (the Screening Committee), tasked with consigning business to the correct committee, court, or government agency, and there was a weekly schedule of sittings and the time and place for the committees to make the best use of the representatives'

time.³⁵³ In 1723, the speakers of the Estates began to meet regularly to decide the order of business. To make the cumbersome four-chamber assembly work, it was essential that the Estates worked on the same issues at much the same time.³⁵⁴

Majority voting and a free mandate were further developments, brought about by the Riksdag's new prominence.³⁵⁵ The Riksdag used to have a simple model for its business – it made decisions by manufacturing consent rather than voting, collective units had a major influence in the Estates, and members of the Riksdag were bound by instructions from their constituents – but that was not viable or desirable once it was busier. It had been feasible to reach consensus by long-winded negotiations between the different Estates in the seventeenth century, but not with an amount of business that was levels of magnitude larger. Both in and between the Estates majority voting was accepted as the tool to decide matters.³⁵⁶

The Estates still tried to reach consensus on matters that seemed to require national unity, however. The nobles also made unanimity a precondition for changes to an Estate's privileges – thus safeguarding their own privileges. But the nobles did not persuade the others that their own vote would be the tiebreaker when two Estates stood against two. That was against the parity that ought to exist between the Estates, the clergy stated. Majority voting thus was established for important decisions that included the entire Riksdag. In 1723 the lower Estates ensured the *Expeditionsdeputation* (Parliamentary Business Committee) would ensure the Estates' decisions were interpreted and expressed correctly in the formal decisions communicated to the authorities which were to implement the decisions. This was likely prompted by the nobles, who often twisted the Riksdag's decisions after most commoner representatives had travelled home. Now all Estates would be represented on the Parliamentary Business Committee to prevent that from happening.³⁵⁷

For an assembly that dealt with so much business when it was in session, it was also necessary for representatives to act freely as they judged best. It was impossible for their constituents to foresee what the business of the Riksdag would be, so their instructions could

only cover a fraction of it. The Riksdag Act of 1723 set down that every representative could debate and decide any issue before the Riksdag, so establishing the principle of the free mandate, rather than the imperative mandate which gave constituents the power to decide what representatives should do. The free mandate is a prerequisite for all effective representative assemblies. It has been regarded a trait unique to the English and British Parliament since medieval times.³⁵⁸ According to traditional historiography, the free mandate was willed by the kings who wanted representatives enabled to freely grant them what they wished. While there may be some truth in this, the free mandate in both Sweden and Britain was more plausibly a result of the extensive power that their respective parliaments had obtained by the early eighteenth century. When parliaments shared in government, their members had to decide on a growing volume of parliamentary business.³⁵⁹

The free mandate thus weakened the constituents' hold over their representative. It was in the members of the Riksdag's remit to hand in grievances, but they were not supposed to lobby for them, only make sure that they were handled with fairness. Once at the Riksdag, they represented neither a locality nor an Estate, but the entire realm.³⁶⁰ That was the theory or ideology, at any rate. Constituents still influenced the behaviour of their representatives. For many, especially among the peasants, rectifying local, regional, or Estate grievances was by far the most important job of the Riksdag. The constituents of the lower Estates paid for their representatives' food and lodging for long stays in Stockholm, so they thought they should have a say in return.³⁶¹

In the Riksdag, what we would call the logic of representation became more and more prominent. With the now extensive use of committees, their members had to discuss and decide on their Estates' behalf. This certainly went for the Secret Committee, whose members could decide much of its business without referring back to their Estates. To select members for the committees, electors were chosen among the representatives whose decisions on committee members could not be questioned or overturned.³⁶²

Corporations and other collective entities began to lose influence from the beginning of the Age of Liberty. In the Estates' internal votes majority voting became the rule, as it already was when each Estate voted as one. But there was a new individualism in the Estates' internal voting. Collectives such as different noble ranks, dioceses, and towns ceased to be the main voting blocs. Per capita voting gained ground in the Estates of the Nobles, Clergy, and Burghers in the 1720s and 1730s, but the Estate of the Peasants trailed behind for a few decades and continued to vote by *landskap* (province).³⁶³

Another important innovation was that the government agencies were made subordinate to the Riksdag. The lower Estates, and possibly their allies among the noble 'Constitutional Monarchists', had a new set of policies for the relationship between the administrative and political spheres. In the seventeenth century, the administrative and political elite were the same – the Council of the Realm included the high government officials – but in 1720 a system of dualism was introduced, which has lasted to the present day. At the burghers' suggestion, it was made the rule that members of the Council could not head a government agency at the same time.³⁶⁴ This was the exact opposite of Axel Oxenstierna's system of rule by the five highest officials. The one exception was the president of the Chancery Board, who not coincidentally was the influential Arvid Horn. Apart from their documented distrust of the Council of the Realm, the reform was prompted by dissatisfaction with the functioning of government. The burghers said they hoped once the heads of the government agencies were no longer distracted by Council sessions, the bureaucracy would start to run more smoothly.³⁶⁵ There are many other indications of dissatisfaction with the government agencies during and after the Great Northern War – war put immense strain on the administration and the king's subjects.

The Estate of the Peasants was upset by the king's open inability to help them.³⁶⁶ The lower Estates insisted government officials be excused from sitting on the Secret Committee so they could do their day job. They also demanded the Chancery's incoming correspondence be numbered and filed in chronological order: an open

expression of their distrust of the bureaucracy's impartiality, fearing that precedence would be given to privileged subjects, that is, the nobility.³⁶⁷ The commoners wanted to use their power in the Riksdag to make the state apparatus work for them instead of maximizing military capability – or serving the nobles' private interests. It was a sea change in how the business of state was perceived. The lower Estates may have long held those views, but the stress of a long war combined with the opportunity the regime shift brought meant change was both urgent and possible.

At the same time, none of the factions wanted to dismantle the strong fiscal–military state inherited from the seventeenth century; but to lessen the perceived excesses of the extreme military state that Karl XII and Görtz had introduced. While the central control of the provinces was loosened as lower Estates wished, the central government agencies themselves were not shut down.³⁶⁸

That the bureaucracy should be not only separate from political decision-making, but also subordinate to it was clear from the division of labour between them. Resolutions about *allmänna besvär*, the grievances of an entire Estate as one, counted as legislation, and should henceforth be handled by one of the Riksdag's committees. Local, specific grievances, meanwhile, should be delegated to the appropriate government agency, which would decide them in accordance with the Estates' legislation.³⁶⁹ Likewise, it was the Riksdag's Screening Committee that decided whether an incoming letter, petition, or the like was Riksdag business or should be handled by the bureaucracy.³⁷⁰ The once mighty Council of the Realm was also subordinate to the Riksdag, at least in theory, being in effect a branch of the administration. To make it more efficient, the Council was subdivided according to function, with one part the highest judicial instance and the other focused on foreign policy.³⁷¹ Another point of this reform may have been to weaken the Council's cohesion and political clout.

Of course, neither the bureaucrats' nor councillors' influence could be curbed entirely since they had the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions. But their influence has sometimes been exaggerated.³⁷² Arvid Horn, the most influential politician of the

1720s and 1730s, was both a councillor and head of a government agency, but it was only because that agency was the Chancery that he could combine the roles. His influence was also explained by his role as the most important member of the Riksdag – the speaker of the Estate of the Nobles *and* chairman of the Secret Committee in 1720, 1726–1727, and 1734. It was that combined with his personal qualities which made him powerful, not his place on the Council.³⁷³

When it came to appointments, the lower Estates and especially the burghers were in favour of reform. In 1723 they lobbied for appointment quotas for the bureaucracy, asking that the king fill new posts with non-nobles until they numbered half of all government officials. The nobles were appalled, as were the commoners' noble allies among the 'Constitutional Monarchists'. One of the most powerful generals even promised to use military force if it was tried.³⁷⁴ It was a unique outburst which highlighted how controversial the proposal was – and how rare the mention of violence was, despite the political tensions in the period.

The Estates' involvement in appointments affected the proceedings of the Riksdag. From the early 1720s there were already complaints that many members of the Riksdag only turned up to defend their own appointments or challenge the appointments of others – and whose public spiritedness could be questioned.³⁷⁵ More seriously, the state apparatus was politicized. At least that was how it was viewed. One of the attractions of royal power in the eyes of the 'Constitutional Monarchists' was that monarchs were supposedly impartial and fair arbiters who could be trusted with the final decisions about appointments. Once the 'Aristocrats' had vetoed royal power, and Fredrik I had discredited himself by his failed quasi-coup in 1723, the lower Estates and their noble allies most likely felt they had to counter 'Aristocratic' power themselves. That is what their actions suggest, at any rate. They claimed commoners had a right to a fair share of the appointments, and they wanted to reduce the power of the bureaucrats, particularly the higher officials. Neither measure would have made the state apparatus less politically contentious if they

had been implemented, and the impartiality of the state was under threat because the bureaucracy had become a political battleground.

Starting in 1723, the Estates reserved the right to overturn rulings by the appellate courts they deemed 'obviously wrong', which opened the gates to political influence over the judicial system.³⁷⁶ The political trial of Baron von Görtz was followed by a string of other prominent cases where the Riksdag functioned as a court of law. The first was against Fredrik I's supporters in 1723, when the Secret Committee even ordered the arrest of the accused peasants – a measure of how extensive its self-appointed powers were, at least as some members of the Riksdag saw it.³⁷⁷

The impartiality of the state was already in question in the 1720s, and when the two-party system emerged around 1740 there were only more political appointments and political trials.³⁷⁸ Long before the famous parties of Hats and Caps came into being, there were factions who feared the state would serve the interests of the opposing group. Distrust of a state dominated by 'Aristocrats' running it for personal gain seems to have gripped the burghers and other lower Estates, who wanted the Council and bureaucracy subordinate to the Riksdag.

There were some efforts to peacefully resolve conflicts within the system that helped make it function for over five decades. A new committee dedicated to solving the thorniest issues was an important feature of the revolutionary era's final settlement in 1723. It was called *Differentiendeputationen* (the Difference Committee) since it was tasked with removing the differences between the Estates, the most important being the conflict over privileges, especially noble privileges. It had plagued the sessions in 1720 but was peacefully resolved in 1723. Under the 'Aristocrats' the Estate of the Nobles had been confrontational and at times outright dishonest, but their leadership in 1723 was different, the credit for which went to the speaker, Swen Lagerberg. Lagerberg was an army officer whose father had been ennobled. He and many of the leading nobles in the 1723 Riksdag were 'Constitutional Monarchists', and they and the lower Estates had shared values, so it was easier for them to compromise in the Difference Committee. Apart from that, the commoners and

most of the nobility agreed on limiting the growing power of the Secret Committee, which had been an 'Aristocratic' bastion in 1720. The noble members of the 1720 Secret Committee were banned from the committee formed three years later. Its powers were also limited and regulated by an instruction, the first of its kind.³⁷⁹

From radical absolutism to parliamentary rule

Agents and motives

That Karl XII died heirless all but guaranteed absolutism would be abolished. The other two goals of the Swedish opposition were also quickly realized, and as the destructive phase of the revolution largely was over in a couple of months, the political conflict over what the constructive phase would be like began. Who were party to the conflict? The answer is connected to the key political actors' goals in the new situation.

The old noble families who wanted to limit royal power formed a faction called the 'Aristocrats' in the sources, because of the group's social composition and plans to introduce aristocratic government. Their political goals centred on strengthening the influence of the Council of the Realm and the Estate of the Nobles and limiting royal power. They also wanted to reverse Karl XI's key policies of conscription reform and the resumption of Crown land, and to enhance the nobility's privileges.³⁸⁰ Naming the opposing faction is trickier. Hugo Valentin calls the nobles who were part of it 'democrats', but that is misleading since there was no question of them supporting anything we would consider democratic.³⁸¹ The term 'Constitutional Monarchists' captures their core beliefs, as they thought the queen or king ought to rule, but in partnership with the Estates and within constitutional limits. They rejected absolutism, but defended the resumption of Crown land and the military reforms, and regarded the monarch as an ally against the rapacious aristocrats they feared. They were much the same group who had conditionally supported Karl XI (the third group in Chapter 4): the lower Estates plus many of the lesser nobility.

Even if the political actors' motives often concerned gain, fear of losing to the opposing side was arguably a more potent incentive. The constitution of the new regime came from fear: fear of the aristocracy, fear of absolutism. Neither the Council nor the king could be allowed to dominate. This severely limited the executive, but it was a notable achievement that the opposing sides could agree about the new political system.

State capacity

The main aspect of early modern state capacity was the ability to wage war. There has been disagreement about the state of the once feared Swedish military machine in 1719–1723. It has been claimed that its military might was deliberately destroyed after the death of the relentlessly belligerent Karl XII, but a major reason was that resources were running out.³⁸²

Sweden's military capacity declined, but that was also the case for other medium powers such as the Dutch Republic and the Spanish Crown, which had been major players in the seventeenth century. These states could not compete with the four resource-laden major powers that had emerged by 1720: France, Great Britain, Austria, and Russia. By mid-century the small but ultra-militarized state of Prussia had joined this exclusive club. Even though military costs in Sweden still were high, the political will to turn Sweden into a Scandinavian Prussia was lacking in the Age of Liberty. Tragically, lack of means did not prevent politicians trying to make Sweden a great imperial power once again, as the two disastrous wars of the Age of Liberty proved.³⁸³

In financial terms, Sweden's state capacity dropped in the revolutionary years, but that was mostly due to the war inherited from the previous regime. State capacity was preserved, but at a lower level than the radical final years of absolutism. The new regime managed the massive debt caused by the war and the disorder caused by Görztz's and Karl XII's reforms.³⁸⁴

The state administration did not go through significant reform in this regime shift. The government agencies established in the first half of the seventeenth century still dominated, and the ones established

in the reign of Karl XI were retained too. The strong centralization under Carolinian absolutism was at least partly reversed, due to the actions of the lower Estates.

The weakness of the executive has rightly been pointed out as a major deficiency in the political system that emerged from the regime shift.³⁸⁵ This was not by design. Since both major factions championed either a strong monarch or a strong Council, the weakness resulted from a compromise that neutered both. It was somewhat compensated for by the fact that the Estates' committees became bodies of experts with substantial knowledge about their respective policy areas.³⁸⁶ The Riksdag was also an important arena for compromises, coordination, and legitimation. Decisions made by the Estates were thus likely to last and be viewed as legitimate. They were printed and widely distributed. Individual members of the Riksdag went out of their way to defend their actions to their constituents.³⁸⁷

Impressive as that was, there was a curious mismatch between official ideology and political practice that undercut the system. In the official propaganda, the royals were much more prominent than they were in actual practice, and the reverse was the case for the Estates. Thus there were no efforts to legitimize decisions in the name of popular sovereignty, so a discourse of that nature was never given the chance to grow into a popular ideology. The restoration of royal power remained on the cards. True, there was an official cult of the constitution, the Instrument of Government of 1720, but even that document upheld the fiction of royal power.³⁸⁸

Impartiality

The Age of Liberty is infamous for the corruption of its politicians and bureaucrats, perhaps unfairly, since bribes and the sale of offices were known in the other regimes. It has not been thoroughly studied, but it is likely that the severe cuts to officials' salaries in the Great Northern War encouraged them to take bribes to make up for lost income. And the higher officials used the regime shift as an opportunity to make up for their losses and enrich themselves. The corruption of

high officials usually legitimizes corruption lower down on the ladder, according to the literature.³⁸⁹

The people who framed the constitutions of 1719–1723 also tried to curb corruption with sternly worded rules against conflicts of interest. Impartiality was the stated goal, and the lower Estates wanted no member of the Riksdag who was an employee of an agency to investigate that agency in their capacity as a representative of the Estates, as conflicts of interest were also to be scrupulously avoided.³⁹⁰ However, the extensive powers of the Riksdag over judicial matters and appointments opened the door to corruption. The length of the sessions – because of the amount of work the Riksdag took upon itself – had the same effect, because to support themselves in this extended period many poor members of the Riksdag took bribes.³⁹¹

While politicizing the administration put impartiality at risk, the regime shift of 1718–1723 was also when Sweden became a constitutional state. Ever since 1719, a written Instrument of Government has served as Sweden's constitution, an arrangement which has brought stability and clarity to the exercise of power. The Instruments of Government of 1719 and 1720 clearly drew on the tight regulation of the state apparatus that characterized their seventeenth-century predecessors. But now the constitutional element was more pronounced. The government would be bound by the constitution, and a constitution that was not supposed to be changed either, even if the Instrument of Government admitted that it could be reinterpreted if necessary. The experience of recent years encouraged them to ring-fence the monarch's power to prevent the reintroduction of absolutism, and in particular the monarch's ability to decide war and peace was curbed to reduce the likelihood of war. Protecting the rule of law was stressed in the constitution, largely in line with the tradition established in the medieval Law of the Realm. A hierarchy of courts would guarantee a fair trial. To prevent corruption among judges, they were to have ample salaries. In contrast to the absolutist regime's practices, subjects were guaranteed a role in making new laws through their representatives in the Riksdag. The office of Chancellor of Justice furthermore was supposed to protect the subjects from abuse and was

guaranteed in the Instrument of Government (a legacy of Karl XII's regime).³⁹² There were also commissions that were supposed to punish transgressing officials, even though their efficiency in this period has been questioned. But the constitutional regime offered more channels than ever for the subjects' complaints, which probably compensated for the other deficiencies.³⁹³

Political participation

When the monarch was sidelined, especially after Fredrik I's attempted coup in 1723, the Riksdag had to take centre stage. The Estates' ever stronger claims for power in the Riksdag sessions of 1723 were probably explained by a realization by the former 'Constitutional Monarchists' that they had to make the Riksdag the sole counterweight to the Council and the high nobility who they still feared. The Riksdag Ordinance was part of that, as were various other innovations that often started with the lower Estates.

Even if the peasants were a second-class Estate in the Age of Liberty, they were not entirely neglected. In the conflict over the Estate's proposals to increase royal power in 1723, they enjoyed some support from the clergy and the burghers. The support concerned not the measures, but the peasants having the right to suggest political change 'as a free Estate'. When the nobility, disgusted by the peasant-supported attempted coup, printed the written rejection of the peasants' claims without the peasants' consent, the burghers and clergy condemned it as an infringement of the peasants' political rights.³⁹⁴ The three lower Estates also united to reject and ultimately defeat the noble privileges of 1719.³⁹⁵

Locally, above all in regions dominated by tax peasants, the peasantry probably increased their influence in local politics in the Age of Liberty.³⁹⁶ According to the Riksdag Ordinance, the peasantry were to be protected from bailiffs and county governors, who in the past had been more than willing to choose the peasant representatives: they had wanted pliant men who did not cause trouble.³⁹⁷ While constituents could not control their representatives at the Riksdag, the elections to the Estates of the Peasants and Burghers invigorated

local political participation. This was due to the commoner Estates' rejection of the centralizing policies that had been an essential part of absolutism, and which Horn and the 'Aristocrats' had endeavoured to continue. Paradoxically, the peasants' distrust of the new regime may have forced concessions from it that a powerful monarch would have hesitated to give. Peasants, for example, were now able to buy land from the Crown. Economically, the Age of Liberty turned out to be quite a boon for the peasantry in general and the tax peasantry in particular. It was because of their influence in the political system.³⁹⁸

The right of the members of the Estates to present memoranda with suggestions, to complain in petitions, and otherwise communicate with the Estates was established in the new Riksdag Ordinance of 1723. Any proposal designed to improve Sweden could be debated and decided on by the Riksdag. This was an important step towards the democratization of the political initiative while simultaneously promoting the flow of information into the Estates. While early drafts of the Ordinance left out this provision, the practice had already been established in the Great Northern War, after which a flood of memoranda had been handed in by members and others at each Riksdag session.³⁹⁹

There were growing challenges to the old practice of cathedral chapters and town councils selecting the members of the Estates of the Clergy and Burghers respectively. The diocesan clergy and burghers of the towns claimed the right to elect their own representatives. In the Estate of the Clergy the bishops' dominance ended with the Age of Liberty. Parish clergy and even chaplains now played an important part in the Riksdag.⁴⁰⁰

Even if the Age of Liberty is remembered for the discord between the two main parties, the Hats and the Caps, in its early years there was a broad consensus about the constitution that survived for decades. There were two main factions with differing views, particularly on royal power, but after Fredrik's failed coup they came together to defend the Instrument of Government of 1720. It became like a holy scripture that was celebrated and could not to be criticized.⁴⁰¹ But criticisms there were, above all from the losers of 1723, the royals and

the peasants. They remained hostile and were a constant threat to the constitution. Yet even they, with some notable exceptions, generally played by its rules.

While there were no new social groups and no broadening of political participation in the Riksdag in this regime shift (unlike the seventeenth century), the commoners gained in influence and political skill. New principles and a new organization transformed the Riksdag for good. The parliamentary committees, majority voting, and a free mandate all made a difference, and were codified in the Riksdag Ordinance of 1723. While the nobility claimed to be superior to the other Estates, their claim was refuted and the equality between Estates and individual members highlighted. Mechanisms such as the Parliamentary Business Committee were introduced to ensure compliance with decisions. In an important sense, participation was broadened in comparison with the seventeenth century – broader segments of the population could now propose, debate, and decide policies rather than merely react to policies decided by the king and aristocracy.

