

Sweden

Self-rule

INSTITUTIONAL DEPTH AND POLICY SCOPE

Sweden has one intermediate tier of governance: twenty-one *län* (counties)¹ which combine self-government and deconcentrated state authority (Law No. 152/1974, Ch. 14, Art. 1; No. 179/1977).² There has never been a clear-cut separation of functions between self-governing *landstinge* (county councils) and *länsstyrelser* (deconcentrated central government in the *län*), though in recent years *landstinge* have gained authority. To facilitate implementation of EU cohesion policy, the Swedish government created eight larger statistical regions (*riksområden*), but these are not general purpose governments.

Between 1950 and the county reform of 1971, *landstinge* owned hospitals and outpatient centers, were responsible for the provision of health care, and had secondary responsibilities for agricultural, craft, and industrial training. *Länsstyrelsen* have primary responsibility for law and order, local government supervision, and implementation of central legislation in the fields of health, education, labor, housing, town planning, and social affairs (Law No. 825/2007; Torfing, Lidström, and Røiseland 2015). From 1971, *landstinge* were given responsibility for implementing regional development, cultural activities, and public transport, and they extended their role in health provision (Council of Europe: Sweden 1999, 2007; Lidström 2001c). The dual structure was retained. There is still a centrally appointed governor (*landshövding*), but the majority of the executive, the *länsstyrelser*, are selected by the *landstinge* (Committee of the Regions 2005). *Landstinge* score 2 on institutional depth and 1 on policy scope until 1971, when policy scope increases to 2.

Cities with a population of more than 50,000 citizens could opt out of a county council (*Städer*) and these cities assumed county council tasks (Law No. 349/1924, Art. 3; No. 319/1954, Art. 2). There were six cities that were not part of a county council: *Gävle* (until 1963), *Helsingborg* (1963), *Norrköping* (1967), Stockholm (1967)³, *Göteborg* (1997), and *Malmö* (1997).

¹ *Gotlands landstinge* is an island which is both a municipality and a *landsting* (Council of Europe: Sweden 1997, 2014).

² Sweden was the last of the three northern-most Nordic countries to create a parliament for the Sami people (Law No. 1433/1992). The first elections took place in 1993 (Josefsen 2010). The Sami parliament may initiate proposals to promote Sami culture, appoint the members of the Sami school board, and advise on planning and monitoring Sami needs such as reindeer husbandry (Law No. 1433/1992, Ch. 2, Art. 1). Like its counterparts in Finland and Norway, the Sami parliament is dependent on central government grants (Josefsen 2010; Law No. 1433/1992, Ch.2, Art. 1).

³ Until 1977, the capital city of Stockholm had its own law but Stockholm's competences were similar to those of other *Städer* and *landstinge* (Law No. 50/1957; No. 179/1977). Stockholm is subdivided into fourteen districts which have a council appointed by the municipal council. The districts exercise some delegated tasks in primary school, leisure, and cultural services (Council of Europe: Sweden 1999, 2007). In addition, *Stockholms landstinge* executes some municipal competences such as public transport (Council

Collectively, *Städer* governed over 1.7 million citizens which was around 22 per cent of the total Swedish population. These cities exercised similar authority as *landstinge* except that they were also responsible for refuse collection, sewers, public health, fire protection, town planning, public transport, housing, libraries, theatres, and primary schools (Harloff 1987; Humes and Martin 1969). These competences were not shared with a *länsstyrelser*. *Städer* score 2 on policy scope.

In 1996 and 1997, *Kristianstad* and *Malmö landstinge* were merged into *Skane landsting*, and *Göteborgs och Bohus*, *Skaraborgs*, and *Älvsborgs landstinge* were merged into *Västra Götaland landsting* (Law Nos. 945–6/1996; No. 222/1997; No. 223/1997). From 1999, these two newly created regions (*regionkommuner*) assumed competences in economic development, regional transport, and cultural institutions, which were previously the responsibility of *länsstyrelser* (Council of Europe: Sweden 2002; McCallion 2007; Lidström 2010; OECD: Sweden 2010; Svensson and Östhol 2001). These reforms have become permanent and were extended to *Halland* and *Götland* in 2010, to *Gävleborg*, *Jämtland*, *Jönköping*, *Kronoberg*, *Örebro*, *Östergötland* in 2015 and, in 2017, to *Norrbottnen*, *Uppsala*, *Västmanland*, and *Västernorrland* (Assembly of European Regions 2010; Berg and Oscarsson 2013; Council of Europe: Sweden 2014; Law No. 1414/1996; No. 630/2010; No. 118/2014; No. 473/2014; No. 945/2016; McCallion 2017).