Coda – The regime shift of 1718–1723

The regime shift of 1718–1723 entailed a revolutionary transition from militarized autocracy to parliamentary rule. State capacity, measured as the focus on military strength, was wound down, and did not make discernible progress because of the revolution. Crucially, the state's mission was partly redefined to include promoting the general welfare of the population, enabled by a democratization of initiative. Dramatic strides were made in participation once the Riksdag was the ultimate source of power and the *de facto* government whenever it was in session. The constitutionalism of the revolution ensured that Sweden from that point was ruled by an Instrument of Government, setting legal limits to government power, though the perceived impartiality of the state would be dented when the Riksdag – and its factions – took charge of appeals against appointments and occasionally served as a court of law. The corruption of the state

brought by party politicization was an important reason why parliamentary rule would be held in low esteem in the nineteenth century, to the detriment of political development. Not until the 1880s were political parties once again seen as a legitimate part of political life.⁴⁰²

The political project ahead of its time that left a lasting legacy was the lower Estates' attempt to separate the political and administrative spheres and subordinate the administration. The Oxenstierna model, with its integration of the same spheres, was rejected. One legacy of the new policy was the dualism that is still a key feature of the 'Swedish administrative model': at no point since the 1718–1723 regime shift have government agencies been led by members of the political government. The positive value of this administrative legacy down the centuries may be questionable, but in 1720 it was understandable.⁴⁰³

The regime shift saw the Riksdag rapidly modernize. The Riksdag Ordinance of 1723 left an enduring legacy by laying the foundations of the central role that parliamentary committees have played ever since. The introduction of majority voting and a free mandate for individual members of the Riksdag replaced the old-fashioned principle of unanimity, and with it the imperative mandate combined with collectivism. The democratization of initiative was also an important step forward. But parliamentary progress came at a cost, because the influence of the represented over their representatives was diminished. Elections did not meet modern standards and were not supposed to be an instrument of voter control over members of the Riksdag. The electorate was not broadened, although political interest among the disenfranchised grew because of the parliamentary system and the political debate it encouraged.⁴⁰⁴

These deficiencies should not hide the fact that important steps towards democracy were taken in 1719–1723. Never again would Sweden be ruled without a constitution; never again would Sweden's parliament vanish from the public consciousness. Gustav III and his son would try to cow the Riksdag and then do away with it, but in the minds of their subjects the memory lingered of the era when they had been governed by public representatives. By taking on extensive – excessive – powers, members of the Riksdag had learned not only

how to debate and raise local concerns, but also how to draft and implement policies, including making compromises. The Estates' competence to take on such responsibilities was not lost, and in the nineteenth century power-sharing relied on that. By comparison, the French Revolutionaries had plenty of experience making pretty speeches, but next to no experience of actual government.⁴⁰⁵ This difference went a long way to explain the difference in political stability between France after 1789 and Sweden after 1809. It was not only the Riksdag which was invigorated in the Age of Liberty. The political system (eventually) saw open political debate and growing popular participation in local politics. Hierarchical order-giving as a mode of governance was replaced by negotiation – interest aggregation from below. Society was strengthened, but state capacity was not significantly reduced. The state apparatus was still recognizable and still worked as well as any in the *ancien régime* – and perhaps better than most.

Johan Rudolph Thiele, *Kongen af Sverrig admitterer Rigstænderne til Haandkys* (1772?). The four Estates are accepting the new Instrument of Government from Gustav III. The king is under a canopy with his regalia. In a mark of gratitude for the new regime the representative of the Estate of the Nobles is kissing the king's hand. Credit: Uppsala University Library.

The return of the king

Royal autocracy revisited, 1765–1772

On 21 August 1772, the four Estates of the Riksdag (the Swedish Diet) gathered at the royal palace in Stockholm. They had been hastily summoned by the king, Gustav III, who two days earlier had led a coup, overthrown the parliamentary regime of the Riksdag, bolstered royal authority, and paved the way for autocracy. In front of them, Gustav III portrayed himself as the saviour of the people and attacked the political system he had toppled and the two ruling political parties that had dominated Swedish politics since the end of Carolinian absolutism in 1719.

The nation has long been divided by two Parties, which have divided her [...] into two peoples, united only to tear the fatherland apart. [...] Streams of blood have flowed, either from one party, or the other, and the People have always been the victims of misfortunes that didn't concern them, but whose unfortunate consequences they felt.⁴⁰⁶

The 'two Parties', known since the 1730s by their nicknames as the *hattar* or Hats and the *mössor* or Caps, had alternated in power.⁴⁰⁷ With the parties fighting for power and position in the Riksdag, the king said, Sweden's politics had been detrimental to the government of the kingdom and the welfare of its subjects. So he saw no alternative but to seize power himself.⁴⁰⁸

The Riksdag was the key political actor in the Age of Liberty and parliamentary sovereignty was established in the 1750s.⁴⁰⁹ The traditional balance of power between the king, the Council of the Realm,

and the Riksdag was dispensed with in the regime shift of 1718–1723, and the 1720 constitution curtailed the king's powers and made the Riksdag the main political arena for Swedish political life. In an early form of parliamentary rule, politics gravitated around the Riksdag as the infallible, central ruling body.

Gustav III's autocoup of 1772 replaced the political system of the Age of Liberty with a royal regime, and evolved into autocracy in 1789, against the background of a political crisis that had been going on since the mid-century. This included a financial crisis, due to two failed wars against Russia in 1741 and 1757, and an economy worsened by the general financial crisis in Europe and soaring inflation.⁴¹⁰ In both 1771 and 1772, Sweden was struck by crop failure and famine, adding to the strained social and economic situation.⁴¹¹

The political crisis of 1765–1772 was a critical juncture that ended in Gustav's autocoup in August 1772. To understand the regime shift we argue it is necessary to consider the whole period and not only focus on events of 1772. Calls for a regime shift were first heard among the lower Estates in the Riksdag, but were taken up by the king, though he went in a different direction than originally intended. We see parliamentary politics as the main driving force for political change in the early 1770s, so we concentrate on the Riksdag and the members of the Estates as the main political actors, however fragmented into different factions. Approaching the period as a critical juncture permits an explanation of the regime shift that includes both the radicalization of the era and the conservative reaction that followed.

Between 1765 and 1772, political debate was radicalized when tensions between the lower Estates and the Estate of the Nobles escalated.⁴¹² The political conflict included demands for a levelling of privileges and greater freedom of the press, the latter having been introduced in 1766. Calls for sociopolitical reform culminated in an all-out attack on the existing regime when the lower Estates in 1771 argued for privileges for all four Estates.⁴¹³ Privileges for all Four Estates would remove the exclusiveness of the nobility, and in the end challenge the old social order.

The autocoup in 1772, however, abruptly halted the process and changed Sweden's government profoundly by strengthening royal authority and significantly limiting the powers of the Riksdag. As in other parts of Europe, it was a conservative reaction against a period of radicalization.⁴¹⁴ While the radical politicians set about tearing down the old Estate-based society, the conservatives looked to Enlightenment theories of power-sharing to defend the old order.⁴¹⁵ The autocoup of 1772 saw the radicals grind to a halt as the king swept to power, delaying the democratization of the Swedish political system.

State of the art – The late Age of Liberty

The politics of the Age of Liberty is a well-researched topic in Swedish historiography. Beginning in the nineteenth century, historians moralized about the politics of the time. Carl-Gustaf Malmström was negative about the period in his multi-volume work, characterizing it as both corrupt and dysfunctional. This view dominated until Fredrik Lagerroth in the early twentieth century took the opposite view, hailing the Age of Liberty as the precursor of modern parliamentarianism.⁴¹⁶ Both Malmström and Lagerroth focused on national politics in the Riksdag and the debates and decisions about domestic and foreign policy. Building on their work, there was a sustained interest in political conflict in the historiography.⁴¹⁷

Party politics, that part of the parliamentary regime that Gustav III so despised in his speech, has always fascinated. Since the mid-nineteenth century, many scholars have tried to label the political actors of the time, particularly the members of the Riksdag, as belonging to one of the two dominant political parties. This categorization of individual politicians has been criticized by scholars who consider the Riksdag and the political parties only two of the many important political arenas.⁴¹⁸ Extra-parliamentary activity in Stockholm's clubs and pubs was one example, recently surveyed by Karin Sennefelt. Another is Erik Bodenstein's study of the larger party narratives of the day, rather than the minutiae of party institutions.⁴¹⁹ Current research on the Age of Liberty can thus be said

to have increased attention on cultural perspectives and renewed interest in politics.⁴²⁰

Swedish historians have wrestled with the question of why the Age of Liberty ended, and at such a speed. One approach is to emphasize institutions. Lennart Linnarsson long ago argued that the Age of Liberty's constitution had various organizational flaws, notably a lack of interaction between the government and the Riksdag.⁴²¹ The Secret Committee's waning importance is given as another reason. Since the 1720s, its hundred or so members from the Estates of the Nobles, Clergy, and Burghers had been the Riksdag's central authority; in the 1760s, however, more issues were referred straight to the Estates.⁴²² The committee's influence diminished and with it the authority of the leading members of the Estates.

The decline of the parliamentary system has also been explained by foreign meddling in Swedish politics. The influx of money, especially from France and Russia, has been an important area of research. The flow of foreign money to pay politicians in the Riksdag, and sometimes to bribe them, has informed perceptions of the whole period, with the Age of Liberty seen as a corrupt political system dominated by foreign powers trying to take over Sweden.⁴²³ The opposing foreign powers supported both sides of the Riksdag with large sums of cash. When France changed its foreign policy towards Sweden in the 1760s, the money was diverted to the court instead. It was money that supposedly made the autocoup in 1772 a necessity.⁴²⁴

The fall of parliamentary rule has also been explained in economic and financial terms. In his influential work on the Age of Liberty, Michael Metcalf argues that the political conflicts of the 1760s challenged the mercantilist system and its grip on Swedish financial policy.⁴²⁵ At the Riksdag of 1765–1766, a major attack on economic policy was launched against the perceived irresponsible management of public funds, and in particular against public spending; the critique had an anti-bureaucratic edge and announced the government agencies' bureaucrats were to blame for the miserable state of Sweden.⁴²⁶ Economic policy was also said to have contributed to a situation in which self-interest took precedence over the common good.⁴²⁷

Patrik Winton follows this strand of research to conclude the Age of Liberty was ended by the unstable financial situation that evolved after the Seven Years War (1756–1763). The credit system failed because the emerging political group in Sweden, the peasants, had neither the interest nor the means to support current economic policies. For Winton, the autocoup was an answer to a debt crisis.⁴²⁸ The war brought inflation and a fall in the value of the Swedish currency, which eventually led to a political crisis centred on the public finances.

Winton's explanation fits well with the more common interpretation that Swedish politics was radicalized in the second half of the Age of Liberty, with calls for wider representation and the abolition of noble privileges.⁴²⁹ Parliamentary sovereignty, says Metcalf, was an established orthodoxy in Sweden by the 1750s, upsetting the traditional balance between the king, the Riksdag, and the Council of the Realm. In the early 1760s, however, the Riksdag's sovereignty was challenged by the wave of inflation, bankruptcy, and unemployment that followed the end of the Seven Years War.⁴³⁰

One response to the situation was the first open criticism of a political system that saw the Riksdag concentrate legislative and executive power in the hands of members of the Estates.⁴³¹ It was a sign that established political networks and their ability to control and limit the political agenda were weakening. The debate became more politicized as the number of political actors grew, leading to a political debate focused on ideas and political opinions rather than sociomaterial issues.⁴³² The ability of leading politicians to direct policy was limited as polarization grew and Estate politics replaced party politics. The result was the king's autocoup of 1772.

The most likely explanation for the fall of parliamentary rule combines all the competing accounts. Of all the factors, social tension appeared to be the most significant. The argument is that the regime shift in 1772 resulted from broader social conflicts, not individual political events. It would explain both the radicalization and the conservative reaction that followed. The autocoup came on the back of intense politicization, the most obvious example being the radical challenge to noble privileges that culminated at the Riksdag

of 1771–1772.⁴³³ Then the foundations of the old social order came under attack from the lower Estates. This conflict, based on egalitarian arguments for the abolition of the Estate order, revealed two important reasons for the fall of parliamentary rule. First, as the Riksdag's radical politicization showed, the nobility lost control of events, having once dominated politics through the Secret Committee. Second, their dominance had made the parliamentary system useful for the nobility, as they and their families stood to gain by it.⁴³⁴ The conflicts in the 1760s threatened their position. Inevitably, the king garnered support from the nobility as they tried to safeguard their position and privileges. A widespread climate of mistrust and scepticism of the political system allowed Gustav III to stage his autocoup and redraft the Instrument of Government.

The literature on the later Age of Liberty singles out the 1760s as key. The political crisis of 1765–1772 was a time of intense political conflict and accelerating politicization, clearly inspired by ideas from continental Europe. It was a decisive period, both for those defending the old order and for those arguing for a more participatory Instrument of Government. However well-researched by historians, though, we would argue the regime shift's significance as a critical juncture in Swedish history has been overlooked. For that reason we consider the whole period when analysing the end of parliamentary rule in 1772.

The critical juncture of 1765–1772

One of the clearest expressions of the radicalization of the later Age of Liberty was the Riksdag of 1765–1766. Having held power since 1738, most of the Hats had lost their seats. As Lagerroth says, the election result was 'one of the great landslides in Swedish parliamentary history'.⁴³⁵ Thus, the scene was set for a political regime shift, the first to be started by the elected members of the Riksdag. The Caps immediately attacked the previous policies of the Hats. According to the Caps, the bureaucracy had had the real power for decades, and the bureaucrats in the government agencies were to blame for the state of the country.⁴³⁶ The economic policy pursued by the Hats was criticized for not

yielding the promised results, and, worse, contributing to a situation where self-interest was more important than the common good.⁴³⁷

When the Riksdag of 1765–1766 opened in Stockholm, the new Cap majority launched its attack, focusing on three areas: the desperate financial situation, foreign influence, and the corrupt and dysfunctional state administration and its civil servants.⁴³⁸ The common denominator was the critique of the unrestricted powers of the bureaucracy, the *ämbetsmannavälde* (lit. rule by civil servants). According to the Caps, state officials favoured themselves and their colleagues, pursuing promotion and rewards instead of working for the public good. Central to this critique was the argument that the country's laws and regulations were not upheld and civil servants enriched themselves at the public expense. Whenever policy areas such as economic policy were discussed, the officials' quality and impact was seen as an important reason for the problems.

In September 1766 the Riksdag approved an ordinance 'on the promotion of the competent enforcement of the law'.⁴³⁹ It came with a committee report that detailed its thinking about all the clauses of the ordinance. In interpreting the correct enforcement of the law, as opposed to bad enforcement, it took its cue from the constitution of 1720.⁴⁴⁰ The discussion revolved around the three powers – the king, the Council of the Realm, and the Riksdag – which were considered the basic elements of the political system, and by extension of society as a whole.⁴⁴¹ Hence, the qualities – or merits – of civil servants were directly connected to state capacity. Civil servants recruited for their skill and experience would make for a better society. To achieve it, the Riksdag's powers grew at the expense of those of the king and the Council. Several appointments usually made by the king were transferred to the Riksdag in 1766.⁴⁴²

An important innovation in the committee report was that any changes to the Instrument of Government should be decided by two consecutive sessions of the Riksdag. This was to make sure changing political majorities did not alter the constitution to further their own goals.⁴⁴³ The resultant ordinance, although disputed in the coming years, pointed to a more 'modern' view of the constitution. Even

today, Swedish law states that any change to the constitution must be confirmed twice by Parliament, with a general election in between.

The ordinance and committee report of 1766 thus further limited the king's powers and the Council's ability to appoint civil servants. This meant that one of the traditional prerogatives of the king was now in the hands of the Riksdag. The reduced role of the monarch and the abolition of the principle of seniority established clearer bureaucratic principles, which in practice transferred power to the administration. This included appointment based on merit and greater transparency in the administration, making it easier than before for 'new men' to be promoted.⁴⁴⁴ Foreshadowing the rational, or modern, bureaucracy proposed by Weber, the ordinance of 1766 advocated predictability, competence, and stability.

The first real test of the ordinance 'on the promotion of the competent enforcement of the law' came in 1769 when the Riksdag convened for a new session. The office of Chancellor of Justice was open because Erik von Stockenström was promoted to the Council of the Realm.⁴⁴⁵ According to the ordinance of 1766, the Riksdag was now to appoint the new Chancellor of Justice; the constitution of 1720 said it was the king and the Council. This sparked a principled argument about which applied, the ordinance or the constitution. The bottom line was whether the Riksdag exercised both legislative power and executive power, or were they separate?

One of the leading Hat politicians, Anders Schönberg, argued in favour of the constitution. He claimed what was needed was a defensive wall around the laws of the realm to secure the constitution. An important part of that would be what Schönberg called a Security Act, to protect the basic rights of the citizens and secure both personal and material security. Schönberg proposed a long list of clauses, including a ban on political commissions, freedom from arbitrary arrest, no convictions without a trial, a ban on torture, and a ban on partial witnesses.⁴⁴⁶

The central question in the debate that unfolded in the autumn of 1769 was whether the Riksdag's powers should be limited. Was the Riksdag the omnipotent power in the Swedish political system,

or should it be balanced by the king and the Council? The question was referred to a committee that produced three documents, later presented to the Riksdag: a report about the original question of the appointment of a new Chancellor of Justice; a draft Security Act along the lines of Schönberg's proposal; and a draft of an ordinance about the appointment of civil servants.⁴⁴⁷ The report and the draft act mattered most, while the report summarized the committee's deliberations. They considered the Instrument of Government the supreme law of the land. They found the constitution had been revised and extended since 1720. All of those changes were rejected, and specifically the ordinance of 1766. Consequently, the Chancellor of Justice was to be appointed by the king and Council, as in the 1720 constitution.⁴⁴⁸

The committee report stressed there should be a separation of powers between the legislative and the executive such. The unfortunate combination of powers was the reason the Security Act had to be implemented. Citizens' personal security was in danger because the Riksdag had extended its powers further than the constitution allowed, or as the report eloquently put it, 'in part through the execution of the law and in part through new additional laws, this equilibrium has been disturbed. One has outweighed the other and the balance is lost'.⁴⁴⁹

When the Four Estates debated the committee report in early November 1769 it was a political anticlimax. The peasants rejected the report and the Security Act out of hand, without a vote.⁴⁵⁰ The burghers were so upset by the report they refused even to debate it. Two days later, the clergy approved the report and the Security Act, the only Estate to do so.⁴⁵¹ That left the nobility. On 15 November, they opened a debate about the report, but from the outset the proponents of reform were in the minority. The debate closed with a vote on the committee's proposals: 431 yes, 457 no. The committee report and the reforms were rejected by the Riksdag.

The debate in 1769 was in principle about constitutional reform. The political conflict about the Security Act was a reaction to the reforms of 1766, looking for a balance between the Riksdag and the executive branch. The advocates of the separation of powers had pro-

posed reducing the Riksdag's authority, and at the committee stage their faction had command of the debate. They argued for a Swedish equivalent of England's Magna Carta or *habeas corpus* rights. However, the majorities in the Estates were volatile and when the Security Act was put to a vote, it fell. The Riksdag retained its powers at the expense of the constitutional reformist alternative of the Security Act.

The years following the failure of the Security Act saw the continued radicalization of national politics. A key moment was the death of King Adolf Fredrik on 12 February 1771. The same night, the Council of the Realm arranged to govern the kingdom. The new king was in Paris at the time, and the Council despatched a courier for France, carrying a provisional Accession Charter for him to sign. The Riksdag was summoned to draft the formal Accession Charter and prepare for his coronation as Gustav III.⁴⁵²

The turmoil in the Riksdag in 1771–1772 has drawn considerable interest from historians. Described as the last major political conflict in the Age of Liberty, it has been studied at length by Edler, Malmström, and Lagerroth and more recently Nordin, Wolff, and Ihalainen.⁴⁵³ By that point, the political system of the Age of Liberty was – in theory – egalitarian and politically representative. Citizens constituted the Four Estates that together formed the Riksdag. In this representative assembly, each Estate had one vote and could influence decisions about policy. The result was equal rights and obligations between the Estates in a 'modern' sense. This system, however, only encompassed citizens in their capacity as members of the Riksdag. The rights and obligations belonged to the Estate; there were still barriers to the rights and influence of individual citizens.⁴⁵⁴

One of those barriers was on appointments to higher office in the state administration and military. The highest offices were reserved for the nobility and regulated in the privileges of the Estate of the Nobles. That came under attack at the Riksdag of 1771, and at its heart was the transition from an old social order to a class society, as Jonas Nordin and others have found. Perhaps best articulated at the time by Anders Nordencrantz, it was linked to European debates and the emerging ideologies of the French Revolution in 1789 and

even earlier in North America.⁴⁵⁵ In Sweden as in Europe, the old social order with its advantages of birth and Four Estates was under pressure, a prelude to the fall of the *ancien régime*.

The work of drafting Gustav III's Accession Charter started as soon as the Riksdag opened. In September 1771, representatives of the Four Estates met as *Stora deputationen* (the Great Committee) to prepare the text. A fair number of the clauses were copied from the Accession Charter of Adolf Fredrik in 1751.⁴⁵⁶ Some, however, were changed, and it was that and the debate about wording that evolved into the raging political conflict of the Riksdag in 1771–1772. The commoners inserted the issue of privileges for each Estate into the formulation of the Accession Charter, using it to challenge the nobility. When the Great Committee had a first draft, it was sent to the Riksdag for debate. All three lower Estates swiftly approved the changes, but the nobles hesitated, delaying the final decision.

The conflict about the Accession Charter fuelled the political tensions in the spring of 1772. The more radical developments were abruptly halted on 19 August, though, when Gustav III seized power. The young king had turned the divided political situation to his advantage. The lower Estates had pushed for regime change, but it was the king who imposed it, and on his own terms. The political momentum had been with the commoners, whose politics became increasingly radical as time went on. This eventually led to a conservative reaction. While in 1769 it was led by the noble opposition, by 1772 the king was at the forefront.⁴⁵⁷ The autocoup has been systematically analysed elsewhere, and it is enough to say here that it was bloodless, and in just one day Gustav took control of Stockholm. The military regiments in the city immediately swore an oath of allegiance to the king; the following day the government agencies and central administration were called to swear the oath, together with the burghers of Stockholm who joyfully declared themselves loyal to the king.⁴⁵⁸

The immediate result of the events of 19 August was a new Instrument of Government. Gustav III presented the constitution to the Riksdag on 21 August, and it was immediately approved by the Estates, now firmly controlled by the king. The powers of the Riksdag

were broken and the Age of Liberty ended. The thrust of the 1772 Instrument of Government was the transfer of power, and primarily executive power, from the Riksdag to the king. It was, however, not a restoration of the absolutist rule of earlier Swedish kings. Carolinian autocracy was still thought the reason for the precarious state of the country, and Gustav III continued to denounce the evils of absolutism. Rather than being the absolutist ruler of his kingdom, Gustav claimed to be the first among its citizens – an enlightened monarch.

Liberty thwarted

The radicalization of politics and Gustav III's autocoup brought down the Age of Liberty's parliamentary regime. The period 1765–1772 was a critical juncture in Swedish history, culminating in a regime shift that eventually re-established autocracy. In hindsight, however, the radical period of the late 1760s could have spelled the end of a society based on privilege. This short period was marked by political conflicts that altered course several times before the coup in 1772.

Agents and motives

The regime shift was largely the work of Gustav III and his court allies. As earlier research has shown, Gustav had made various plans for revolutions and coups since at least the 1760s.⁴⁵⁹ None had materialized. In the summer of 1772, however, the conditions were right to stage a coup and extend the king's power. These conditions resulted from the radicalization of politics at the Riksdag. The argument we make is that the period 1765–1772 should be considered a political crisis. In this period the old social order was challenged at the Riksdag, at the same time as parliamentary sovereignty was questioned.

The driving forces behind the regime shift can be attributed to both internal and external factors. Domestic politics was one of the most important of these, and among the more particular reasons were dissatisfaction with the state's poor finances and the recent crop failures and famine. The increasingly polarized political situation alienated several established groups in society, most notably the nobility. When

the lower Estates attacked the privileges of the nobility and ousted the conservative members of the Council, the disregarded members of the nobility rallied to the king.

Another driving force was the changing foreign policy advocated by the ruling Caps, essentially moving Sweden closer to Russia. Gustav III opposed the change, seeing France as the primary ally. The new foreign policy played into the geopolitical realities of the day and explains why Gustav acted in August 1772. In neighbouring Denmark, the court had carried out a coup in Copenhagen in January, when the royal physician, Johann Friedrich Struensee, was arrested. Struensee had been able to manoeuvre himself into being Denmark's *de facto* leader because of the mental illness of the king, Christian VII. Struensee tried to distance Denmark from Russia, and with the fall of his regime, the Danes again moved closer to Russia.⁴⁶⁰ This alarmed France, the historically dominant power in Scandinavia, and with Gustav III being held back by a radical Riksdag, dominated by pro-Russian Caps, France urged the young king to seize power. The French wanted to secure their influence in an important region of Europe, and Gustav III was their hope of securing an ally.

Since his visit to Berlin in 1771, Gustav was aware of secret negotiations between Prussia and Austria about Poland. The First Partition of Poland was a warning example. To avoid the same fate, Sweden had to act. Part of the calculation was that Russia in 1772 was occupied with the 'Polish question' and did not have political resources to stop a coup in Stockholm.⁴⁶¹

Taken together, the internal and external factors explained why Gustav III carried out his autocoup in August 1772. Internal political strife, combined with geopolitical circumstances, created a window of opportunity for the king. Geopolitics, however, had been the constant backdrop to Swedish politics in the preceding decades. What changed in the 1760s was the increasing politicization of Swedish domestic policy, and with it the possibility of changing the Instrument of Government.

State capacity

When assessing the effect of the regime shift of 1772, it is plain that state capacity increased. In various ways this affected the resources, policy instruments, and power of implementation available to the Swedish state. Through his coup, Gustav III gained control of the state's resources, both political and administrative. Most striking was the strengthening of executive power, which after 1772 was concentrated in the king's hands. This was the exact opposite of the earlier shift in 1723 when the Riksdag reduced the role of the monarch. After 1772, the king became the centre of the political and the administrative sphere, as he controlled both the Riksdag and the state bureaucracy.

The main boost to state capacity was in the power of implementation. The question of whether the Riksdag should exercise both legislative and executive power was a major bone of contention in 1765–1772. Gustav III's coup concentrated executive power in the hands of the king. But as the Riksdag became more circumscribed, legislative power became dependent on the king's will. After 1772, the king was the centre of state power. No proposals were discussed, no decisions were put into practice, without his approval. This paralleled the regime shift in 1617–1626, when Axel Oxenstierna's reforms were unsuccessful in limiting royal power. Gustav III was ruling like his great hero, Gustav II Adolf, when he claimed the right to intervene in administrative, political, and judicial affairs when he considered it necessary.

After the coup, Gustav III continued to assert his executive powers. One example was the suppression of the freedom of the press in 1774, which imposed fines on people who attacked royal authority in writing. Another was the *myntrealisation* (lit. mint regulation) of 1777, the revaluation of the currency which introduced the silver standard. The latter greatly improved Sweden's finances and the king's scope for action.⁴⁶²

One explanation for the successful regime shift was Gustav III's ability to deploy the resources of information control. After the coup, the king gradually restricted the freedom of the press and controlled

how the new Gustavian regime was portrayed and legitimized. An important feature of this was how the king presented himself as the first among its citizens. Using a rhetoric that built on the political language of the Age of Liberty was key to the rule of Gustav III.⁴⁶³ It strengthened the king's position in the short term, but over time it weakened the legitimacy of royal power, as the king's repressive policies alienated many of his supporters.

Gustav III portrayed himself in positive terms as the saviour of the country. As he proclaimed in his speech to the Riksdag in 1772, he could unite his divided kingdom. To distribute this positive image, the king took full advantage of the policy instruments of the state. The most obvious was the implementation of the Instrument of Government, declaring the king to be the heart of the state apparatus. The king poured out a stream of propaganda to legitimize and consolidate the new regime. That Gustav III amended the constitution in 1789 with the Act of Union and Security, making him a *de facto* autocratic ruler, shows the effectiveness of the regime shift and how state capacity increased after 1772.

Impartiality

A result of strengthening state capacity was a parallel decrease in government impartiality after 1772. The political regime in the Age of Liberty was based on constitutional limitations on royal power. The monarch was subordinate to the Riksdag. In theory this secured impartiality, as the Estates were regarded as representatives of the country. The coup in 1772 overturned this and the king replaced the Riksdag as the centre of political affairs. The change comprised different perceptions of what impartiality meant, however. While the Age of Liberty framed it as a safeguard against earlier autocratic rule, Gustav III perceived impartiality as part of a longed-for restoration of the country. The actual consequences for impartiality, however, were negative. In 1772, the constitutional limitations on the king were abolished and he steadily accrued power.

The new Instrument of Government repealed all the laws and constitutional arrangements made since 1680. It also stipulated that

the constitution could not be changed by the Riksdag, because the Instrument of Government explicitly prohibited any changes or amendments to it.⁴⁶⁴ The new Gustavian regime sought to establish a constitutional shift, but the opposite happened in the state bureaucracy, where the continuity from the Age of Liberty was striking. The king relied on individual advisers and he created several new bodies in the administration, but on the whole the old bureaucracy continued to function as before.⁴⁶⁵ It seems the strengthening of bureaucratic principles, among them the impartiality of civil servants, was sustained after the regime shift. An exception was the king's right to appoint or promote civil servants without the consent of the Council. Thus, one direct consequence of the changes in 1772 was that the king secured a decisive say in all appointments.⁴⁶⁶

The changes to the rights and protections of the individual are more difficult to interpret. The immediate consequences in 1772 were minor, apart from the restrictions on the freedom of the press. The limits on free speech and debate obviously made it harder to criticize the new regime, which soon led to discontent with the king's policy. Those conflicts lay ahead in 1772, however, and many existing regulations stayed in place. One example was the judicial system, which was not overturned by Gustav III in 1772. The major changes to the impartiality of the courts and the subsequent move to absolute rule would wait until 1789, when the Act of Union and Security granted the king exclusive authority over foreign and domestic policy, war and peace, and the administration of justice.

Political participation

The coup in 1772 curtailed the powers of the Riksdag, and Gustav III side-lined the Estates. The events that followed significantly reduced political participation. The new Instrument of Government kept the Riksdag as a political arena, but gave the king the power to make major decisions. The new Gustavian regime used the Riksdag much like Gustav II Adolf and Karl XI had done. At first they accepted the Riksdag's role as a representative assembly, but in practice they bypassed it for all important decisions. Until his assassination in 1792,

Gustav III summoned the Riksdag only four times, each time strategically manoeuvring the Estates to further extend royal authority.

The Riksdag nevertheless remained an important political resource. Even the autocratic Karl XI had not abolished the Riksdag altogether, but instead used it to aggregate different interests and play them off against one another. One reason for the importance of the Riksdag is that the Swedish political system can be described as one of shared authority, especially regarding economic policy.⁴⁶⁷ To obtain resources, especially to wage war, the monarch was sooner or later forced to convene the Riksdag to negotiate a consensus with the elites. This happened again in 1789 when Gustav III passed the Act of Union and Security, thus consolidating his autocracy.

The decrease in political participation after the coup in 1772 was a response to the challenge to political and social privilege that the lower Estates had been making since 1770. The calls for a levelling of privileges, or even the introduction of separate privileges for the lower Estates, was perceived as an attack on the foundations of the old social order, and something that eventually did away with the nobles as a privileged group. The debates about privileges indicate the Riksdag had emerged as a platform for wider political participation, with political issues raised by the less affluent Estates at the top of the agenda. In Sweden, it was access to the representative assembly – the Riksdag – that made it possible to challenge privilege, unlike Britain and France, where the middling sort lacked representation and the channels to exert political influence.⁴⁶⁸

If the political programme of the lower Estates had been implemented, the political influence of the Estate of the Peasants would have increased. We agree with Sheri Berman that this would have made democratic development possible.⁴⁶⁹ However, the coup efficiently stopped it, as both the king and the nobility rejected it. The Instrument of Government was the tool used to limit political participation. It placed the king at the centre of the state administration and vested most executive power in him. That made all constitutional instruments designed to protect mutual agreements superfluous.

Coda – Gustav III's regime shift

Gustav III's regime shift must be understood as a critical juncture extending from 1765 to 1772. The radicalization of politics, beginning in the 1760s, is essential to any explanation of Gustav III's coup. Thus, the regime shift can primarily be explained by internal forces. Radicalization led to the collapse of parliamentary sovereignty in 1772. Foreign pressure, especially from the French, played a role in encouraging Gustav III, but political change was ultimately driven by the defection of the nobility from the Riksdag.⁴⁷⁰

Most nobles had supported the constitution and the Riksdag, as it had suited them and their families. However, the intensified political conflicts of the 1760s equated parliamentary sovereignty with the possibility of sociopolitical reforms. This frightened the nobles, who sided with the king, leading to a regime shift. We see it as an example of the alliance between the nobility and the king to defend their position of power, with the wider goal of institutional change in mind. Faced with the lower Estates' demands for greater political and social participation, a change of government was seen as a good choice. The collapse occurred suddenly in 1772 but had been in the making since at least 1769. The proposal for counter-reform in 1769 was driven by the nobility. When the Riksdag rejected it, many nobles knew that it was now the lower Estates calling the shots.

The events of 1772 point in two directions. First, Gustav III's political project was successful, as the coup transferred most of the Riksdag's powers to the king. Whether the Age of Liberty was democratic or not, the coup ended an era of parliamentary rule. From then on, the king, not the Riksdag, was the centre of politics. The regime shift thus strengthened the king's political powers as he ignored the Riksdag and later embarked on autocracy, cemented with the Act of Union and Security in 1789. Second, the coup effectively halted the progress of sociopolitical reform. The institutional framework of the old social order had been challenged in the 1760s. The demands of the lower Estates for privileges and an equal society had been close

to being fulfilled. The coup ended that, prompting a reaction against social reform and reducing political participation.

There is a paradox in these two interpretations of the regime shift's consequences. Gustav III's new regime in many cases continued Age of Liberty policies. The future autocrat navigated a sociopolitical landscape largely shaped by the previous regime, with its layering of older institutions combined with the creation of new ones. For the state administration and its civil servants, there was ample evidence of the path dependency of existing institutions. The king carried on the administrative policy of the younger Caps in the 1760s, for example, and the government agencies were mostly retained.⁴⁷¹ Another example was how the coup in 1772 declared all legislation after 1680 void. This meant there was no Riksdag Act in place when the Riksdag reconvened in 1778. The solution was to use the old ordinances from the early seventeenth century.⁴⁷² It was a constitutional path dependency from long ago, and it gave the king a political opportunity, because he could exploit ambiguities in the old texts to his advantage.

Even sociopolitical reform continued to some extent. For example, proposals from the failed Security Act of 1769 were incorporated into legislation introduced alongside the new Instrument of Government, the ban on torture among them.⁴⁷³ However, the more far-reaching reforms envisaged in the 1760s were not introduced until 1789. With the Act of Union and Security, Gustav III implemented many of the social reforms advocated by the lower Estates in the 1770s.⁴⁷⁴ The act decimated the privileges of the nobility – the Council of the Realm was abolished, and most positions in the state administration could be held by commoners. Gustav III thus confirmed parts of the radical programme of the Age of Liberty, while proving himself an autocratic ruler.

Gustav III used both radicalization and the conservative reaction that followed to his advantage. When the old social order was challenged, the king played on the nobility's fear of losing their position in the social hierarchy. The critical juncture of 1765–1772 shows that political strategies for abolishing privilege drove political conflict in the later Age of Liberty. The radical position in the debate was to

dispense with all privileges and move to popular sovereignty. This nuances the claims by political scientists that modern democracy only developed after the old social order was called into question by the revolutions in America and France. The established political order was challenged in Sweden in the 1760s, culminating in Gustav III's regime shift in 1772.



The signed Instrument of Government from 1809. The coup of 1809 was the last early modern regime shift in Sweden, replaced by a continuous debate about political change. With the new Instrument of Government, progress and change was made part of the political debate and was accepted by leading politicians. Credit: Emre Olgun, Swedish National Archives, 'Statsrättsliga handlingar nr 68', Stockholm 6 June 1809.

A separation of powers Modelling mixed government, 1809–1810

In early June 1809, *Konstitutionsutskottet* (the Committee on the Constitution) put a new Instrument of Government before the Riksdag (the Swedish Diet). The proposed constitution resulted from two weeks of intensive work by the committee. Under the threat of an advancing Russian army and with the king arrested and ousted from power, the committee had been given the task of charting the survival and the future of the Swedish kingdom. According to a memorandum that accompanied the proposal, the new regime was long-awaited.

The dormant Swedish power rose to the rescue of the fatherland; before it could not rise, but distress and danger had created a common belief which now loudly and collectively demanded a change of government, which before had been desired only secretly and individually.⁴⁷⁵

This framing and legitimization of a *coup d'état* in all but name was the final nail in the coffin of the Gustavian regime. The new constitution in 1772 had strengthened royal authority and limited the Riksdag's powers. In 1809 the pendulum swung back. Gustav III's autocracy, established in 1789, was replaced by a new Instrument of Government, influenced by the separation of powers and with the position of the king circumscribed.

The coup of 1809 was a critical juncture in Swedish political history. There has been some debate whether it was a revolution or not.⁴⁷⁶ In

effect, it was a military coup which overthrew the legal, constitutional regime. The political and constitutional institutions were rearranged in short order, and the foundations of Swedish society came under scrutiny when the Estates gathered. In a busy couple of months, the Riksdag crafted a new constitution, elected a new king, and passed a range of laws and regulations. They could not have guessed how long their work would last: the Instrument of Government from 1809 governed Sweden until 1975, when it was replaced by today's constitution.

The Riksdag of 1809–1810 was the focal point of the convulsions that followed the overthrow of the king. Like the earlier regime shifts, events of 1809 once again illustrated how important the legitimacy of the Riksdag was. The argument went that the Riksdag, with its historical roots, had the authority to make institutional changes. As for the regime shift of 1765–1772, we would argue that politics in the Riksdag drove political change after the military coup. However, the political actors were highly fragmented, and each political group had its own agenda: the officers and bureaucrats who launched the coup; the members of the Committee on the Constitution; and the new king, Karl XIII. The political dynamics of events of 1809 were anything but straightforward.

Earlier regime shifts, such as in 1720 and 1772, were about coming to terms with the past. The politicians of the Age of Liberty wanted to get rid of Carolinian autocracy, and Gustav III wanted to get rid of the parliamentarianism of the Age of Liberty. In both cases, however, their inspiration lay in the past. Gustav III dreamed of recreating Gustav II Adolf's Sweden; the politicians at the start of the Age of Liberty looked with envy at the heyday of the nobility before 1680. Our point is that the 1809 regime shift differed from all previous examples, and the political turmoil that followed the coup brought together both experiences and ideas about the future in a way that was unprecedented in Swedish politics.

We argue that the politicians of 1809 used both the past and the future to formulate political arguments as they made peace with the previous Gustavian regime, but also with the entire social order. The long debates in the Riksdag revealed diverging political views on key

issues such as political representation and the social organization of society. This was a political novelty because the issues were not dismissed out of hand, but instead were added to the political agenda with an eye to the future. Both the American and the French Revolutions had influenced Swedish politics.⁴⁷⁷ The combination of history and futurity made the political struggle of 1809 a melting pot of the old and the new. To paraphrase Reinhard Koselleck, the horizon of expectation was widened, as future reforms were now expected.⁴⁷⁸

The background to the regime shift in 1809 was the political turmoil in Europe following the French Revolution. In 1804, Sweden became involved in the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815), and due to Gustav IV Adolf's deeply-rooted aversion to Napoleon – he described him as the Antichrist – Sweden allied with Britain, Russia, and Austria against the French emperor. The Treaties of Tilsit in 1807, however, flipped the political tables, because Tsar Alexander went over to Napoleon. One consequence of this new political alliance was the outbreak of the Finnish War (1808–1809), when Russia attacked Finland, or rather Sweden–Finland, in February 1808. Shortly after that, Denmark–Norway declared war on Sweden, forcing the Swedes to fight a three-front war: in Finland against the Russians, along the western border against the Norwegians, and in southern Sweden against the Danes.

The threat from Denmark was averted with the help of the British, as the Royal Navy patrolled the Öresund Strait and prevented an invasion of Skåne. In Norway, skirmishing began in April 1808, but soon the war reached a stalemate, leaving the two sides to guard each other's positions along the border. The hardest fighting was in Finland, where a large Russian army attacked. The Swedish army counterattacked, but after a series of defeats and setbacks its troops withdrew, and Sweden evacuated the whole of Finland.

The Finnish War exacerbated the Gustavian autocracy's crisis of legitimacy, and the surrender of the fortress of Sveaborg (Suomenlinna) in May 1808 deepened the crisis for the king.⁴⁷⁹ The military setbacks added to a political situation that had pertained since 1800, in which Gustav IV Adolf had failed to make his policies credible to influential groups in society.⁴⁸⁰ The elites in the nobility and the army

became increasingly dissatisfied with the king, and the coup of 1809 ended Sweden's last royal autocracy.

State of the art – The revolution of 1809

The events of 1809 have been extensively studied and the failed war and the loss of Finland, the military coup, and the new Instrument of Government each have a significant body of research, though less so in recent years so some of it is outdated. Military historians have studied the war itself, and the actual course of events of both the war and the subsequent coup are well documented.⁴⁸¹ Constitutional history, including the making of the new Instrument of Government and other parts of the constitution, is another large research field.⁴⁸²

The new Instrument of Government has attracted a great deal of attention from historians and political scientists, many of them drawn by the question of whether it had internal or external sources of inspiration.⁴⁸³ Did it draw on Sweden's legal tradition or was it inspired by current constitutional theories from abroad, especially Montesquieu's theory of the separation of powers? That question, along with a debate about influence of individual political actors – such as the members of the Committee on the Constitution – has dominated much of the research.⁴⁸⁴

Historians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries argued the Instrument of Government was based on the Swedish tradition, while later researchers were less certain, among them Rolf Karlbom, who, arguing it broke with tradition, was one of the first to discuss the Instrument of Government from a more theoretical, analytical position.⁴⁸⁵ More recently, Anders Sundin has analysed the debates about the Instrument of Government as an interpretative framing process, emphasizing the existing political culture and all-important public opinion. Sundin has also shown how political and institutional changes enabled the gradual transformation of Swedish government, exemplified by the possibility of change introduced in the new Instrument of Government. Sundin's study focuses on discourses, the reinterpretation of political concepts, and the advent of new concepts.⁴⁸⁶

The causes of the political regime shift in 1809 have not attracted as much academic interest as the inspiration for the constitution. The literature, when it looks at the reasons for the coup, usually concentrates on the king's inability to manage the war and the difficult international situation – the king and his advisers as incompetent managers of the kingdom.⁴⁸⁷ The precarious international situation was Sten Carlsson's theme in his seminal work about the coup. To his mind, war and Gustav IV Adolf's inability to form alliances with leading civil servants and military officers triggered the coup. However, it dated back further than that to the active opposition in the Riksdag to the king in 1800, and many of the elite thought the country's difficulties had started in 1789, when Gustav III strengthened the powers of the monarchy.⁴⁸⁸

The role of the military in the coup was significant against the background of war and the willingness of army commanders to rebel. Martin Hårdstedt has argued that the coup resulted from problems related to the war, and the king would probably not have been deposed if his foreign policy had not failed.⁴⁸⁹ Mats Hemström also places great emphasis on the military. Hemström shows how the officers of Sweden's western army exploited the king's lack of legitimacy: as the rebel troops marched on Stockholm, there was no resistance from the surrounding areas.⁴⁹⁰

Another explanation, which also emphasizes the legitimacy of the political system, has been put forward by Mikael Alm. He has studied the rhetoric and public images of Gustav III and Gustav IV Adolf in the period of Gustavian autocracy, and considers its crisis of legitimacy to lie behind the coup. The basis for the continuation of the autocracy was a king who pursued policies that satisfied the most influential sectors of society. Gustav III achieved it by appealing to the nobility, the army officers, and the top civil servants; his son took a different approach by pursuing policies that appealed to broader sectors of the population. As Alm puts it, the privileged elite lost confidence in the king and his policies and eventually decided to overthrow the regime.⁴⁹¹

That bears repeating. It was the privileged elite who lost confidence in the king and his policies, not the wider population. The coup was primarily the result of conspiracies by leading military officers and civil servants. In the provinces, for example, support for the king was still strong. There were several anti-revolutionary declarations, including from Gothenburg on the west coast and Skåne in the south. Local priests and peasants blamed the king's officials but not the king for the country's misfortunes.⁴⁹² This tension between the population, especially the less well-off, and the authorities continued in the years after 1809 and was expressed in riots in Stockholm in 1810.⁴⁹³

There has been no one approach to the history of the 1809 regime shift. Some treat the coup as a political event, quite distinct from the constitutional questions in the Riksdag in 1809–1810; others are preoccupied with the constitutional question, seeing the answer in the Swedish legalist tradition or in international influence. When explaining the change of regime, the Finnish War and the king's failed policies are the usual explanations, though in recent decades the actual events of 1809–1810 have received little attention.

Here constitutional issues are set aside in favour of a perspective that emphasizes political conflict, on the basis that politics in the Riksdag drove political change after the military coup. Uniquely, it was a regime shift when both past and future inspired the politicians who formulated policy for a post-Gustavian society – the men of 1809 were acting at a critical juncture in Swedish history.