Län which were not turned into *regioner* could opt to establish regional cooperative councils (*kommunförbund* or *samverkansorgan*) consisting of representatives of the *landstinge* and all municipalities residing within the county (Bäck 2014: 244–248; Law No. 34/2002; McCallion 2017; OECD: Sweden 2017; Torfing, Lidström, and Røiseland 2015). The regional cooperative councils gained competences in regional development and culture from the *landstinge*, funding and coordination of regional development from the *länsstyrelser*, and resources from the municipalities (Torfing, Lidström, and Røiseland 2015). Between 2003 and 2011 thirteen regional cooperative councils had been set up but six were disestablished in the *län* which were transformed into *regioner* in 2015 (Council of Europe: Sweden 2014; OECD: Sweden 2017: 60–61). In 2019, all county councils have become *regioner* with directly elected assemblies which are called *regionfullmäktige* and regional executives which are named *regionstyrelse* (Berg and Oscarsson 2020; Law No. 1348/2018).⁴

FISCAL AUTONOMY

The main income source for *landstinge* (and for *Städer* until 1997) is a local income tax, which accounts for about 75 percent of county revenues. The tax base is set by central government, but the *landstinge* can determine the rate within limits determined by the central government (Bäck 2014: 253–257; Harloff 1987; Humes and Martin 1969; Jones 1993: 124–125; Law No. 370/1928; No. 210/1953, Arts. 67–73; Lidström 2001c; Lotz 2006; Olsson 2000).

BORROWING AUTONOMY

of Europe: Sweden 2014; OECD: Sweden 2006).

⁴ There are plans to merge 21 *regioner* into six to nine *regioner* by 2023 (Feltenius 2016; McCallion 2017; OECD: Sweden 2017: 191–199).

Landstinge and *Städer* could borrow without prior authorization by the central government and, until 2000, the only restriction was a maximum of five years to repay a loan (Council of Europe: Sweden 1999, 2007; Law No. 210/1953, Art. 58; No. 319/1954, Art. 64). However, capital markets have had a disciplining effect on *landstinge* spending and deficits, especially since the central government has made an explicit commitment not to bail out county councils (Council of Europe 1997; Joumard and Kongsrud 2003; OECD 2012: 52). Since 2000, borrowing by *landstinge* is restricted by a centrally imposed balanced budget rule (Bäck 2014: 253–257). *Landstinge* are required to balance their current accounts and, if a deficit occurs, the county council has to adopt an action plan and return to a balanced budget within three years (OECD 2012). Borrowing autonomy decreases from 3 to 2 in 2000.

REPRESENTATION

Landsting assemblies have been directly elected since 1912 and the assembly chooses its own executive (*landstingsstyrelse*) (Law No. 319/1954; No. 891/1976; No. 179/1977, Ch. 3, Arts. 5–6; No. 900/1991, Ch. 3, Art. 3). Since 1970, elections take place in conjunction with municipal and national elections every three years and, since 1994, every four years (Law No. 620/1972, Ch. 1, Art. 1). At the same time, *landstinge* share authority with deconcentrated *länsstyrelser* under the direction of a centrally appointed *landshövding* (governor) (Bjørnå and Jenssen 2006). The councils of *Städer* (*stadsfullmäktige*) were directly elected and the councils elected a board (*stadskollegium*) and chair (*ordförande*) (Harloff 1987; Humes and Martin 1969; Law No. 210/1953, Arts. 6 and 11).

Shared rule

LAW MAKING

Until 1971, *landstinge* had institutional representation in the upper chamber of the Swedish *Riksdag* which was composed of members selected for six-year terms by *landsting* councils (*L2*, *L3*). Each *landsting* was allocated seats proportional to its population. The upper chamber and lower chamber had equal powers (*L4*). In 1971, Sweden became unicameral (Law No. 152/1974, Ch. 3, Art. 2) and *landstinge* lost shared rule in law making.

EXECUTIVE CONTROL

Landstinge have no executive control.

FISCAL CONTROL

Until it was abolished, the upper chamber provided *landstinge* with a veto over the distribution of tax revenues. From the 1970s, the Swedish central government also concluded non-binding agreements with peak organizations of municipalities and counties. The Swedish parliament preserved the right to take unilateral action (Blom-Hansen 1999), and peak organizations could not bind their members. We do not consider this authority sufficient to reach a score of 1.^β The

practice was abandoned in 1982, when the *Riksdag* resorted to unilateral measures to constrain regional and local spending.

BORROWING CONTROL

Landstinge have no borrowing control.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Until 1971, when the upper chamber was abolished, the *landstinge* had equal powers with the lower chamber over constitutional laws. Constitutional provisions required a simple majority in both chambers (Law No. 152/1974, Ch. 8, Art. 14).

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Self-rule in Sweden

			Institutional depth	Policy scope	Fiscal autonomy	Borrowing autonomy	Representation		Self-rule
							Assembly	Executive	
Landstinge/Län	I	1950-1970	2	1	3	3	2	1	12
	I	1971-1999	2	2	3	3	2	1	13
	I	2000-2018	2	2	3	2	2	1	12
Städer	I	1950-1997	2	2	3	3	2	2	14

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Shared rule in Sweden

		Law making						Executive control		Fiscal control		Borrowing control		Constitutional reform		Shared rule
		L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	M	B	M	B	M	B	M	B	
Landstinge/Län	1950-1970	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	0	7.5
	1971-2018	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Städer	1950-1997	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

National legislature has: L1 = regional representation; L2 = regional government representation; L3 = majority regional representation; L4 = extensive authority; L5 = bilateral regional consultation; L6 = veto for individual region. Total for shared rule includes the highest score of either multilateral (M) or bilateral (B).

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