The critical juncture of 1809

The dire military situation in the winter of 1808–1809 led to conspiracies against Gustav IV Adolf. The Russians were planning to invade the Åland Islands, and even Stockholm was threatened. There was widespread dissatisfaction among army officers with the king's handling of the war, and his character as a military leader was questioned, though not in public. Discontent also spread among civil servants, and in the autumn of 1808 there were plots to arrest and even assassinate the king.⁴⁹⁴ None of the plans materialized, however.

The spark that ignited the coup was the decision by the western army on the Norwegian border and one of its officers, Georg Adlersparre, to march on Stockholm on 7 March. Adlersparre issued a proclamation stating the goals of the uprising; to save the country from annihilation and to summon a Riksdag to negotiate peace. The king learned about the revolt on 12 March and immediately planned to gather loyal troops from the south of Sweden to fight the revolutionaries. With the king preparing to depart from Stockholm, the military command in the capital finally acted. On the morning of 13 March, seven officers led by Carl Johan Adlercreutz arrested the king at the palace. With the king in custody, the revolutionaries formed an interim government with the king's uncle, Duke Karl, as regent.

One of the first decisions by the interim government was to summon a Riksdag. The most pressing issue for the country was to end the war and negotiate a peace with the Russians, so a new political regime was essential. With the king deposed, political power was transferred to the Riksdag. Thus, the Estates were once again brought in at a critical juncture. As in 1719, the dismantling of autocracy was thought to require a representative assembly, underlining the importance of the historical experience of political culture. Over the next few months, the Riksdag became the main political arena for the struggle for Sweden's political future.

When the Riksdag opened in Stockholm on 1 May 1809, the interim government had a plan for how to pursue their political goals. First, the deposed Gustav IV Adolf should formally abdicate and the crown prince be excluded from the succession. The plan was for the Estates to accept Duke Karl as King Karl XIII, and once he was proclaimed king a new Instrument of Government drawn up by the interim government would be presented to the Estates. The Riksdag would adopt or reject the proposal, and if it were rejected the old Instrument of Government from 1772 and 1789 would continue to apply.

The interim government had underestimated the strength of feeling in the Riksdag. When the suggested order of events was presented, the Estates of the Clergy and Peasants accepted it, but the Estates of the Nobles and Burghers fiercely opposed it, saying the Riksdag should

first decide on the Instrument of Government and then proclaim the king. The future monarch should be controlled by the new constitution, not the other way round. Their opposition clinched it, and Duke Karl and the interim government accepted that the Riksdag would first decide the Instrument of Government.

There were several strands to this outcome. One was that the Riksdag now accepted that Sweden was in an unconstitutional state, and there were no more calls for Gustav III's Instrument of Government to be reinstated.⁴⁹⁵ Subsequent debates looked ahead, and there were few positive references to previous constitutions – both the constitution of the Age of Liberty and the Instrument of Government of 1772 and 1789 were portrayed as failed regimes. This differed from previous regime shifts, when the past was often presented as a model for the future. In 1809 the coup led to an expectation that the future would involve something new and different.

Another important result was that the Riksdag took the initiative for the Instrument of Government. Shortly after the coup in March 1809, the politician and civil servant Anders af Håkansson was commissioned by the interim government to draft a new Instrument of Government. It was presented to the Estates in early May as a part of the government's initial plan, but met with strong resistance.⁴⁹⁶ Those opposing it claimed that it was the old Instrument of Government of 1772 and 1789 phrased differently.⁴⁹⁷ As the Gustavian regime was highly unpopular, the proposal came to represent the old autocratic order, and was eschewed as a continuation of the previous regime and part of the interim government's plan for the quick acceptance of the king and constitution. Both the plan and Anders af Håkansson's proposal misfired, and the interim government's opponents came out on top.

The early skirmishes established the Riksdag would be the central political arena for the regime shift of 1809–1810. From early May 1809, the Estates replaced the deposed king as the political counterpart to the government, and it was in the debates and in the committees at the Riksdag that the political and constitutional result of the regime shift was to be decided. This also meant that any reservations about

the legitimacy of the coup were silenced, and the righteousness of the revolution was an established fact.⁴⁹⁸ Since the ex-king was out of the picture, criticism of the Gustavian regime, and especially the Instrument of Government of 1772 and 1789, replaced the initial argument for the coup – the king's policies and personal character.

When the first draft of a new Instrument of Government was rejected, the Riksdag set up the Committee on the Constitution. A special committee dealing with constitutional matters was a novelty in Sweden. It had 15 members representing all Four Estates. The committee's task was to formulate a new constitution for the kingdom and a new Instrument of Government. The Riksdag did not instruct the committee how it should work, and the details are largely unknown, because the committee decided at its first meeting on 14 May 1809 not to keep minutes.⁴⁹⁹

On 29 May, the Committee on the Constitution presented a draft proposal for a new Instrument of Government and on 2 June it was debated in the Estates. It came with a committee report explaining the proposal and defending the committee's position, written by its secretary, Hans Järta.⁵⁰⁰ Järta has been described as one of the most important figures in the history of the 1809 constitution, and is known for the style and eloquence of the report.⁵⁰¹

The proposed new Instrument of Government was based on the separation of powers, a well-known theory that had been debated by Swedish politicians since the eighteenth century.⁵⁰² The Committee on the Constitution declared that it had wanted to strike a balance between the executive (the king) and the legislative (the Riksdag). The executive was to be kept within certain limits, and the legislature was to be slow to act but strong in its opposition.⁵⁰³ The proposal also established the judiciary as an independent branch, but without the authority to change the law. The objective was to balance the three powers so they kept one another in check. As Olof Petersson argues, the Instrument of Government may have been inspired by the theory of the separation of powers, but it was not modelled on its more schematic doctrine.⁵⁰⁴

When the proposal was presented to the Estates, the debate was relatively brief. Sundin concludes the Committee on the Constitution's goal with the new Instrument of Government was to balance executive power with the freedoms and rights of the nation.⁵⁰⁵ This reflected a common opinion about the failure of the two previous regimes that one party had too much power: unrestricted parliamentary rule in the Age of Liberty and despotic autocracy under the two Gustavs. The Committee's goal to balance the positions was not challenged by the Estates in 1809, so the ensuing debate focused on various individual clauses of the proposal.

One of the most controversial clauses concerned privileges. The revolution of 1809 had been instigated and carried out by the high aristocracy and military leadership. Once the king was deposed, however, the coup was open to the possibility of more radical reforms of society. The first sign was a slew of pamphlets and other publications that appeared in the spring of 1809, when the interim government restored the freedom of the press.⁵⁰⁶ Many writers called for the abolition of the privileges of the nobility – a reminder of the radical politics of the 1760s.

When the Riksdag debated the proposed Instrument of Government, the peasants argued for far-reaching reforms and attacked the privileges of the nobility. The peasants demanded equal taxation of all land in the kingdom and an end to the nobility's privilege of tax exemption. This would put all the land on an equal footing and was a challenge to the old order – precisely the challenge that Sheri Berman has identified as a prerequisite for an emerging democracy.⁵⁰⁷ However, Clause 114 of the proposed Instrument of Government confirmed the old privileges. The Estate of the Peasants could not accept that, and in their resolution made their acceptance conditional on the clause being struck out. They demanded that privileges be dealt with as a separate question once the Instrument of Government was accepted by the Riksdag.⁵⁰⁸ On 5 June, all Four Estates approved the Instrument of Government, but the peasants forbade their speaker to sign off on the constitution until the clause about privileges had been removed. This led to a stalemate between the Estates and days of

intensive effort to persuade the peasants to sign. They were adamant and continued to demand that privileges be omitted and eventually changed. On 27 June, the crisis ended when Duke Karl summoned the peasants to the royal palace. After some constitutionally dubious tactics and a scathing speech by the duke, the speaker finally signed the Instrument of Government. On 29 June the duke was crowned King Karl XIII.

To meet the peasants' demands for reform, the other Estates agreed to some minor revisions in 1809. The nobility agreed to relinquish their right to *säterier* (tax-exempt manors), and like the clergy they undertook to pay the *mantalspenningar* (personal tax to the Crown). Changes were also made to the *kronoskjuts* (duty of royal carriage) in times of war, which was now extended to peasants living on noble lands. Overall, however, the reforms were minor and not what the more radical peasants had expected.⁵⁰⁹

In less than a month, the Committee on the Constitution and the Riksdag had finished work on the new Instrument of Government. To explain the urgency, historians usually point out the constitution was a prerequisite for peace negotiations with the Russians, and there was the threat of enemy troops outside Stockholm.⁵¹⁰ Another explanation, however, was the chance to alter the constitution. Previous constitutions had been regarded as almost sacred and unchangeable. The new Instrument of Government made the Committee on the Constitution permanent and tasked it with dealing with proposals for future amendments. Sundin suggests it led the members of the Estates to adjust their response accordingly.⁵¹¹ They could accept the final proposal for the constitution without agreeing with everything, knowing that future amendments could be discussed at the next Riksdag.

The future possibility of constitutional change is also an explanation for another issue that was not part of the final Instrument of Government in 1809. After the revolution in March, the question of possible parliamentary reform was raised – whether the existing Riksdag should be replaced with a unicameral or bicameral system, or whether it should be adjusted. As in many parts of Europe, old

political structures were being questioned and, drawing parallels with Britain, many Swedish politicians envisioned a new Riksdag with two chambers.⁵¹² Another widespread opinion was that the Four Estates should be supplemented by a fifth, to include the unrepresented sections of the population.⁵¹³

At the beginning of the Riksdag, several memoranda were presented in the Estates arguing for parliamentary reform and making various proposals as to how this should be achieved. The many proposals show that the question of parliamentary reform was considered important by the members of the Riksdag.⁵¹⁴ The Committee on the Constitution was forced to deal with the issue. The pragmatic solution was to exclude the question from the proposal for a new Instrument of Government, a tactic defended by the secretary of the Committee on the Constitution, Hans Järta. In his report to the Riksdag he said

because no method for its implementation [a change of the representation] has yet been worked out with complete accuracy, and the Committee lacks information about the subject, [it] could not devise one in haste.⁵¹⁵

Once again, the need for urgency was used to explain the work in the committee: there was not enough time to deal with the issue of parliamentary reform. Further arguments for the Committee's strategy were noted by Gudmund Jöran Adlerbeth in another memorandum accompanying the Committee's proposal, which said on behalf of the committee that future changes 'will not violate the main principles of the Instrument of Government'.⁵¹⁶ Adlerbeth and the Committee argued that the Instrument of Government was intended to govern the relationship between the king and the nation, and that it was possible to deal with the question of representation after the Instrument of Government had been adopted.⁵¹⁷

However, most evidence suggests there was broad support in the 1809 Riksdag for parliamentary reform.⁵¹⁸ For various reasons, the Committee on the Constitution reached a consensus that it was impossible to include the change in the new Instrument of Government. The committee, as both Järta and Adlerbeth had said in their

memoranda, was still in favour of a change, but after the Instrument of Government had been adopted by the Riksdag.⁵¹⁹ The committee's strategy proved successful and the question of parliamentary reform was avoided in the ensuing debate on the Instrument of Government.

However, the matter was indirectly referred to in the debate in the autumn of 1809 about the Riksdag Act, the other major piece of legislation passed by the Riksdag in 1809–1810. The Act regulated the organization of the Riksdag and touched on the question of representation. When the Committee on the Constitution presented its proposal for the Riksdag Act on 5 August a debate ensued about clause 38, the voting procedure in the parliamentary committees. According to tradition the committees were composed of representatives elected from each Estate. Whenever there was a vote in committee, each Estate had one vote in the same way as when the entire Riksdag had to decide. In its draft, the Committee on the Constitution proposed per capita votes instead. The ensuing debate revealed the contradictions in the principles of representation. The committee and the members of the Estates struggled to accommodate a corporatist worldview, at the same time as they wished to introduce a more modern perception of political representativeness.

The proposal for a Riksdag Act was debated in two rounds in the autumn. On 18 October, the nobleman David Schulzenheim argued in favour of per capita voting: 'It seems to me we have seen enough of the unfortunate consequences of Estate partiality and alleged preferential rights; and that it is now time to adopt more popular social principles'.⁵²⁰ Schulzenheim represented the radical left and had written a memorandum calling for major parliamentary reforms. He was opposed by more conservative representatives, such as his fellow noble, Carl Axel Morath, who claimed that per capita voting would lead to 'the beginning of the dissolution of the rights of the nobility'.⁵²¹ Corporatism was pitted against individualism, tradition prevailed, and the proposal for per capita voting was removed from the Riksdag Act.⁵²²

The debate about voting procedures showed the importance of how political representation should be organized. The issue came up

again before the Riksdag was prorogued. When the Instrument of Government was debated in June 1809, all four Estates decided to refer the question of parliamentary reform back to the Committee on the Constitution. In March 1810 the committee submitted a memorandum on the subject.⁵²³ As it noted in the introduction, a memorandum was not a constitutional proposal but an inquiry.⁵²⁴ After discussing the pros and cons of the current Four Estates, the Committee ran through various alternatives and came up with a proposal for how representation could be changed. The principal suggestion was to replace the Four Estates with a bicameral system.⁵²⁵ In April 1810 the Estates decided to refer the memorandum to the next Riksdag.

When the Riksdag of 1809–1810 ended, Sweden's political institutions were not the same as they had been before 13 March 1809. The king was now subordinate to the Riksdag. The country's political institutions had been reorganized according to the theory of the separation of powers. The Riksdag had approved a new Instrument of Government and a Riksdag Act, the two most important pieces of legislation. In addition, it had passed a new Act of Succession and a Freedom of the Press Act, as well as several other laws and regulations. As in earlier regime shifts, the Riksdag was used to restore the political balance of the country. This time, however, the past was unprecedentedly linked to the future. The Riksdag now had the mandate to amend the constitution with future decisions. As the country's course was debated, examples from the past and contemporary ideas about political organization were combined. The clearest expression of this was how the balance of power was incorporated into the new regime.

Towards democratization

The military coup of March 1809 that ousted Gustav IV Adolf from power was a revolution, though a bloodless one. When the Riksdag decided on the new Instrument of Government it spelled the end for Sweden's last autocracy. It was a critical juncture in Swedish political history. In the political conflicts that followed the immediate coup, the foundations of Swedish society were once again called into question,

as landed privilege, political participation, and representation became part of an intense political debate. If the introduction of Gustavian autocracy in 1772 had halted a nascent democratization, the events of 1809 made it possible again.

Agents and motives

The initial steps of the regime shift in 1809 were taken by the high command of the Swedish army. The leading officers in Stockholm, led by Carl Johan Adlercreutz, arrested the king, and staged a military coup. They were responding to widespread criticism of Gustav IV Adolf and his handling of the war. The king's arrest was also a reaction to his plans to leave Stockholm when news of the western army's revolt reached the capital. After the king was deposed, the Riksdag was convened at which the critical juncture of 1809 was implemented. At the Riksdag the old political institutions were challenged and eventually changed with the completion of a new Instrument of Government.

The impetus behind the 1809 coup was the Finnish War. Swedish troops had evacuated Finland in late 1808, and Sweden's heartlands were now threatened by the Russian army. The king's conduct of the war was increasingly criticized, but his personal character was also questioned, as was his ability to lead the country to military victory. The difficulties faced by the Swedish army were one of the driving forces behind the revolution of 1809. The war loomed over the Riksdag when it met – to enter into peace negotiations they needed a new constitution and a new king.

Most historians have rightly focused on the war and its disastrous consequences, but there were other forces at work. The Gustavian monarchy had a crisis of legitimacy because the king did not maintain his claim to power: he could not convince the leading elites of the legitimacy of his rule. Mikael Alm has pointed out how discursive authority eluded the king because he never mastered the conceptual apparatus of the day. When Gustav III seized power, he spoke of freedom and equality and placed himself at the forefront of the ideas of the Age of Liberty. Gustav IV Adolf did nothing of the sort, and stepped up the repression of his political opponents.⁵²⁶ He could not

mobilize the support that was his and the monarchy's for the taking.⁵²⁷ One interpretation of this is that the late Gustavian autocracy simply failed in aggregating interests as Gustav II Adolf had done in the seventeenth century, and Gustav III after the autocoup in 1772. In the early nineteenth century there were conflicting interests in play, and the mobilization of domestic resources required for war could not be fully implemented.

Taken together, there were both internal and external factors that explained the events of 1809. However, the war with the Russians was the single most important catalyst – it prompted the military leadership to act, and that led to a change of regime and a new Instrument of Government. The backdrop was a long-standing dissatisfaction with the political regime, not only linked to the war. Swedish politics had been radicalized since the 1780s, and even Gustav III had to fight hard to maintain the legitimacy of the autocracy. There was greater repression of political opponents, leading to opposition to the king, and ultimately to his assassination in 1792.⁵²⁸ When Gustav IV Adolf came to the throne, the repression only intensified, eventually leading to a total crisis for the monarchy.

State capacity

An assessment of the 1809 regime shift in terms of state capacity yields mixed results. State resources, policy instruments, and executive power were affected differently. Compared to the regime shift in 1772, events of 1809 represented a transfer of power in terms of control of state resources. More political actors were involved in the governance of Sweden, but many previous models of control, both from the Age of Liberty and the Gustavian autocracy, continued to function.

After 1809, executive power remained with the king. He alone ruled the country, and he alone appointed the members of *statsrådet* (the Council of State). The king had to listen to his Council's advice but did not have to follow it. The Council of State was a novelty in the Constitution of 1809, and was in part a return to the old Council of the Realm with its medieval origins. The king also had the right to make war and peace. Compared to how the Riksdag had dealt with

the end of Carolinian autocracy in 1720, the executive was still strong and not nearly as limited in its powers as the Swedish regents of the eighteenth century. The statutes of 1809 also differed from the way the executive had been handled in both America and France in the revolutions there. In both cases the executive's power was initially much more limited than in Sweden in 1809.⁵²⁹

The difference compared to the Gustavian regime, however, was that the king's power was now balanced by the Riksdag, just as legislative power was shared between them. The balance of power was reminiscent of the debates in the later Age of Liberty. The failed constitutional reform in 1769, when the Security Act did not pass, was partially implemented in the new Instrument of Government in 1809. The balance between the legislature and the executive was central to the men of 1809 too. To achieve this balance, the king was given much more power than, for example, Gustav II Adolf had enjoyed in the 1620s.⁵³⁰ After 1809, for example, the king still had the right to enter into international agreements, and he was also given the right to veto amendments to the constitution.⁵³¹ There was a paradox in all this: steps were taken towards democratization, but the king was hypothetically given greater opportunities for autocracy.

The state bureaucracy was kept in place after 1809. The government's proposed Instrument of Government by Anders af Håkansson had a plan to reorganize the state administration. This was later rejected by the Committee on the Constitution, and the final Instrument of Government kept the old collegiate organization. Reform of the Swedish state administration would wait until 1840.⁵³² The path dependency of the old bureaucratic organization proved difficult to dismantle.

One change introduced was the establishment of the permanent Committee on the Constitution, which was regulated by the Instrument of Government. It prepared and approved amendments to the constitution. This was an important new policy instrument as it meant politicians could take a longer view on certain issues. It became possible to accept parts of a policy if there was a guarantee that the problem would be revisited later. The permanent Committee on the Constitution drew on the ordinance of 1766, when some had

suggested any changes to the Instrument of Government be decided by two consecutive meetings of the Riksdag.⁵³³ Another departure was that the new form of government required the Riksdag to meet regularly, every five years, depriving the king of a political instrument – he could no longer control when the Estates met.⁵³⁴

The capacity of the state after 1809 was strengthened, then, but less than the political upheavals might warrant. The leadership of the state was broadened and power was redistributed between the king and the Riksdag. Hypothetically, this should have led to a weakening of the state compared to previous regime shifts; however, the disadvantages of personal rule were clear by 1809, and including more human capital in political decision-making led to an increase in state capacity. This was possible because the revolution and final form of the new Instrument of Government were conservative products and compromises between conservative and radical politicians in the Riksdag. It became necessary to involve more political actors in politics. The leading men of 1809 represented the radical forces that had criticized royal power around 1800, but the main points of criticism had been directed at the king himself, not at the overthrow of the entire political system. That means the result of 1809 was not so much a revolution in the French sense, as a partial return to the traditional balance of power in Sweden.

Impartiality

If the impact on state capacity in 1809 was elusive, the impact on government impartiality was greater and far clearer. Gustavian autocracy had removed several constitutional limits on royal power, reintroduced by the new Instrument of Government in 1809. Although the king kept many of his executive powers, as according to the constitution he ‘alone shall govern the realm’, the role of the monarch was now clearly defined.⁵³⁵ The influence of the separation of powers was evident. The remainder of the Instrument of Government’s fourth clause stated that the king had to adhere to the constitution and listen to the advice of the Council of State. Compared to the reigns of Gustav III

and Gustav IV Adolf, the post-Gustavian regime was more like a constitutional monarchy.

The Gustavian autocracy was increasingly repressive, especially after 1800. Criticism of the regime was severely hampered when the freedom of the press was restricted in 1800 and the protections for individual rights were curtailed.⁵³⁶ This was reversed after 1809, as the new regime brought a strengthening of individual rights. A guarantee of basic civil liberties and a prohibition on the Riksdag going against court decisions and interfering in civil cases were included in the constitution. All these clauses were reminiscent of the failed Security Act of 1769. It is clear that much of the inspiration for these provisions came from the last years of the Age of Liberty. Another example was the codification of the freedom of the press as part of the constitution in 1809, which revived the Freedom of the Press Act first introduced in 1766.

Further improvements were made to the impartiality of the judiciary and transparency of government. The new Instrument of Government restored the judicial system in a way that limited the king's influence on its decisions. The king still had two votes in the Supreme Court, but this was more of a relic of the past, as kings after 1809 rarely took part in the work of the court.⁵³⁷ The rule of law was strengthened by the establishment of the office of the *justitieombudsman* (Parliamentary Ombudsman), a revival of the office of the Chancellor of Justice from the Age of Liberty.⁵³⁸ The new Parliamentary Ombudsman was to inspect government authority activities and deal with public complaints about them.

Political participation

As with impartiality, political participation was a victim of Gustavian repression. The Riksdag had not been convened since 1800, as Gustav IV Adolf despised it and ruled as he saw fit as an autocratic ruler. One of the 1809 coup's main demands was to summon the Estates, a decision that seems never to have been questioned. Once the Riksdag had rejected Anders af Håkansson's proposal, it was decisively established as the central political arena.

The regime shift of 1809–1810 must be said to have left political participation significantly strengthened. The Riksdag was the obvious political counterpart to the government in the debates that followed the coup. Interpreting this is that the Estates were once again used to restore the political balance. Hypothetically, the revolutionaries and politicians could have used a different strategy to reach their political goals, but they relied on established political institutions rooted in Swedish history. Gustav III had done the same in 1772 when he used the Riksdag to legitimize his new regime. But in 1772 the Riksdag was seen as the cause of instability, in 1809 it became the answer to political instability, just as it had been in the regime shift in 1720.

Political participation was not enforced in line with more radical political currents. After the American and French revolutions, both the abolition of social privileges and the reform of political representation were topics of political debate, including in 1809; the outcome, however, was negative in terms of political participation.⁵³⁹ The privileges of the nobility and clergy were only slightly changed, not abolished, and the question of parliamentary reform was deferred. The result of the 1809–1810 regime shift was an increase in political participation compared to the previous regime, but it was not extended to previously unrepresented social groups.

One result of the regime shift was the creation and implementation of new constitutional instruments. They favoured political participation, because the new Instrument of Government was designed to protect the balance in the new political system. The establishment of the permanent Committee on the Constitution and the introduction of the Parliamentary Ombudsman were both examples of how political participation was institutionally safeguarded by the new regime. Another was the reintroduction of the freedom of the press, which made it possible to take part in political debate to a greater extent than before.

Coda – The regime shift of 1809

We argue the regime shift of 1809 was a critical juncture in Swedish history, combining political arguments that looked to the past and the future in ways unprecedented in Swedish politics. Events following the coup in March 1809 made it a melting pot of old and new, and distinct from the earlier regime shifts. There were striking similarities with other periods in history, of course, the most obvious being the use of the Riksdag to restore political legitimacy and stability, a good example of institutional path dependency. The Riksdag was convened right after the coup and was instantly recognized as the authority that could make institutional changes. The Riksdag was the main cause of political change after the military coup.

Political conflict in the Riksdag pitted conservative and radical forces against one another on a wide range of issues. In part it combined constitutional conservatism with social radicalism. A typical example was the debate about changes to privileges and representation: supporters and opponents could be found in all four Estates. Classic Estate politics was beginning to loosen in favour of a more politicized and perhaps more modern way of doing politics. This was further evidence of history and futurity in the debates. People who argued for the preservation of the old social order did not want changes made to their privileges or representation. Their opponents argued for a new political organization. It was clear from the political debates that the old order was ending. Calls for the abolition of privileges and a new form of representation were heard throughout the Riksdag.

It was indicative of the wider changes to politics and ideas. The previous retrospective understanding of the present began to be replaced by new ideas about the future and the perception that this too could be shaped. To follow Koselleck, the connection between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation was changed.⁵⁴⁰ The character of political conflicts also changed; politics was now shaped by different alternative visions of the future. As the debates over the Instrument of Government showed, this opened the possibility of accepting the final proposal without agreeing to everything.

Compared with some of the previous regime shifts, the changes in 1809–1810 illustrated a shift in focus towards the future and an increasing importance of politics to shape it.

An assessment of the outcome of 1809, however, must be that the institutional changes helped stabilize Swedish society, not disrupt it further. The minor changes in privileges did not remake the foundations of the old, corporatist social order, and the new Instrument of Government did not overthrow the Swedish monarchy and replace it with a revolutionary government. Rather, the new constitution and the changes it entailed restored the status quo and balanced the king and the Riksdag. The latter was a clear return to the way it had functioned in earlier eras. The events of 1809 also helped end the Finnish War and bring peace to the country. It is also clear that the revolution of 1809 laid the foundations for Sweden's new role and position in European politics. The 'Policy of 1812', which emphasized détente and peaceful coexistence with Russia, set the tone for Swedish foreign policy well into the twenty-first century.⁵⁴¹

The Swedish revolution of 1809 was, despite its short duration, a slow revolution. There was never a radical challenge to the old order, as in France or America. Rather, it was part of a sociopolitical equalization that had been underway since at least the eighteenth century. The old social order was redundant by 1809, something that was recognizable in the memorandum about parliamentary reform from the Committee on the Constitution in 1810. The Committee came close to denouncing the Four Estates as a representative assembly.⁵⁴² The Riksdag, however, had neither the ability nor the power to change things in 1809, because the leading elites were opposed to reform, while small advances were enough to satisfy the radical forces, who were not interested in violent change. The result was constant political conflict in the Riksdag throughout the nineteenth century, especially over the question of representation because it was deferred to the future. Eventually, the representation reform of 1866 replaced the Riksdag with the bicameral Parliament. Those changes were based on earlier regime shifts in past centuries, but also on 1809.

In the short term, the revolution of 1809 did not promote democratic development in Sweden. It was a group of aristocrats and bureaucrats who wrested power from the king. Compared to the Gustavian autocracy, however, the new constitution had a certain elasticity that, eventually, made it possible to develop a more egalitarian and democratic society. This distinguishes the 1809 regime shift from earlier ones. The new Instrument of Government made the Committee on the Constitution permanent, and a mechanism for amending the constitution was introduced. This was important, since it altered the view of what was politically feasible to implement. The coup of 1809 had more in keeping with the politics of the late Age of Liberty, when political change was at least partially accepted by leading politicians. From then on, the radical regime shifts in Swedish history ceased, replaced by a continuous debate about political change.

The changes in 1809–1810 go a long way in explaining the stability that characterized Swedish politics after 1809. In past regimes, politics had been static and, in terms of reform, conservative and backward-looking. The constitution of 1809 – much more than, say, the constitution of 1720 – made progress and change part of the political debate. It was a lesson learned from past regime shifts and put into practice by the men of 1809. The political turmoil of 1809 was the last regime shift in Sweden in the early modern period.



Norrbro and Parliament in Stockholm (1905–1906), the home of the Riksdag since the early twentieth century. The constitution of 1809 restricted monarchical power, ushering in a stable, conservative regime that proved capable of limited political reform while still keeping the fundamentals of elite rule, suggesting a combination of future-oriented policies with practices inherited from the early modern period. Credit: Stockholm Transport Museum.

The dynamics of shifting regimes

State formation and democratization

We have investigated the six major regime shifts in early modern Sweden, from the creation of a strong national monarchy in the mid-sixteenth century to a mixed monarchy in the early nineteenth, with the aim of establishing the motives, dynamics, and long-term effects of the conflicts that produced different political regimes. The question is whether abrupt changes in government helped a more inclusive political system evolve, or the regime shifts mainly consolidated the dominance of the traditional elites. What impact did early modern political conflict have on state formation and democratization in Sweden?

There were no parliamentary democracies in early modern Europe. Scholars who have analysed democratization as a long-term political process, however, claim that important political reforms preceded the democratic breakthrough. These include the establishment and consolidation of representative assemblies, local self-government, limited political rights, and an impartial judicial system.⁵⁴³ We argue the recurrent shifts in political regime had profound if varying effects on the power of the state and society's ability to control and influence it. The uneven effect of the regime shifts generally increased state capacity in terms of resources, policy instruments, and powers of implementation, but also reinforced the Riksdag's constitutional position and the implementation of transparent administrative procedures.

In this concluding chapter, we will first summarize the results from the previous six case studies, discussing agency and motives behind the regime shifts before analysing the long-term effects on state capacity, impartiality and political participation. Second, we consider the impact of these turbulent changes on state formation and democratization, using the model presented by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson. Third, we focus on the Riksdag and its significance for political change in early modern Sweden. Finally, we discuss the general implications of our study, addressing the problem of continuity and change and the relevance of the Swedish case in a state formation perspective.

Agents and motives – The critical junctures

The regime shifts analysed in this book were all decisive moments in Swedish political history: moments when one system of government was replaced by a different political regime. Inspired by historical institutionalism, we have analysed them as critical junctures – the formative moments when the established proceedings of government were challenged, changed, and even abolished. We have studied regime shifts as processes of political change, involving many political actors and incentives with several possible outcomes. Our case studies therefore have a broader focus than a successful political coup; they address the motives, actions, and outcomes of the struggle for political change.

Considering first the agents of change – the individuals and groups involved in the political process of regime change – most of the regime shifts were top-down affairs, instigated by the monarch supported by certain factions of the domestic elite. Only once did the initiative come from below, when members of the Estates established a parliamentary form of government after the death of the autocrat Karl XII in 1718. Events in 1809, when revolting army officers conducted the swift disposal of the last autocrat Gustav IV Adolf, are best described as a conflict within the ruling elite. The revolution of 1809 was also the one case which involved replacing a ruler with a new candidate.

This points to a rather bleak characterization of political change in Sweden: the process was not only started and conducted from above, but it also ultimately confirmed and strengthened the royal authority over the forces trying to restrain it.

This explanation, however, is overly simplistic. Each regime shift had its own dynamic, there were many interests involved, and the king did not always have the upper hand in deciding the outcome. The first regime shift was instigated by Gustav I Vasa from 1538, acting from a position of strength, having quelled uprisings, and emerged victorious from the Count's War (1534–1536). The king opted to change the medieval structures of government by introducing new administrative bodies, to be staffed by German bureaucrats and loyal Swedish aristocrats. However, the royal agenda was thwarted by a major peasant uprising that threw the Vasa regime into a deep crisis. Gustav I eventually succeeded in subduing the peasants by force, but he had to adapt his policies and mobilize the Estates to fulfil his project of personal rule. Peasant resistance thus had an important role in the first regime shift, as had the country's representative institutions.

While the changes of 1538–1544 were dominated by domestic conflict and compromise, other regime shifts were initially driven by exogenous factors, mainly war and international conflict. The regime shift of 1617–1626 was essentially a response to the financial crisis that followed the Kalmar War (1611–1613) and prompted Gustav II Adolf to forge a lasting alliance with the Swedish aristocracy. The reconstruction of the state administration, coordinated by his chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, was made possible by a successful bid for international credit and the recruiting of a great deal of foreign experts with strong connections to the capital markets in the Low Countries. While the administrative reforms thus entailed an integration of the Swedish state in the emerging European order, they also demanded a successful mobilization of domestic resources to promote further military endeavours: the mass recruitment of peasant soldiers, made possible by the ideological and administrative support of the parish clergy. Ultimately, the Swedish military state needed the support of

the lower Estates in the Riksdag to provide the means to sustain the ruling elites' aggressive foreign policies.

The regime shift of 1675–1683 was also propelled by the effects of warfare, the successful but devastating military campaigns of the Skåne War (1675–1680). Contrary to the previous critical juncture, Karl XI primarily relied on support from domestic groups – army officers, royal officials, and the lower Estates – to attack the wealth and power of the aristocracy, and to prove himself an absolute king. The new autocratic regime might have been a return to the system of personal rule pursued by Gustav I, but it was now sustained by a formidable fiscal–military organization. The king in effect positioned himself as the top bureaucrat, presiding over a swelling organization filled by petty noblemen and ambitious commoners. The swift and relatively seamless introduction of royal autocracy may appear a classic example of a top–down government coup, but this is only a half-truth since the monarch's vendetta against the aristocrats also meant the realization of the political programme of the lower Estates: confiscating noble land to maintain the military forces. Karl XI could rally the Estates supporting the royal executive, much like Gustav I had done. The Estates, however, never intended the Riksdag would lose all power, which was the inevitable consequence of royal autocracy.

The regime shift of 1718–1723 was also triggered by international conflict, in this case Sweden's defeat in the Great Northern War and the death of the autocrat Karl XII. While the first three regime shifts had been chiefly orchestrated by the monarch, the changes introduced at this critical juncture represented something new: a coordinated effort of the nobility and the lower Estates to abolish royal autocracy, introducing a representative regime where most of the decision-making would be concentrated in the Riksdag. Several political factions were active in the political process. The political system was a hard-won compromise between the aristocracy and the lesser nobles and the commoners. The new regime would promote the active political participation of all three lower Estates in national politics.

At this point we may draw two conclusions. First, while the regime shifts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries strengthened the

monarch's position, they were less effective in promoting political stability in the longer term. The paradox is that while the new regimes of 1544, 1626, and 1683 laid the foundations for Sweden as a model fiscal-military state, the outcome left the political system at the mercy of large-scale international conflict. War may have incited the conflicts that spawned new political regimes, but it was also instrumental in overthrowing them. Second, the critical junctures show a successive broadening of political agency. The changes in government mobilized new groups as active stakeholders in the new political regime, although the monarch and the top bureaucrats were the main political actors. The strengthening of royal power also consolidated the three-way conflict between the king, the aristocracy, and the commoners. The changing configurations of power gave the monarch considerable freedom of action, while hampering attempts to form broader political coalitions to challenge royal power. It also opened the way for further conflict.

A possible interpretation would be that war was a leveller in political terms, if not economic.⁵⁴⁴ Sweden's transformation into a European power required a systematic exploitation of domestic resources, which prompted the recognition of the Estate of the Peasants who had to bear the lion's share of the financial burden. This argument, however, must be further elaborated. Although the wars enabled the peasants to gain a political voice, it also strengthened the dominance of the king and the economic exploitation that came with it. Military expansion generally helped the king, and to some extent the nobility who staffed the bureaucracy and did not pay taxes. Defeat in war, however, may also cause the breakdown of a political regime, as shown by the fall of the royal autocracy in 1718.

The many wars of the expansionist Swedish state illustrate the importance of the interaction between internal and external political forces. In the early modern period, Sweden was increasingly integrated into the European state system, especially through the system of foreign subsidies.⁵⁴⁵ These connections had varying degrees of impact on domestic politics. While we recognize the external effects on domestic politics, we maintain that the character and outcomes

of the regime shifts were decided by internal political conflict and cannot be reduced to simple reactions to external pressure.

The critical juncture of 1765–1772 seems to confirm these findings, while also showing the long-term effects of wider political participation. War and financial crisis once again dominated the scene, following Sweden's unsuccessful campaigns in the Seven Years War. The domestic conflict started with a political initiative from below when radical politicians in the Riksdag attacked the privileges of the nobility. It provoked a sharp reaction from the conservative members of the Riksdag, and the reform process was eventually hijacked by King Gustav III, who deftly exploited the popular opposition to aristocratic power to strengthen his own position in the coup of 1772. The king was supported by the French, who wanted a change of power in Stockholm. The result was a new form of popular autocracy, in which Gustav III curtailed the representative institutions while presenting himself as the first citizen of the nation.

Our last case, the regime shift of 1809–1810, began as a direct reaction to exogenous factors. The war against Russia sparked a mutiny among the leading officers, who revolted against the King Gustav IV Adolf. This was a coup from the inside, started by top officials. However, as in 1544 or 1719, the Riksdag was summoned to restore constitutional rule in a period of political crisis. After a period of political inactivity, the four Estates were quickly assembled to negotiate a new constitution that would ensure a balance of power and put a definitive stop to royal absolutism. The new form of government approved by the Riksdag in 1809 remained in place until 1975. This system restricted the royal executive, thus dissolving the three-way constellation that had fuelled political conflict throughout the early modern period. The monarch no longer had the means to navigate independently between the leading political factions. While successfully putting a balanced system of government into practice, the new regime did not achieve the parliamentary reform that would have broadened political participation. The Riksdag of the Four Estates continued until 1866, providing a political voice to traditionally organized groups, but effectively excluding much of the population.

Taken together, our six case studies show the successive broadening of political agency, as new groups played an active part in changing the political system. The first two regime shifts were mainly orchestrated by elite political actors: the king, his aristocratic allies, and high-ranking officials. The critical juncture of 1675–1683 represented something new, as it involved the military and administrative rank-and-file and the lower Estates supporting the king to strike a blow at aristocratic power. The regime shifts of the eighteenth century reflected the emancipation of members of the Estates, who were now instrumental in both starting and making changes in government. Although Gustav III was ultimately victorious in 1772, the reigning monarch was no longer the supreme political actor. The political initiative had spread to representatives of all factions.

While external conflict played a major part in setting the stage for domestic change, our argument is that the most important reason was conflict within the government elites and the larger political community. Foreign interests meddled in Sweden's parliamentary politics throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but in our case studies the outcome was decided by the configuration of power among domestic political actors. Until 1809, political changes were mainly driven by the structural antagonism between nobility and commoners, offering the monarch plenty of room to manoeuvre around them. In the nineteenth century, that form of political conflict gradually faded away and there would be no more drastic regime shifts in Sweden before the advent of modern democracy.

State capacity, impartiality, and political participation

What of the long-term impact of early modern regime shifts, especially on state capacity, impartiality, and political participation? We find the first two regime shifts had a profound effect on state capacity, while the effects on impartiality and participation were somewhat mixed. In both cases, the financial resources of the state were multiplied, and the pool of human capital expanded. The structural

changes started by Gustav I ensured royal control of the means of violence, while also creating an extensive information bank covering the taxable resources in the country. Policy instruments, designed to strengthen state capacity, were implemented from the local up to the central level. Negotiations in the district courts and the mechanisms for handling grievances promoted communication between taxpaying peasants and central government. The power of implementation was further improved by the establishment of the Riksdag as the arena for national politics, committing the organized groups to adhere to government policy.

The second regime shift further improved state capacity by reorganizing the state bureaucracy and recruiting new competence. The alliance between Gustav II Adolf and chancellor Axel Oxenstierna promoted the integration of the top aristocrats into the state administration, thus overcoming the limitations of personal rule. Financial resources were expanded through the monetization of the tax system, securing a steady flow of international credit. Introducing a provincial level of government boosted the central control of local resources and provided better policy instruments. Crucially, the deployment of the parish clergy as local political actors to gather data and communicate royal propaganda gave central government a formidable degree of information control. The institutionalization of the Riksdag as an organ for approving taxes and military conscription meant the Swedish government could aggregate interests in government policy.

This expansion of state capacity, however, came at a political and social cost. The alliance between the king and the aristocracy left the lower Estates in a vulnerable position. The political emancipation of the Estate of the Peasants, empowering the male householders who controlled much of Sweden's landed wealth, went hand in hand with economic exploitation, which increasingly targeted marginalized groups. They included rural craftsmen, younger sons, landless labourers, and conscripted soldiers, who were effectively excluded from political influence for the rest of the early modern period, although concern for the servants' situation was sometimes voiced in the Estate of the Peasants.

The military state project, pioneered by Gustav I and accelerated by Gustav II Adolf and his chancellor, revealed further flaws, especially when it came to impartiality and political participation. The reorganization of the fiscal system, with the implementation of written records and formal audits, promised to promote transparency and calculability in the state administration. The limitations of personal rule, however, thwarted most attempts to control local officials and stamp out corruption. The eventual integration of nobles at the central and provincial levels of government provided the state with administrative competence and considerable social capital. However, it also brought a tangle of patronage networks and bureaucratic structures that threatened to undermine impartiality and trust in government. Finally, the regime shifts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries never imposed effective constraints on royal power. The monarchs successfully kept their freedom of action, which left further attempts at political reform dependent on the whims of Sweden's rulers.

Regarding political participation, we argue that the first two regime shifts played a positive role by making the Riksdag and the local institutions for self-government integral parts of the system of government. The monarchy became dependent on the support of the lower Estates, which meant broadening the political community and weakening of the traditional dominance of bishops and aristocrats. The legal system of social privilege, however, was never challenged by Gustav I and Gustav II Adolf, and in fact was further strengthened. The conclusion must be that political participation in the Riksdag was not an instrument for challenging the hierarchical order (yet); it was rather a way to shore up the political rights of other status groups in Swedish society.

The introduction of royal autocracy in 1675–1683 complicated the picture. On the one hand, the attack on noble economic privilege represented a decisive victory for the lower Estates. Their political programme for restricting noble dominance was finally confirmed and soon implemented by Karl XI. The members of the lower Estates thus played an important part in constraining aristocratic power by supporting their monarch. But the mobilization was mostly to the

benefit of the ruler himself. Karl XI established himself as an autocrat, reducing the Riksdag to a mere formality. After 1697 it stopped meeting altogether. Meanwhile, local institutions of self-government were circumscribed by bureaucratic procedures that subjected them to increasing control by the state. Ultimately, the third regime shift had negative effects on political participation.

Royal autocracy boosted the executive power of the monarch. Karl XI assumed the role of an impartial first bureaucrat, supervising government bodies to enforce the implementation of his own decisions. Still, the revival of personal rule had its limitations, as the scope for royal arbitrariness and the courting of favourites was considerable. The king claimed to be the supreme judge with the right to overrule court decisions as he saw fit. The bureaucratization of the judicial system may have restricted the scope for noble malpractice, but the lack of restrictions on monarchical power made the rule of law subject to the monarch. State capacity was improved by the financial resources confiscated from the nobility, and the new system of maintaining the national army ensured the steady strengthening of the monopoly of violence. The marginalization of the Riksdag and the aristocratic council deprived the government of important tools for interest aggregation that had served previous rulers well. But the career opportunities in the expanding state apparatus ensured loyalty from the men, often of lowly birth, who were employed in it.

Taken together, the regime shifts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicate a remarkable strengthening of state capacity, while having less discernible effects on impartiality and political participation. This cannot be analysed as a simple process of state capacity first, however. Francis Fukuyama makes the point that rulers who can rely on effective administrative structures are more successful in making democratic reforms.⁵⁴⁶ Following Acemoglu and Robinson, though, we argue that political and administrative reform must support each other to establish inclusive institutions of government.⁵⁴⁷ Our analysis shows political participation was a necessary way to mobilize support to change the political system. The regime shifts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicate that structural

changes promoting state capacity, impartiality, and participation were implemented in the early modern period, but were not followed by sustained periods of political reform. Again following Acemoglu and Robinson, the first regime shifts failed in striking a successful balance between state power and a strong society. The monarch and the power elites were still in pole position in the race between state and society, which would spark further political conflict in the eighteenth century.

The Carolinian autocracy collapsed after the death of Karl XII in 1718. With the throne empty, it was up to the members of the Estates to negotiate a new constitution. The result was a representative form of government in which the personal power of the monarch was limited, and the means of legislation were *de facto* taken over by the Estates. Executive powers were shared between the Estates and the Council of the Realm. The regime shift of 1718–1723 thus brought a decisive breakthrough for political participation. The effects on impartiality and rule of law were not only positive, however. Representative government effectively reduced the scope for royal discretion, but the aristocrats retained their dominant position in the Council and government agencies. The Riksdag amassed vast powers that were open to abuse. The Estates ventured to promote impartiality in government by subordinating the bureaucracy to the Riksdag. The situation, however, was complicated by the lobbying of foreign agents, who used bribes to influence members of the Riksdag and the royal court alike.⁵⁴⁸ The involvement of members of the Riksdag in legal matters and appointments opened the way for corruption and the politicization of the judiciary.

While the first three regime shifts had a direct positive impact on state capacity, that cannot be said of the critical juncture of 1718–1723. There was no strengthening of financial or military resources, nor any remarkable advances in human capital. Perhaps the ascendance of the Riksdag gave the state sharper policy instruments, while the right of individual representatives to table motions at the Riksdag strengthened political participation and the legitimacy of government, but the political factions' infighting threatened to weaken executive power, as did the complicated bureaucratic procedures of the Riksdag.

The positive effects of the regime shift in 1718–1723 would therefore be processual rather than a direct effect of the regime shift itself. There was a gradual broadening of the political community as members of the lower Estates learned to manoeuvre in the new political landscape, forming new alliances to forward their interests. Ordinary people had a growing latitude in local politics. Deputies from marginalized areas such as Finland took an active part in the Riksdag proceedings.⁵⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the political press fuelled debate outside traditional political arenas, supported by a Freedom of Press Act in 1766. Politics was becoming a public concern that could no longer be limited to the established institutions of the old social order. The system of representative government, which had effectively curtailed the executive power of the monarch, eventually challenged the social basis of inequality that underpinned early modern political relations.

It could have been the beginning of a virtuous circle of reform, but the further consolidation of inclusive institutions was effectively thwarted at the critical juncture of 1765–1772. Political conflict posed radicals against conservatives, and the situation was exploited by King Gustav III to launch a royal coup to abolish the representative regime and prove himself an autocrat. The reactionary shift saw executive power once again concentrated in the ruler's hands, but the long-term effects on state capacity were not impressive. Bureaucratic structures were largely left in place, although the king claimed to support the radicals' programme for promoting merit over seniority. While Gustav III had proved a formidable manipulator of public opinion, the increasingly repressive features of his regime would erode support for it and eventually contribute to its downfall. Ultimately, the Gustavian autocracy had a clear negative impact on both impartiality and political participation, restricting the freedom of press and clamping down on the autonomous powers of the Riksdag.

The second period of autocratic rule ended with the critical juncture of 1809–1810. The long-term effects of the army coup, eventually supported by all Four Estates, would be considerable. Starting with state capacity, the new regime consolidated a system of mixed government, balancing the powers of the Riksdag and the government, the latter

appointed by the king and labelled the Council of State. While this regime shift did not result in a notable expansion of state capacity, its effects were profound regarding impartiality and participation. The new regime put constitutional limits on royal power that would make sure there was no revival of absolute rule. A relative freedom of press was reintroduced and basic civil liberties, such as the right to appeal, were supported by the new constitution. The Riksdag was also granted powers to inspect government activities and act against wrongdoing. The new regime provided sharper instruments to combat government corruption, although implementing good governance still had a long way to go.⁵⁵⁰

The last critical juncture saw the revival of political participation and the restoration of the Riksdag to the central position it had held before 1772. The nobility's socioeconomic privileges were finally abolished, as noblemen were no longer guaranteed top positions in the army or bureaucracy. While these reforms had the potential to inspire an extended process of democratization, their promise was never realized. The regime shift did not result in a major parliamentary reform; rather, inequality and exclusion were still the basis of national politics as the Riksdag remained an arena for the traditional status groups – noblemen, burghers, clergymen, and landowning peasants. Much of the Swedish population was kept from having a political voice, as the Four Estate system was not replaced by a bicameral Parliament until 1867. Even then, established status groups maintained their grip on national and local politics, as the right to vote and the right to be elected as a representative were restricted to men with property and an income.

The early modern regime shifts analysed here did not put Sweden on a safe route towards democratization. The first three regime shifts indeed promoted the inclusion of certain status groups into the country's political community, but the main effect was the strengthening of state capacity, while impartiality and political participation continued to lag behind. The result was a strong government organization with an efficient bureaucracy that retained elements of impartiality and participation, while reserving the power of initiative for the king and

the power elite. The regime shifts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tell a somewhat different story. The political struggle was no longer focused on strengthening state capacity. The critical junctures involved a broader plethora of political actors, noble privileges were increasingly challenged, and demands for impartial jurisdiction and individual liberties were discussed. The fundamentals of the old regime, noble privilege, and royal supremacy were challenged, but the process of democratization was not taken to its logical conclusion. Instead, the reforms were reversed by a royal bid for absolute rule, and when a lasting balance of power was finally achieved in 1809, political equality was left off the agenda.

Taken together, the regime shifts of early modern Sweden demonstrate no general trajectory, no distinct path towards effective administration, impartial government, and democratic rights. Instead, they point to the volatility of political rule. Reforms introduced at one stage might be supplemented or reversed later. Although the recurrent conflicts profoundly affected the structure of government, they did not open the door to modernity; rather, they were windows of opportunity that could be flung wide or slammed shut, depending on the current configurations of power.

State formation and democratization

Did the early modern regime shifts promote the development of political rights and inclusive institutions? While the individual case studies show rather mixed results, we argue that the overall impact of the critical junctures examined here was positive: the political conflicts contributed to a broadening of the political community, a gradual strengthening of state capacity, and an articulation of demands for political rights. Admittedly, the reforms failed to overturn the hierarchical political order, but that did not make the political confrontations meaningless, merely that the political structures of the old regime were both resilient and adaptable, and that political change was never easy to achieve.

Our results qualify the overly simple claim that democratic development was impossible until the privileges of nobles and clerics had been abolished.⁵⁵¹ The status-based order was challenged in all our case studies, although the results varied. The traditional dominance of provincial magnates was partly undermined by Gustav I's courting of the lower Estates and integrating peasant communities into the fabric of government. The economic privileges of the aristocracy were attacked first by Gustav II Adolf and then, even more consistently, by Karl XI. In 1718–1723 the lower Estates effectively blocked aristocratic bids for power without support from the monarch. In the critical juncture of 1765–1772, a programme was launched to end the nobility's control of the public administration. The nobility's right to hold land without paying taxes was finally abolished in 1809. Although the nobility was sometimes able to halt or even reverse this trend, attacks on their exclusive rights were a recurring feature of the dynamics of shifting regimes. Challenging social privilege was also used to justify political decisions by the king. Both Karl XI and Gustav III played the Estates off against one another to push through their policies.

Acemoglu and Robinson's theory of the relation between state power and a strong society has helped us structure the results of our six case studies. We have constructed a model of possible outcomes of early modern regime shifts (Fig. 8.1).

Figure 8.1. Possible outcomes of early modern regime shifts.

Power of the state	Strong	Strengthening state capacity + Weakening impartiality and participation	Strengthening state capacity + Strengthening impartiality and participation
	Weak	Weakening state capacity + Weakening impartiality and participation	Weakening state capacity + Strengthening impartiality and participation
		Weak	Strong
Power of society			

The analysis has demonstrated that there were four possible outcomes of each regime shift. An important result is that in all six cases, the pattern of impartiality and representation was the same, so that if one was strengthened, the other followed.

It would seem there was a significant connection between political representation, the strengthening of impartiality, and the rule of law. We have shown that some of the regime shifts impacted state capacity as well as impartiality and representation, while others had diverse outcomes.

For state capacity, the different resources, policy instruments, and powers of implementation generally underpinned one another, though the scope for expanding state resources may have narrowed in the eighteenth century. Attempts to improve state capacity were increasingly focused on effective policy instruments rather than fiscal or military reform. For impartiality and participation, the significant result of the early modern regime shifts was the successive integration of status groups – priest, burghers, and peasants – into the country's political community. Equity between status groups did not follow, however, because social privilege was adjusted but never abandoned. The shifts in political regime helped codify the restrictions on the monarch, but there was no corresponding promotion of individual rights and liberties.

To evaluate the long-term effects of the regime shifts, we have analysed their outcomes in terms of state capacity, impartiality, and participation, illustrating Sweden's uneven evolution from medieval polity to nineteenth-century mixed government (Fig. 8.2).

The collected effects of the regime shifts were mainly a strengthening of state capacity: in four of six regime shifts, state capacity was strengthened by the new regime, while the other two had a mixed effect. Regime shifts promoted the transformation of the Swedish state into a powerful, and relatively effective, bureaucratic state. Meanwhile, the societal control of the state's powers was generally strengthened by the regime shifts, though to a lesser extent. While inclusive institutions, impartiality in government, and political participation were strengthened in some of the regime shifts, the advent

Figure 8.2. Long-term effects of Swedish regime shifts.

Regime shift	New regime	State capacity	Impartiality	Participation
1538–1544	Princely rule	+	≈	≈
1617–1626	Bureaucratic government	+	+	+
1675–1683	Royal autocracy	+	–	–
1718–1723	Representative government	≈	+	+
1765–1772	Royal autocracy	≈	–	–
1809–1810	Constitutional government	+	+	+

+ strengthening, – weakening, ≈ mixed effects

of royal autocracy harmed them. Reforms introduced by one political regime could be reversed by another.

The conclusion must be that societal aspirations to control the early modern state often lagged behind the rapid strengthening of the state. The precarious balance between powerful state and strong society, ‘the narrow corridor’ that Acemoglu and Robinson identify as a specific European route towards modern democracy, threatened to overturn on several occasions. Political development was not simply a question of maintaining balance. Early modern politics was rather a sequence of wobbly regimes, where each reform threatened to undo previous changes. Sweden did not stay in the narrow corridor of political reform in the early modern period, but was pushed in and out of balance, and sometimes promoted arbitrary power over societal control.

We thus find Acemoglu and Robinson’s model of political development in Europe too optimistic. Our results show the unevenness and fragility of political reform in early modern Sweden. While Acemoglu and Robinson argue that societies that have once achieved balance will generate ‘conditional effects’ that promote further reform, our case studies indicate there was no such clear trajectory. Rather, while many of the regime shifts promoted both impartiality and political participation, these achievements were effectively stalled on later occasions. The legacy of the Swedish regime shifts was the means to

restore inclusive institutions after periods of extended mismanagement, chiefly by royal autocrats. Effective administration, impartiality in government, and representative bodies could never be taken for granted, but they were historical experiences that could be revisited when the time was right.

Balance was never easy. The changes made by Gustav I privileged a strong state over societal control. Reforms promoting calculability and transparency in government were inevitably hampered by the aspirations and limitations of personal rule. We argue that the regime shift of 1617–1626 was more successful in balancing the strong military state and the need for societal control. The meetings of the Estates, as well as the negotiations at the local level, were institutionalized and recognized as an integral part of the political system; however, the Estate of the Peasants generally maintained their political voice by accepting fiscal exploitation. The section of society that asserted its influence over the state was mainly the traditional elite, namely the Swedish aristocracy. The hard-won political balance remained in place until it was effectively thwarted by the regime shift of 1675–1683.

The launch of representative government after the death of Karl XII proved to be a decisive step towards a more balanced form of government, with the organized status groups of the Riksdag effectively asserting their influence over government institutions. Although state capacity was not significantly strengthened, the mobilization of society resulted in something resembling the ‘shackled leviathan’ that Acemoglu and Robinson have identified as a precondition for modern democracy. The reforms were nullified by Gustav III’s auto-coup in 1772 and the restoration of an autocratic, repressive regime that followed. The regime shift of 1809–1810 was testament to the resilience of inclusive institutions, as the Estates restored the constitutional system, while establishing a much stronger balance between the ruling executive and the representative bodies. The power of the Riksdag to amend the constitution and introduce further reform was now formally recognized, thus introducing futurity to Swedish politics. The downside of the system, however, was a government organization still prey to the economic interests of men of property and status.

The regime shifts of early modern Sweden show the uneven character of the ongoing struggle between the powers of the state and societal influence. Sheri Berman's analysis of the rocky road to democracy after 1800 seems to apply to the early modern period too, but with less positive results. According to Berman, modern democracy was reached by a series of temporary reforms and setbacks.⁵⁵² In the Swedish case, the ideal balance between a strong state and an organized society posited by Acemoglu and Robinson would prove hard if not impossible to achieve in the early modern period. Democratization in Sweden remained uneven well into the twentieth century.

Charles Tilly has argued that a process of democratization must include more equality, constitutional mechanisms for upholding agreements and legal rights, and a broadening of political participation.⁵⁵³ All that was true of the early modern regime shifts. Regarding constitutional reform, the result was a successive articulation of political rights and obligations. Broader political participation was achieved, notably in 1544 and after 1718. While we understand democratization as a slow process of progress and debacle, important advances were achieved by regime shifts. Structural conflicts opened the way for the greater inclusion of status groups, which strengthened the commoners' political organization and eventually challenged elite privilege. The process fell short of promoting equality, though, as the new constituents were mainly traditional status groups. The hierarchical order between the established Estates remained untouched, as did the structural inequalities between the politically organized and the marginalized groups in local communities.

The Riksdag – The resilience of political representation

Our case studies bring to the fore the Swedish Riksdag's ability to promote impartiality and participation while supporting effective government. We argue the Riksdag played a pivotal role in changing the political order, creating and supporting broad political coalitions

to ensure constitutional rule in the face of national and international crises.

Did the Estates of the Riksdag help to overthrow hierarchical society and establish a new order of democratic participation and equality? Certainly not. Few representative assemblies, if any, before the twentieth century show such progress. But our analysis demonstrates that the Riksdag promoted political and administrative reforms on several occasions. That the reforms could be abandoned or supplemented by other, more extractive institutions did not mean that popular influence on national politics should be neglected. The recognition of the lower Estates as co-guardians of the political constitution was a remarkable achievement, since in other parts of Europe parish priests, craftworkers, and peasant freeholders were usually excluded from political representation.

The Riksdag, including the lower Estates, played an important part in paving the way for royal autocracy in 1680 and in 1772. However, the lower Estates were also instrumental in restoring constitutional government after 1718 and in 1809, making the Riksdag a necessary part of legitimate rule. That the commoners occasionally ventured to support royal autocrats reflected the political structure of the old social order. The dominance of the nobility threatened the status of the lower Estates, and their support for strong monarchs was a strategy to defend their political autonomy. The Riksdag showed remarkable resilience over the centuries as a national arena for the protection of the constitution, providing stability and at other times promoting political reform.

While the Riksdag had considerable influence in promoting changes in government, the development of the Estates as organized political groups was more an extended learning process than a direct effect of shifting regimes. The upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries created opportunities for popular politics, but they were only exploited on specific occasions when royal power was weak and noble dominance had to be resisted at all costs. In this perspective, the eighteenth-century Riksdag represented something new: an ongoing process of adaptation and emancipation that eventually put the

levelling of social privilege, freedom of the press, and civil liberties on the political agenda.

By the late eighteenth century, the members of the Riksdag had gained the competence *and* the confidence to challenge the old social order. They were no longer mere protesters, but decision-makers and advocates of inclusive institutions. That the process took several hundred years was by no means remarkable in European terms. Rather, it was a testament to the complicated, conflicted nature of pre-modern politics.

The dynamics of shifting regimes

In Swedish historiography, two conflicting narratives describe the country's transition from an aggressive early modern power state to the model social democratic welfare state of the mid-twentieth century. The first stresses stability and peaceful interaction, focusing on how local organs of self-government maintained and eventually improved their independent status over the centuries.⁵⁵⁴ The second centres on the powers of the state and economic exploitation, analysing the early modern period as a conflict between rulers and subjects.⁵⁵⁵ We have chosen to present an alternative analysis, one that highlights political instability and discontinuity as a recurring feature of Sweden's early modern politics.

We do not agree that early modern Sweden was a resilient political culture of peaceful negotiation. Although we recognize the importance of inclusive political institutions, our case studies show that the relevance of these arenas varied considerably, and that periods of broader political participation were often followed by autocratic or repressive regimes. Yet the representative institutions were never successfully abolished, and retained their importance in political life after every setback. The Riksdag, petitioning, and the local institutions of self-government were continuous forms of participation that survived the recurrent shifts in political regime.

That the hierarchical order of society survived should not obscure its having been repeatedly challenged and transformed at the critical

junctures analysed here. Shifting regimes prove that political change was possible, and that windows of opportunity might open when conditions were right. We argue that these changes were not mere elite conflicts with little relevance outside high politics; rather, they were sociopolitical confrontations with the potential to change the course of history. Although the political conflicts never led to a complete overhaul of the traditional, Estate-based political system, our case studies indicate there were several critical junctures in the early modern period when more inclusive policies could be implemented. The regime shifts of the eighteenth century stand out for the articulation of new political ideas only realized at a much later date. If you are looking for a Swedish *Sonderweg* to modern democracy, this would be the place to start.

The critical junctures analysed here played a key role in creating a centralized government organization with an extended local administration, based on interaction with representative institutions at central, regional, and local levels. This remained a defining feature of the Swedish state throughout the early modern period. Regarding societal control over the powers of the state, it is hard to identify a distinct trajectory. Reforms promoted constitutional settlements and representative functions, but there were also setbacks that threatened political rights or protection under the law.

Early modern politics was neither a continuous process of institutional growth, nor a sequence of chaotic and disruptive oscillations. Instead, it was precisely the interplay of continuity and change, of path dependency and political innovation, that characterized the period. There were several challenges to the established order, sometimes provoking reactionary counterstrikes, but no lasting compromise between the power elites and the organized groups in society was ever achieved. It can be argued that the ending of the three-way constellation after 1809 paved the way for a political alliance between the traditional (noble) elite and the landed peasantry.⁵⁵⁶ This new configuration of power, however, could only be realized when the Estate-based order was finally abolished in 1867 and replaced by a parliamentary system in which political voice was equated with property and income.

From a Swedish perspective, the impact of war on the early modern state was decisive. War triggered the internal conflicts that resulted in the regime shifts of 1617, 1680, 1718 and again in 1809. In the first two cases, the situation was exploited by the monarch, in the latter it was the Estates, and in 1809 it was the military command who acted. Even the parliamentary conflicts that led to the coup in 1772 had its roots in the financial crisis following the Seven Years War. The cost of war then, effectively contributed to the fall of the political regime, but it had less immediate effects when it came to establishing a new political system. It seems a paradox that in Sweden, one of the first fiscal–military states, many of the regime shifts resulted in (relatively) extended periods of peace. The case that stands out as the exception was the critical juncture of 1617–1626, when Gustav II Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna formed a military state bent on aggressive territorial expansion.

Our interpretation of history as a conflict-driven process indicates that the more conflict, the more opportunity for radical political change. From this perspective, we might expect that the end effect of these conflicts would be a process of modernization, transforming Sweden into a fully democratic polity. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Democratic institutions remained elusive, as the Estate-based system in the nineteenth century slowly transmuted into a class-based order of institutionalized inequality, where political representation was cornered by propertied classes.

It is tempting to explain the lack of democratic reform in nineteenth-century Sweden with the cessation of the early modern patterns of political confrontation. The regime shifts analysed here were all driven by structural conflicts between a strong monarchy, a land-owning social elite, and an uneasy alliance of the lower Estates. The constitution of 1809 restricted monarchical power, and there would be no more mobilization of the commoners to promote royal supremacy. Once the era of recurrent regime shifts was over, the historical sequel would be a stable, conservative regime that proved capable of introducing limited political reform while still keeping the fundamentals of elite rule.⁵⁵⁷ Even after democratization, many of the

established forms of governance in Sweden remained in place, such as the procedures of the Riksdag and some of the government agencies. Developments after 1809 suggest a combination of future-oriented policies with practices inherited from the early modern period.

Sweden's turbulent history of shifting regimes raises the question of the stability of political rule in early modern Europe. Was Sweden an extreme case, or was it rather an example of the general volatility of the pre-modern political order? There are interesting parallels to draw from other polities such as England and Denmark. The English state experienced disruptive political conflicts throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from the Reformation and the Civil War of the 1640s and beyond. Relative political stability was eventually achieved by the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689, which established a parliamentary regime supported by a majority drawn from the propertied classes. While the Swedish experience of representative government was effectively ended by a royal coup in 1772, parliamentary rule in England would promote visions of empire and tentative, but decisive, democratic reforms in the nineteenth century.⁵⁵⁸

Denmark offers an interesting counterexample. From 1660, following a disastrous defeat against Swedish military aggression, the Danish state was ruled by a monarch claiming absolute power. Royal autocracy provided some political stability for almost two hundred years, until it finally succumbed to the international wave of liberal reform in 1848. There was no violent revolution, but the new constitutional regime in Copenhagen established reforms that set Denmark on a faster path to modern democracy than its northern neighbour.⁵⁵⁹ Obviously, democratization in the nineteenth century was not dependent on the historical experience of early modern regimes.

We must be careful when applying teleological schemes to political development. The turbulent history of early modern Sweden provides evidence of both institutional change and path dependency. Political regime shifts on several occasions promoted impartiality and participation, but these trends could be reversed by further political upheaval. The strengthening of state capacity furthered a successive consolidation of administrative structures. The fiscal organization of

Gustav I, the provincial boards and bureaucratic authorities introduced by Axel Oxenstierna, Karl XI's system of military conscription: all of them would continue to function until the turn of the twentieth century, albeit supplemented by more modern institutions. The political oscillations did not challenge or reverse this development. There was an element of irreversibility about institutional growth. New political regimes could take over the administrative structures established by their predecessors to make changes in other parts of the system of government.

The impact of political conflict on society must not be exaggerated, nor can it be easily dismissed. We argue that early modern regime shifts are profoundly important for understanding state formation and democratization in Sweden. The conflicting narratives of Swedish history offered by scholars today emphasize social and political stability, but from different perspectives. Lars Trägårdh and Eva Österberg have argued that the sociopolitical stability of early modern Sweden promoted a peaceful political culture, bent on negotiating favourable compromises.⁵⁶⁰ Erik Bengtsson and others counter that Sweden was characterized by oppressive, authoritarian rule until the early twentieth century. According to Bengtsson, political change in Sweden was impossible before the ascendance of the organized labour movement in the twentieth century.⁵⁶¹ Our results point to something else: that volatile political regimes sometimes furthered inclusive politics and at other times promoted government clampdowns and extractive structures.

This book shows there was little political stability in early modern Sweden, so what of the period that followed? Historians agree on the importance of nineteenth-century politics, but have different interpretations of the historical process. The conflicts and compromises following the regime shift in 1809 therefore beg the question of whether nineteenth-century Sweden was really the home of peaceful modernization and democratic reform, and if so, how.

Political developments after 1809 can be contrasted with the upheavals of the early modern era, but also with the political changes in the twentieth century. The Swedish welfare state of the post-war

period has been analysed as a special case, organizing universal public welfare services more systematically than other Western polities.⁵⁶² Likewise, there is an argument to be made that the neoliberal reforms of the late twentieth century had a more fundamental impact on state administration in Sweden than in other comparable countries.⁵⁶³ This suggests that radical shifts in political regime were not necessarily limited to the early modern period.

The rise and fall of political regimes after 1809 is beyond the scope of this book, but it should be the focus of future research, addressing Sweden's not-so-stable political history. We might also consider whether early modern Sweden really was a special historical case, or whether similar shifting political regimes were found elsewhere, perhaps with different sociopolitical consequences. Early modern Sweden can surely serve as an important point of comparison for understanding political developments in Europe. We have shown that the Swedish example is more than a special historical case. Sweden's development was neither linear nor predetermined. It was an evolving sequence of shifting regimes.

Notes

1. Disruption and change

- 1 In this book we will use Riksdag for the Swedish Diet or Parliament.
- 2 Tilly 1992; Ertman 1997; Glete 2002.
- 3 Scherp 2013; Almbjör 2016; Linnarsson 2022.
- 4 Österberg 1998; Berggren & Trägårdh 2006.
- 5 Important works are North 1990; Tilly 1992; Ertman 1997; North, Wallis & Weingast 2009; Mahoney & Thelen 2015; Fiorette et al. 2016.
- 6 Cappocchia & Kelemen 2007, 341–342; see also Soifer 2012, 1574–1577; Collier & Munck 2022.
- 7 Moore 1966, 413–432; Tilly 1992, 96–103; Downing 1992, 239–240.
- 8 See also Møller 2017, 13–15, drawing on Ertman 1997, 6–10.
- 9 Acemoglu & Robinson 2019, 198–200; for the importance of societal institutions imposing accountability on government administrations, see also Fukuyama 2011, 321–335; Møller 2017, 125–138.
- 10 Acemoglu & Robinson 2019, 41–42.
- 11 Capocchia & Kelemen 2007, 348.
- 12 Capocchia & Kelemen 2007, 352; see also Acemoglu & Robinson 2012, 105–110.
- 13 See Møller 2017, 4–5.
- 14 For a critique, see Gustafsson 2010, 147–148.
- 15 Fukuyama 2011, 3–25; Fukuyama 2014, 198–213.
- 16 Haldén 2020, 1–4, 201–203.
- 17 Tilly 1992, 101–103.
- 18 Møller 2017, 211.
- 19 Møller 2017, 209.
- 20 Tilly 1992, 94–95; see also Levi 1988, 67–70, 180–184; Ertman 1997, 28–34; Stasavage 2010.
- 21 Ertman 1997, 32–33, 311–314, distinguishes between the participatory traditions in Scandinavia and England and the top–down ‘administrative’ tradition in the core territories of the old Roman Empire.
- 22 For example, Ylikangas 1991; te Brake 1998; Katajala 2004; Dørum et al. 2021; Griesse & Rönnqvist 2021.
- 23 Berman 2019, 16–19, 386–387.
- 24 Anderson 1979; Tilly 1992.
- 25 Berman 2019, 19.
- 26 Acemoglu & Robinson 2019, 198–200.

- 27 Acemoglu & Robinson 2019, 153.
- 28 Acemoglu & Robinson 2019, 198–200.
- 29 Ertman 1997, 311–314.
- 30 Glete 2002, 174–212.
- 31 For a recent overview, see Kuha & Karonen 2024.
- 32 Lindegren 1985, 322–324; Downing 1992, 190–193; Ertman 1997, 313; Glete 2002, 192–194.
- 33 Moore 1966, 414–422; Anderson 1979, 173–191; Tilly 1992, 134–137; Fukuyama 2011, 431–434; see also Scherp 2013, 323–326.
- 34 Tilly 1992, 25.
- 35 Glete 2002, 210–212.
- 36 Ertman 1997, 311–314.
- 37 For example, Roberts 1968; Roberts 1979.
- 38 Roberts 1956.
- 39 Roberts 1986.
- 40 For a recent overview, see Villstrand 2017a, 465–471 et passim; see also Almbjär 2023, 15–17.
- 41 For two comparative Nordic research projects, see Central Power and Local Society, Ericsson 1982; Gustafsson 1994; and The Scandinavian Power State, Jespersen 2000.
- 42 Karonen 2001; Bergman 2012; see also Villstrand 2017a, 473; Lilja 2021.
- 43 Nilsson 1990a, 9–10; Lindegren 1985, 330–335.
- 44 Österberg 1989; Blickle et al. 1997; see also Holenstein 2009, 13–24.
- 45 For example, Villstrand 1992, 9–12; Aronsson 1992, 334–337; for critical perspectives, see Harnesk 2002; Hallenberg & Holm 2016, 31–39.
- 46 Österberg 1993; the perspective is developed by Berggren & Trägårdh 2006; Trägårdh 2013.
- 47 Bengtsson 2019, 2020; Bengtsson & Olsson 2020; see also Svedin 2017; Dahlqvist 2020.
- 48 For example, Lerbom 2003, 22–23; Villstrand 2005, 87–92; Gustafsson 2010, 12–14; Kepsu 2014, 29–36; Hallenberg & Holm 2016.
- 49 Hallenberg & Holm 2016, 235–241; the exclusion of non-propertied groups is also discussed in Bengtsson 2019, 129–130.
- 50 For the history of the Swedish Riksdag, see Metcalf & Schück 1987.
- 51 Scherp 2013, 28; for the three non-noble Estates, see also Ihse 2005; Winton 2006; Holm 2007.
- 52 Holm 2003, 29–50; Hallenberg et al. 2008, 247–268.
- 53 See Kewes et al. 2023; also Koeningsberger 1985, 1–27; Gustafsson 2010, 147–151.
- 54 Glete 2002, 192–194.
- 55 Scherp 2013, 304–307; Scherp 2023b, 2023c.
- 56 Nordin 2000, 418–428; Nordin 2015, 19–27; Winton 2006, 303–305; Sennefelt 2011, 279–283.
- 57 Linnarsson 2022, 251.
- 58 Roberts 1979, 76–78.
- 59 Lindegren 1985, 308, 322; see also Nilsson 1990a, 24–26.
- 60 Almbjär 2023, 95–96.
- 61 Winton 2017.

- 62 Norrhem 2019, 9–23, 53–56; Norrhem & Thomson 2020.
- 63 Bodensten 2021.
- 64 Aristotle's is the classic typology; see Bendix 1978; Finer 1997, 37–38; Nilsson 2017, 85–89.
- 65 For example, Gasiorowski 1990; Linz 2000; Storm 2008; Lührmann et al. 2018.
- 66 Finer 1975; see also Nilsson 1990a, 11.
- 67 Nilsson 2017, 89.
- 68 Nilsson 2017, 89–92. We do not distinguish between political regimes and types of states, and we consider princely rule to be a political regime rather than a specific type of state. See the discussion in Møller 2017, 13–15, drawing on Ertman 1997, 6–10.
- 69 For the drifting and layering of institutions, see Berndt 2023, 42–46.
- 70 Skocpol 1985.
- 71 For example, Englund 1989; Eriksson 2008, 227–231; Tunefalk 2015, 109–120.
- 72 Capoccia & Kelemen 2007, 351.
- 73 For example, Bockstette et al. 2002; Besley & Persson 2009; Sobek 2010; Fukuyama 2011, 80–94; Fukuyama 2014, 509–511; Dincecco 2018.
- 74 Lindvall & Teorell 2016, 4–5.
- 75 Lindvall & Teorell 2016, 14; for a similar definition, see Dincecco 2018, 11–12.
- 76 Lindvall & Teorell 2016, 18.
- 77 Rothstein & Teorell 2008; Rothstein 2011b, 1–33.
- 78 Rothstein & Teorell 2008, 170.
- 79 Rothstein 2011b, 34–51.
- 80 Rothstein & Teorell 2008, 171.
- 81 Teorell & Rothstein 2015; Karonen & Villstrand 2022; Riih  2022.
- 82 Kroeze et al. 2018, 3–6, 14–18; for Sweden, see, for example, Lennersand 1999; Hallenberg 2001; Cavallin 2003.
- 83 Scherp 2013, 313, 316.
- 84 Weingast 1997, 245.
- 85 M ller & Skaaning 2014, 28, 173.
- 86 Rothstein & Teorell 2008, 181–182.
- 87 Ten 2017, 493–502.
- 88 Lindvall & Teorell 2016.
- 89 The seminal work on political participation theory is Pateman 1970. Her work discerns the basic functions of political participation as an educative function, an integrative function, and a facilitation of the acceptance of decisions; see Pateman 1970, 42–43; Kern 2017, 17–18.
- 90 Beetham 2001, 15–25.
- 91  sterberg & Sogner 2000.
- 92 Beetham 2001, 18–19.
- 93 Berman 2019, 15–25.
- 94 Tilly 2007, 13–15.
- 95 Tilly 2007, 22–23.
- 96 Capoccia & Ziblatt 2010, 943.
- 97 Capoccia & Kelemen 2007, 360.
- 98 Capoccia & Kelemen 2007, 360.

2. A national monarchy

- 99 For surveys of Gustav I's rule, see Svalenius 1994 [1950]; Roberts 1968; Larsson 2002; Berntson 2010; Larson 2010; for the royal election, see Gustafsson 2000; Ferm 2023, 11–49.
- 100 Larsson 2002, 7–9.
- 101 Svalenius 1994 [1950]; Roberts 1968, 167–198.
- 102 Larsson 2002, 348–362.
- 103 Hammarström 1956, 352–363, 465–467.
- 104 Lundkvist 1989, 209–225.
- 105 Gustafsson 2000, 263–273; see also Lundkvist 1960, 168–179.
- 106 Hallenberg 2001, 406–414; Glete 2002, 189–191.
- 107 Sjöblom 2016 181–215; Neuding Skoog 2018, 429–438, 468–477.
- 108 Andrén 1999, 92–99; Berntson 2017, 174–197.
- 109 Hallenberg 2003, 24–26, 38–41; Brilkman 2013, 230–235.
- 110 Tilly 1992, 25, 134–137; Glete 2002, 181–189.
- 111 Ertman 1997, 311–314.
- 112 te Brake 1998; Katajala 2004; Koskinen 2016; Dørum et al. 2021; for the Dacke War, see Larsson 1964.
- 113 Schück 1987, 39–45.
- 114 Berman, 2019, 15–19, 45–48; Haldén 2020, 1–2.
- 115 Roberts 1968, 107–113; Gustafsson 2000, 263–266.
- 116 Schück 1987, 39–42. After 1527, the Council of the Realm consisted of the leading members of the top families whom we term 'aristocrats'. Sweden had no titled nobility before 1560, see Samuelson 1993.
- 117 Nilsson 1947, 90–99; Hammarström 1956, 363–372, 465–467; Neuding-Skoog 2018.
- 118 Edén 1899, 18–20; Carlsson, 1922; *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon (SBL)*, s.v. 'Kristofer Andersson', by Ivan Svalenius, xxi. 585.
- 119 *SBL*, s.v. 'Conrad von Pyhy', by Sven Lundkvist, xxix. 533.
- 120 Lundkvist 1989; Hallenberg 2001, 67–73.
- 121 Edén 1899, 38–54; Larson 2010, 466–470.
- 122 Edén 1899, 51–52; *SBL*, s.v. 'Conrad von Pyhy', by Sven Lundkvist, xxix. 533.
- 123 Edén 1899, 57–77; Larson 2010, 467.
- 124 Svalenius 1937; Roberts 1968, 119; Berntson 2012, 133–134; Schmidt 2019, 148–173; for the significance of St Erik, see Ågren 2012.
- 125 Edén 1899, 74–75, 82.
- 126 Lundkvist 1995–1997; Larsson 2002, 276–277.
- 127 Almquist 1917, 121–127; Dovring 1951, 163–175; Hallenberg 2001, 175–183.
- 128 Almquist 1917, 126–127; Söderberg 1977.
- 129 The chamber ordinances of 1541 & 1547, in Styffe 1856, 1–17.
- 130 Edén 1899, 68–69.
- 131 Tilly 1992, 25; Hallenberg 2001, 404–406.
- 132 Larsson 2002, 203; Åberg 1996, 315–330.
- 133 Larsson 2002, 181–187, 206–209.
- 134 On the introduction of hereditary monarchy: Andersson 1931, 224–233; Hildebrand 1934, 129–166; Hallenberg 2023, 109–134.

- 135 Lundkvist 1995–1997; Larsson, 2002, 225.
- 136 Andrén 1999, 96–103; Berntson 2017, 179–183.
- 137 Larsson 1964, 237–261, 285–355; Roberts 1968, 120–121, 131–138; Johansson 2004; Berntson 2010, 188–206.
- 138 Larsson 1967, 250–267; Hallenberg 2001, 194–202; Hallenberg & Holm 2016, 50–54, 70–72; Neuding Skoog 2021.
- 139 Svalenius 1994 [1950], 205–206; Larsson 2002, 224–225, 272–273.
- 140 Printed in *Svenska Riksdagsakter* 1887, 387–388.
- 141 Larsson 1967, 266–267; Nilsson 1989, 3–9; Hallenberg & Holm 2016, 52–53.
- 142 Schück 1987, 42–43; Hallenberg 2023, 121–125.
- 143 Holm 2003, 29–50; Hallenberg et al. 2008, 247–268.
- 144 Hallenberg 2023, 124–125.
- 145 For Erik XIV deposed, see Roberts 1968, 242–246; Grundberg 2005, 111–119; Sarti 2022, 30–35; for Sigismund, see Roberts 1968, 369–393; Sarti 2022, 35–39; for interest groups and disposals, see Sarti 2022, 105–111.
- 146 Nilsson 1947, 104–105; Anthoni 1968, 133–146.
- 147 Hallenberg 2002, 145–172.
- 148 Eriksson 2008, 25–27.
- 149 Nilsson 1947, 103–107; Samuelson 1993; Hallenberg 2001, 335–337; Tegenborg Falkdalen 2016.
- 150 Lundkvist 1989, 221.
- 151 Schück 1987, 39–60.
- 152 Österberg 1989, 83–89; Larsson 1992, 76–77; Harnesk 1997; Hallenberg 2001, 171–175.
- 153 For the organization of court proceedings, see Simonson 1999; Österberg 2000, 291–310.
- 154 Lundkvist 1960, 282–303.
- 155 For local administration before Gustav I, see Retsö 2009, 365–373; Lund 2022, 436–441.

3. Aristocratic interventions

- 156 Roberts 1968, 250–273, 445–458; Frost 2000, 29–42, 74–81; Peterson 2007, 53–115.
- 157 Johansson 2023, 398–401, 403.
- 158 For general surveys of the earlier period, see Roberts 1968; Frost 2000; Lockhart 2004; Villstrand 2011.
- 159 Hessler 1932, 167–204; Runeby 1962, 79–83; Roberts 1966, 10–18.
- 160 For Gustav II Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna, see Ahnlund 1932; Roberts 1992; Wetterberg 2002; Oredsson 2007, 51–55.
- 161 Nilsson 1984a, 295–311; Holm 1999, 161–195.
- 162 Ahnlund 1932, 143–150; Ahnlund 1933, 118–122.
- 163 Roberts 1992.
- 164 Nilsson 1996, 178–181; Holm 1999, 173–174. Nils-Erik Villstrand 2017b, 121–122, argues that 1617 was a turning point in Swedish history when its leaders opted for further military expansion rather than a peaceful foreign policy.
- 165 Lindegren 1985, 334–335.
- 166 Glete 2002, 181, 186–189; Glete 2010, 19–22, 262–287.
- 167 Österberg 1998.

- 168 Villstrand 2000, 249–314; for local insurrections, see Katajala 2004, 149–187; Hallenberg & Holm 2016, 163–198.
- 169 Rian 2000, 315–342.
- 170 Nilsson 2017, 205–209, 215.
- 171 For the commercialization of the Swedish economy, see Thomson 2004, 300–346; for war and foreign subsidies, see Downing 1992, 193–202; Norrhem 2019, 51–72.
- 172 Holm 2003; Hallenberg et al. 2008, 257–260.
- 173 Ahnlund 1933, 188–201.
- 174 Nilsson 1937, 1984a.
- 175 Holm 1999, 173–177, 182; see also Glete 2002, 198.
- 176 Tilly 1975, 42; also Tilly 1992, 20–28; for critical perspectives, see Kaspersen & Strandsbjerg 2017.
- 177 Nilsson 1996, 178–180; Holm 1999, 167–168.
- 178 Heckscher 1933; Heckscher 1938; Lindegren 1985, 311–312; Nilsson 1996, 178.
- 179 Jakobsson 2021, 116–153 et passim; Johansson 2023, 237–248.
- 180 Wallerstein 1980.
- 181 Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives), Stockholm (RA), Kammarens arkiv, Strödda kamerala handlingar, vol. 59, king's memo for the councillors, 16 July 1621; RA, Riksregistraturet, 16 July 1621, 381–387; Hallenberg 2008, 66–67.
- 182 Hallenberg 2008, 55–60; Hallenberg 2009.
- 183 Hallenberg 2008, 210–214.
- 184 Lindegren 1985, 313.
- 185 Ahnlund 1933, 150–162; Nilsson 1982, 6–7; Lindegren 1985, 321.
- 186 Lundkvist 1974; Rian 2000, 336.
- 187 Rian 2000, 337; Holm 2007, 247–252; Hallenberg & Holm 2016, 249–252, 273–274.
- 188 Johansson 2023, 343–344; for the importance of fiscal consent, see Levi 1988, 10–17.
- 189 Nilsson 1982, 13–14; 'Gustav II Adolf's war ordinance', in Styffe 1861, 1–56.
- 190 Rian 2000, 333–334; Glete 2002, 190–191.
- 191 Nilsson 1958; Glete 2002, 192–195; Glete 2010, 646–651, 668–671 et passim.
- 192 Lindegren 1985, 334; Ringmar 1996, 161–164; Forssberg 2005, 283–286; Nilsson 1994, 122–124.
- 193 Wetterberg 2002, 207–253; Glete 2002, 197–199; Asker 2009, 89–91.
- 194 Lenman & Parker 1980, 29; Österberg & Sogner 2000.
- 195 Gaunt 1975; Olsson 1996; Rian 2000, 327–328; for reforming the school system, see Folkesson 2024, 50–93.
- 196 Wetterberg 2002, 351–369.
- 197 'Riks-Kansleren Axel Oxenstjernas Kansli-Ordning', in Styffe 1856, 300–302.
- 198 Wetterberg 2002, 241–243; Villstrand 2011, 14–15.
- 199 'Gustaf II Adolfs instruction för Kammar-Collegium', in Styffe 1856, 26–46; Linnarsson 2014, 215–234.
- 200 Edén 1941, 51–63; Hallenberg 2008, 169–179.
- 201 Edén 1941, 63–99.
- 202 Hallenberg 2008, 154–162; Lappalainen 2017, 113–120.
- 203 Rian 2000, 337; the decree is printed in Styffe 1852, 131–142.
- 204 Styffe 1852, 142–149.

- 205 Styffe 1852, 169–184; *SBL*, s.v. ‘Abraham Cabiljau’, by G. Jacobson, vii. 199; Segelod n.d.
- 206 Hallenberg 2008, 218–219; for the provincial boards, see Asker 2004; Jonsson 2005, 51–60; Lappalainen 2017, 120–125.
- 207 Persson 1992, 316–329; Samuelson 1993; Norrhem 1994, 154–160; Hakanen & Koskinen 2017b, 95–101.
- 208 Glete 2002, 63–66, 196–199.
- 209 Thorelli 2023, 300–302, 310–315; see also Persson 1993, 49–70; for a more positive view of noble service, see Hakanen & Koskinen 2017a, 65–67.
- 210 Ahnlund 1933, 135–141; Scherp 2014a, 197–214.
- 211 Scherp 2014a, 204–211.
- 212 Ahnlund 1933, 150–162.
- 213 Holm 1999, 175–177.
- 214 Hallenberg & Holm 2016, 235–246; Rönquist 2022, 275–284.
- 215 Holm 2007, 253–254; Johansson 2023, 460–464.
- 216 Ahnlund 1933, 145; Holm 1999, 171; Hakanen & Koskinen 2017a, 61–64.
- 217 Ahnlund 1933, 155–156, 165–168.
- 218 Lindegren 1985, 322–323.
- 219 Landberg 1971; Norrhem 2019, 56–61 et passim.
- 220 For the connections between Scottish networks and the Swedish state, see Murdoch 2006.
- 221 Lindegren 1980; Glete 2002, 194–195; Glete 2010, 287–292, 668–671.
- 222 Johansson 2023, 330–344.
- 223 Hallenberg & Holm 2016, 263–268.
- 224 Holm 1999, 167–170, 186–190.

4. War and peace

- 225 Scherp 2023a, 141–153.
- 226 Scherp 2023a, 150–153; Scherp 2014b, 185–190.
- 227 Rosén 1963, 17–67, 82–98; Rystad 2001, 17–57; Nilsson 1984b, 33–34.
- 228 Henshall 1992.
- 229 Rystad 2001, 120–150, 165–193; Upton 1998, 31–51; Nilsson 1984b, 38–40; Rosén 1963, 117–190.
- 230 Dwyer 2013, 19–21, 100–102, 127–128, 144–145, 540–541.
- 231 Scherp 2013, 295–297.
- 232 Downing 1992, 202–204.
- 233 Scherp 2023b, 127–131.
- 234 Carlsson 1973, 233–237.
- 235 Rystad 2001, 214–215; Upton 1998, 253–254.
- 236 Asker 1993, 74–77; Dahlgren 1992, 83–87, 111–114.
- 237 Upton 1998, 159–169.
- 238 Fukuyama 2014, 66–80.
- 239 Scherp 2013, 227–230; Rystad 2001, 62–63.
- 240 Rystad 2001, 120–150.
- 241 Scherp 2013, 257–258; Rystad 2001, 71–120.
- 242 Rystad 2001, 116–119; Norrhem 2019, 163–164.
- 243 Rystad 2001, 179–180.

- 244 Scherp 2014b, 202–216; Rystad 2001, 165–173, 177–180; Rosén 1963, 156–158.
- 245 Scherp 2014b, 184–202; Rystad 2001, 173–177; Rosén 1963, 148–155; Hammar 2022, 120.
- 246 Rystad 2001, 240–245; Rosén 1963, 167–169; Upton 1998, 71–89.
- 247 Scherp 2013, 267–275.
- 248 Scherp 2013, 261–263; Rosén 1963, 174–176.
- 249 Scherp 2013, 275–290; Hasselberg 1968, 245–248.
- 250 Scherp 2014b, 216–217.
- 251 Scherp 2021, 216–217, 219–220, 226–227.
- 252 Upton 1998, 166–169.
- 253 Rystad 2001, 120–122, 128–131; Rosén 1963, 117–123; Dahlgren 1992, 112–114.
- 254 Nilsson 1984b, 29–36, 40–43; Upton 1998, 12–15, 24–29; Rystad 2001, 135–148.
- 255 Scherp 2013, 297–309, 312–313; Dahlgren 1992, 112–113; Nilsson 1984b, 36–38, 42–43.
- 256 Dahlgren 1992, 111–115.
- 257 Scherp 2013, 295–309.
- 258 Scherp 2013, 24, n48.
- 259 Upton 1998, 71.
- 260 Upton 1998, 79–87.
- 261 Rystad 2001, 247–255.
- 262 Gaunt 1975, 86–91.
- 263 Nilsson 1984b, 41–43; Upton 1998, 157; Asker 1993, 79–85.
- 264 Rystad 2001, 233–234; Rosén 1963, 191.
- 265 Wetterberg 2009, 52–65; Rystad 2001, 189–192.
- 266 Dahlgren 1993, 128.
- 267 Upton 1998, 156–159; Rosén 1963; Rystad 2001, 190–191, 231–233.
- 268 Carlsson 1973, 82–85; Upton 1998, 159–160; Scherp & Forss 2019, 71–75.
- 269 Scherp & Forss 2019, 57–63, 73–75; Carlsson 1973, 233, 236–237.
- 270 Scherp & Forss 2019, 75–83, 264.
- 271 Geddes, Wright & Frantz 2018, 70–71; Yadav & Mukerjee 2015, 1–2, 9–10.
- 272 Rystad 2001, 237–238; Norrhem 2010, 42–45.
- 273 Asker 2004, 24–26, 329–334; Upton 1998, 157–161; Elmroth 2001, 142–144.
- 274 Dahlgren 1992, 134.
- 275 Asker 2004, 300–304.
- 276 Scherp 2016, 164–171.
- 277 Upton 1998, 170–178; Dahlgren 1992, 139–143; Forssberg 2005, 283–285.
- 278 Dahlgren 1993, 130–131; Rystad 2001, 345–350.
- 279 Sandgren 2017, 12–14.
- 280 Upton 1998, 158–172.
- 281 Ågren 1976, 74–80; Rystad 2001, 177–180, 228–229.
- 282 Stiernhielm 1973, 17.
- 283 Scherp 2023a, 159–160.
- 284 Upton 1998, 158–160; Rosén 1963, 191; Lövgren 1980, 169–180.
- 285 Rystad 2001, 254–255; Upton 1998, 169.
- 286 Lennersand 2001, 97–98.
- 287 Lennersand 1999, 307–310.
- 288 Upton 1998, 166–169; Rystad 2001, 238–239.

- 289 Lindström & Simonson 1993, 106–113; Asker 1987, 224–225, 230, 247–249; Lerbom 2003, 120–121.
- 290 Rosén 1963, 186–188; Scherp 2014b, 202–203, 205; Rystad 2001, 226–229.
- 291 Norrhem 2010, 44.
- 292 Thisner 2018, 54, 60–61; Wirilander 1964, 243.
- 293 Rosén 1963, 184.
- 294 Rosén 1963, 179–184; Grauers 1932, 100–122; Sjödel 1966, 368–369.
- 295 Almbjär 2016, 47, 51.
- 296 Corin 1958, 18–20, 220, 223–225, 284; Upton 1998, 164–166.
- 297 Scherp 2013, 59–86; Scherp 2014b, 202–206.
- 298 Scherp 2013, 295–297.
- 299 Glete 2002, 104; Ertman 1997, 259; Bregnsbo 2017, 40.
- 300 Norrhem 2019, 163–170.
- 301 *SBL*, s.v. ‘Magnus Stenbock’, by Björn Asker, xxxiii. 278.
- 302 Florén 1992, 15–17, 20; Dahlgren 1992, 88–89, 95–96; Lindegren 1992, 166, 168–169.
- 303 Scherp 2023a, 135, 137.
- 304 Instrument of Government 1719 § 25; Instrument of Government 1720 § 31
- 305 Cavallin 2003, 240–245; Rothstein 2011a, 240–243.
- 306 Buchholz 1979, 87–88, 89–99, 121–122.
- 307 Acemoglu & Robinson 2019, 418–423; Acemoglu & Robinson 2006, 32–33.
- 308 Lindegren 1992, 152–160, 219–225.

5. The Estates take over the state

- 309 Stjernquist 1999, 21.
- 310 Roberts 1986, 62–69, 76–80.
- 311 Malmström 1893, i. 37–44, Wetterberg 2006, 254–264.
- 312 Rosén 1963, 382–394.
- 313 Scherp 2015, 148–149, 153–156, 166–169; Rosén 1963, 375, 378–380.
- 314 Wetterberg 2006, 258.
- 315 Roberts 1986, 2.
- 316 Wetterberg 2006, 256–258; Scherp 2018, 76–81.
- 317 Karlsson 1994, 243–247.
- 318 Scherp 2023b, 138–144.
- 319 They are not necessarily held by the same people, and 1 and 2 below are somewhat contradictory.
- 320 Andersson 2023, 65–68.
- 321 Hjärne 1916, 170–172; Buchholz 1979, 172–173; Malmström 1889, 156–160, 208.
- 322 Implicit, for example, in Lagerroth 1915, ch. 6.
- 323 Roberts 1986, 1, 6–7, 9; Malmström 1893, i. 46, 48
- 324 Metcalf 1985, 117.
- 325 Bodensten 2016, 104–109.
- 326 Thanner 1953, 47–52.
- 327 Thanner 1953, 171.
- 328 Thanner 1953, 161–163; Malmström 1893, i. 91–92.
- 329 Thanner 1953, 53–54; *Handlingar angående revolutionen* 1954, 4–8, 56–65; Helander 1927, 85–86.
- 330 Scherp & Forss 2019, 135–138.

- 331 Herlitz 1957, 148.
- 332 Scherp 2023b, 142.
- 333 Lagerroth 1934, 26.
- 334 Enblom 1925, 84–85, 180.
- 335 Malmström 1893, i. 247–248, 253–254, 263–266.
- 336 Enblom 1925, 143–146; Buchholz 1979, 123–130.
- 337 Thanner 1953, 132–133.
- 338 Scherp 2017, 64, 71.
- 339 Buchholz 1979, 161–163.
- 340 Carlsson 1913, 72–73; Lövgren 1980, 25–27; Wetterberg 2006, 361–362.
- 341 Buchholz 1979, 123–135, 139–151; Wetterberg 2006, 359–362.
- 342 Ericson Wolke 2023, 88–91.
- 343 Not least in the catastrophic war against Russia (1741–1743).
- 344 Ericson Wolke 2017 103–105, 108–111, 117–118; Artéus 2001, 72–74.
- 345 Lagerroth 1928, 155–175; Wetterberg 2006, 260–262.
- 346 Lagerroth 1928, 208–224.
- 347 Åmark 1961, 598–603.
- 348 Malmström 1893, i. 408; Enblom 1925, 180.
- 349 Scherp 2023a, 141–142.
- 350 Malmström 1893, i. 386; Holst 1953, 148–155.
- 351 Lagerroth 1934, 31–33.
- 352 Lagerroth 1934, 34; Malmström 1893, i. 251–252; Roberts 1986, 76–77; Scherp 2025, 227, 230.
- 353 Scherp 2025, 230; Malmström 1893, i. 423–424; Lagerroth 1934, 113, 115, 122–123.
- 354 Scherp 2025, 230.
- 355 Scherp 2025, 226–227, 235.
- 356 Scherp 2025, 233–234, 237, 239–245.
- 357 Lagerroth 1934, 118, 122; Scherp 2025, 242–243.
- 358 Scherp 2025, 220–222, 233–234.
- 359 Scherp 2025, 228, 230, 235, 239.
- 360 Scherp 2025, 229.
- 361 Scherp 2025, 224–225.
- 362 Scherp 2025, 230–231, 240–241.
- 363 Scherp 2025, 240–241, 246.
- 364 Andersson 2004, 38–52.
- 365 Andersson 2004, 49–53.
- 366 Scherp 2021, 140–142; Almbjär 2016, 166–167, 173–174, 177–179, 221–222.
- 367 Naumann 1911, 22; Forssell 1935, 196.
- 368 Asker 2004, 288–289, 292–293, 301–304.
- 369 Lagerroth 1934, 109.
- 370 Almbjär 2016, 13.
- 371 Herlitz 1957, 171.
- 372 For instance, see Behre 2001, 239.
- 373 Wetterberg 2006, 668–669.
- 374 Malmström 1893, i. 411–414.
- 375 Nils Reuterholms Journal 1957, 35.
- 376 Lagerroth 1934, 111–112.

- 377 Malmström 1893, i. 379–385.
- 378 Roberts 1986, 115–123.
- 379 Malmström 1893, i. 363–365; Lagerroth 1934, 81, 89, 96–97; Enblom 1925, 152–153.
- 380 Valentin 1915, 9–11.
- 381 Valentin 1915, 1.
- 382 Lindegren 2018, 335–336; Malmström 1893, i. 145–148; Åmark 1961, 80–82, 154–156.
- 383 Roberts 1986, 15–27.
- 384 Wetterberg 2006, 284–286, 298–300; Åmark 1961, 22–24, 152, 675–691.
- 385 Herlitz 1957, 168–169; Roberts 1986, 67–69.
- 386 Metcalf 1985, 127–130.
- 387 Sennefelt 2006, 41.
- 388 Nordin 2009, 269–276; Sennefelt 2006, 20–25.
- 389 Rothstein 2011b, 146–151, 172–174; Buchholz 1979, 89–100.
- 390 Naumann 1911, 22; Lagerroth 1934, 115.
- 391 Bodensten 2021, 352–360.
- 392 Lagerroth 1934, 28–30, 32–35; Lagerroth 1915, 255, 264.
- 393 Lennersand 1999, 291–296; Frohnert 1993, 280–285.
- 394 Scherp 2023b, 142.
- 395 Wetterberg 2006, 256–259, 381–383.
- 396 Frohnert 1993, 280–283; Aronsson 1992, 141–145, 160–161, 164–165.
- 397 Olsson 1926, 119–147.
- 398 Gadd 2006, 305–306, 318.
- 399 Lagerroth 1934, 107–108.
- 400 Winton 2006, 293–294, 323–325, 328–330.
- 401 Sennefelt 2006, 24.
- 402 Stjernquist 1996, 116–117.
- 403 Andersson 2004; Scherp 2020.
- 404 Sennefelt 2006, 28–30, 32, 41–43.
- 405 Tocqueville 2007 [1856], 221–225, 292–294.

6. The return of the king

- 406 King Gustav III's speech to the Riksdag, 21 August 1772, in *Modée* 1781, 3.
- 407 To some extent the political factions corresponded to group and class interests in the Riksdag. The Hats represented a protectionist economic position and an aggressive foreign policy, especially against Russia, the Caps advocated a restrained foreign policy and liberal economic agenda, see Carlsson 1981, 127–135; Metcalf 1981, 35–49.
- 408 King Gustav III's speech to the Riksdag, 21 August 1772, in *Modée* 1781, 5; see also Alm 2002, 92–93.
- 409 Metcalf 1982, 252.
- 410 Roberts 1995, 35.
- 411 Malmström 1901, vi. 333, 338.
- 412 See Nordin 2003; Cavallin 2003, 167–169.
- 413 Kjellin 1952, 218; Nordin 2000, 402–403.
- 414 Nordin 2000, 387.
- 415 See Linnarsson 2022, 236.

- 416 Malmström 1893–1901; Lagerroth 1915.
- 417 For the literature, see Almbjör 2016; Bodensten 2016; see also Sennefelt 2011.
- 418 Winton 2006, 18–25; Sennefelt 2011, 17–20 and works cited there.
- 419 Sennefelt 2011, 271–274; Bodensten 2016, 112–114, 350–351.
- 420 Other examples are Dermineur 2017; Wolff, 2007, 34–62; Norrhem 2007.
- 421 Linnarsson 1943, 342.
- 422 Nordin 2003, 61.
- 423 Bodensten 2021, 339.
- 424 Norrhem 2019, 234–241.
- 425 Metcalf 1982, 254–255.
- 426 Lagerroth 1915, 585; Linnarsson 2017, 91–92.
- 427 Runefelt 2005, 167–168.
- 428 Winton 2022, 280–282.
- 429 Nordin 2000, ch. 6; Nordin 2003.
- 430 Metcalf 1982, 254.
- 431 Rudelius 1935, 340–341; Metcalf 1982, 253; Linnarsson 2022, 236.
- 432 Bodensten 2016, 110.
- 433 See Nordin 2000, 419–420.
- 434 Metcalf 1982, 259–260; Winton 2022, 282.
- 435 Lagerroth 1915, 569; see also Roberts 1995, 218.
- 436 Lagerroth 1915, 585; Linnarsson 2017, 91–92.
- 437 Runefelt 2005, 167–168.
- 438 See Malmström 1900, v. 408; Roberts 1995, 222–223.
- 439 *Kongl. Maj:ts Nådige Förordning* 1766.
- 440 The Constitution stated that the King in Council made all appointments to the higher positions in government. Discussion usually referred to paragraph 40 of the 1720 Constitution, see Cavallin 2003, 76–77.
- 441 See Malmström 1900, v. 409.
- 442 *Rikens ständers stora deputations betänkande* 1766, 23, 26–27.
- 443 *Rikens ständers stora deputations betänkande* 1766, 31, §17; see also Lagerroth 1915, 587–588; Malmström 1900, v. 412.
- 444 *Kongl. Maj:ts Nådige Förordning* 1766, §4.
- 445 Malmström 1901, vi. 137.
- 446 Schönberg 1769, 7.
- 447 *Secrete utskottet* 1769; *Act, om personlig säkerhet* 1769; *Förordning* 1769; For the debate in the committee, see Linnarsson 2022, 243–246.
- 448 *Secrete utskottet* 1769, 4–5.
- 449 *Secrete utskottet* 1769, 11.
- 450 Minutes from the peasants, 2 November 1769, *BDP* 1975, 273.
- 451 Malmström 1901, vi. 149; Edler 1915, 111–113; Hennings 1935, 369–371.
- 452 Malmström 1901, vi. 200–201.
- 453 Edler 1915; Malmström 1901, vi.; Lagerroth 1915; Nordin 2000; Wolff 2008; Ihalainen 2010.
- 454 Nordin 2000, 386.
- 455 Nordin 2000, 387–389.
- 456 Malmström 1901, vi. 234.
- 457 See Linnarsson 2022, 249.

- 458 For an account of the coup, see Malmström 1901, vi. ch. 33; see also Hennings 1957, 56–66; Lönnroth 1986, 40–49.
- 459 Lönnroth 1986, 46–47.
- 460 For Denmark and Struensee, see Langen 2018.
- 461 Malmström 1901, vi. 344–345; Hennings 1957, 65–66.
- 462 Lönnroth 1986, 54–56.
- 463 Alm 2002, 125–126, 132–134.
- 464 Instrument of Government 1772, § 39.
- 465 Nordström 1991, 159.
- 466 Cavallin 2003, 82.
- 467 This draws on Winton 2012a.
- 468 Metcalf 2003, 40.
- 469 Berman 2019, 15–25.
- 470 Metcalf 1982, 259–260; Norrhem 2019, 234–236.
- 471 See Nordström 1991, 159.
- 472 Lönnroth 1986, 56.
- 473 For the abolition of torture, see Anners 1965, 186–187.
- 474 Roberts 1995, 298.

7. A separation of powers

- 475 Konstitutionsutskottet (KU) 1809–1810, 8 ‘Memorial N:o 1, med förslag till Regerings-Form’, 2 June 1809.
- 476 See Tersmeden 1999.
- 477 Edling 2009, 106–107.
- 478 Koselleck 2004 [1985].
- 479 Hårdstedt 2010, 190–194, 205–208.
- 480 Alm 2002, 356–358.
- 481 For the war, see Hårdstedt 2006; for the coup, see Carlsson 1944; Hemström 2005; Isaksson 2009.
- 482 Karlbom 1964; Sundin 2006.
- 483 For the literature, see Hessler 1959; Rönström 1997.
- 484 See Rönström 1997, 451–452; Sundin 2006, 14–15.
- 485 Karlbom 1964, 312–315; Rönström 1997, 460–465.
- 486 Sundin 2006, 13–14, 225–227.
- 487 Carlsson 1944, 391–392; Sundin 2006, 19–20.
- 488 Carlsson 1944, 365–366; Hårdstedt 2006, 256–258.
- 489 Hårdstedt 2006, 262.
- 490 Hemström 2005, 256–259.
- 491 Alm 2002, 351–358.
- 492 Carlsson 1944, 373–379; Hårdstedt 2006, 262.
- 493 See Berglund 2009; Hultman 2024.
- 494 Carlsson 1944, 221–224; Hemström 2005, 45.
- 495 Sundin 2006, 110.
- 496 Sundin 2006, 93–94.
- 497 Stjernquist 1965, 24.
- 498 Sundin 2006, 112–113.
- 499 Sundin 2006, 160.

- 500 KU 1809–1810, ‘Memorial N:o 1, med förslag till Regerings-Form’, 2 June 1809.
- 501 Petri 2017, 215.
- 502 For the theory of separation used as a political argument in Sweden in the 1760s, see Linnarsson 2022. The committee’s proposal built on the previously rejected proposal by Anders af Håkansson, see Stjernquist 1965, 30–32.
- 503 KU 1809–1810, 6–7 ‘Memorial N:o 1, med förslag till Regerings-Form’, 2 June 1809.
- 504 Petersson 2010, 55.
- 505 Sundin 2006, 225.
- 506 Brusewitz 1913, 51; Thomson 1923, 134–144.
- 507 Berman 2019, 15–25.
- 508 Sundin 2006, 146.
- 509 Wibling 1954, 90–91.
- 510 Sundin 2006, 161–162.
- 511 Sundin 2006, 215–216.
- 512 For examples, see Brusewitz 1913, 74, 99–100.
- 513 For examples, see Brusewitz 1913, 80–81, 95, 98, 102.
- 514 Brusewitz 1913, 87; Sundin 2006, 120.
- 515 KU 1809–1810, 15–16 ‘Memorial N:o 1, med förslag till Regerings-Form’, 2 June 1809.
- 516 KU 1809–1810, 85 appendix to ‘Memorial N:o 1, med förslag till Regerings-Form’, 27 May 1809.
- 517 KU 1809–1810, 85 appendix to ‘Memorial N:o 1, med förslag till Regerings-Form’, 27 May 1809.
- 518 Sundin 2006, 143.
- 519 Brusewitz 1913, 87.
- 520 Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdags-protokoll (RAP) 1809, iii. 4473 proceedings of the Estate of the Nobles, 20 October 1809.
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- 522 Isberg 2009, 217–222.
- 523 KU 1809–1810, 483–519 ‘Memorial N:o 36, Rörande National-Representationen’, 24 March 1810.
- 524 KU 1809–1810, 483–484 ‘Memorial N:o 36, Rörande National-Representationen’, 24 March 1810; see also Brusewitz 1913, 185.
- 525 KU 1809–1810, 507–511 ‘Memorial N:o 36, Rörande National-Representationen’, 24 March 1810.
- 526 Alm 2002, 356–357.
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- 529 Edling 2009, 107.
- 530 Roberts 1995, 293; Linnarsson 2022, 251–252.
- 531 Edling 2009, 107.
- 532 Asker 2009, 84–85.
- 533 See ch. 6 elsewhere in this volume; Lagerroth 1915, 587–588; Malmström 1900, v. 412.
- 534 *Kongl. Maj:ts Regerings-Form* 1809, 18–19, 6 June 1809 paragraph 49.
- 535 *Kongl. Maj:ts Regerings-Form* 1809, 6, 6 June 1809 paragraph 4.

- 536 Carlsson 1944, 41; Alm 2002, 351–352.
 537 Taube 2009, 350.
 538 Axberger 2009.
 539 Edling 2009, 78–79.
 540 Koselleck 2004 [1985], 269–270.
 541 Suominen 2002; Wahlbäck 2011.
 542 KU 1809–1810, 483–519 ‘Memorial N:o 36, Rörande National-Representationen’,
 24 March 1810.

8. The dynamics of shifting regimes

- 543 Tilly 2007, 13–15; for Sweden, see Nordin 2000, 419–420.
 544 Scheidel 2017, 436–444 et passim.
 545 Norrhem 2019; Winton 2012b.
 546 Fukuyama 2011, 3–25; Fukuyama 2014, 198–213.
 547 Acemoglu & Robinson 2012, 73–83.
 548 For bribes and foreign agents, see Bodensten 2021.
 549 Eilola et al. 2021.
 550 Axberger 2009; Edling 2009; for the fight against government corruption, see
 Teorell & Rothstein 2015.
 551 See Berman 2019, 15–25.
 552 Berman 2019, 376–377, 384–385.
 553 Tilly 2007, 13–15.
 554 Österberg 1989; Österberg 1992; Blickle et al. 1997; see also Holenstein 2009,
 13–24.
 555 Lindegren 1985; Nilsson 1990.
 556 This argument is developed by Bengtsson 2020, 73–89.
 557 For the character of Swedish nineteenth century politics, see Stråth 2012.
 558 Braddick 2000; Pincus 2009.
 559 Bregnsbo & Jensen 2022; Bregnsbo 2024.
 560 Österberg 1993; Trägårdh 2013.
 561 Bengtsson 2020, 105–122; see also Bengtsson et al. 2019; Uppenberg & Olsson
 2022.
 562 Lundberg & Åmark 2001; for an international perspective, see Esping-Andersen
 1990; Edling 2019.
 563 Ivarsson Westerberg et al. 2014; Andersson et al. 2023.

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