

# Comparative Public Policy: The Swedish Model in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (187)

Fall 2023

---

*Instructor:* Jonas Brodin

*E-mail:* [jonas.brodin@swedishprogram.org](mailto:jonas.brodin@swedishprogram.org)

*Class hours:* Tuesday 13.15–14.45 & Thursday 11.00–12.30

*Office hours:* Tuesday 9.00–10.00, A987

---

In the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sweden was often held up as a positive anomaly, proof that it was possible to have both robust economic growth and a strong welfare state. Today, talk of the Swedish Model has faded, even as Sweden's economy and welfare state have continued to evolve. The question we will investigate in this course is whether the Swedish Model can survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the face of economic restructuring, welfare state retrenchment, a changing electorate, and pressure from the EU and beyond.

This investigation will begin by looking at the historical background that allowed the Swedish Model to emerge, and then proceed to a thorough examination of the rise and fall of the welfare state, and finally analyze the future prospects of that welfare state. Along the way, students will gain familiarity with the structure, mechanics, and major players in the Swedish political system, as well as with how Swedish politics differs from and is similar to both Sweden's immediate as well as its more distant European neighbors, with the role of labor unions and other social movements, with Sweden's role in the larger international system, and with the challenges faced by Sweden in a changing world.

**Google Classroom:** The Swedish Program uses the Google Classroom platform for all its courses. On the course Classroom page, you will find the readings, assignments, and lecture notes, as well as links to useful resources for further study. The course platform is also where you will submit your assignments. It also functions as a discussion forum outside of class: you are highly encouraged to participate in extending class discussions by posting questions and links throughout the semester. I will use the course platform to post links to articles and books that are relevant to the class, as well as reminders of deadlines and questions I have for you as a group outside of class.

**Readings:** The first few weeks of the semester, there will be readings assigned from a single book. All the additional readings are linked in the syllabus as well as available through Classroom. The assigned book is:

Michael Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (ISBN: 9780374532505)

Laptops & phones: I *strongly discourage* the use of laptops in the classroom, even for note-taking. [Current research](#) indicates that we are better able to pay attention and retain what we learn if we take notes by hand rather than typing. If you have an accommodation that allows you to take notes on your laptop, you are of course excepted: you should be able to use the note-taking method that best helps you learn. I will post all graphs and tables I put up on the board during class to Classroom so that you will have access to them. However, phone use is *strictly prohibited* during class time (unless I explicitly state otherwise). *If I see you using a phone during class, I will mark you as absent.*

Grading: Your grade will be calculated according to the following breakdown:

<i>Attendance and participation:</i>	20%
<i>Analytical paper:</i>	20%
<i>Policy brief:</i>	20%
<i>Final policy report:</i>	25%
<i>Policy colloquium:</i>	15%

**Attendance & Participation (20%):** Regular attendance is mandatory. An unexcused absence may negatively affect your final grade. Your grade will not be affected if you miss a class due to illness or in the case of a (documented) emergency situation. If you have a personal or family event that conflicts with a class, and cannot be rescheduled, you may ask your instructor for an excused absence. Such a request should be made at least one week prior to the class in question. In addition to attendance, your active participation in class discussions is essential. You should also participate by posting to the course stream in Google Classroom. Please prepare for seminar by writing down the questions you have about the reading or the topic of that day's class.

**Lecture & Policy labs:** Each week will be divided into a lecture and a policy lab. Tuesday classes will be lectures, although you are of course encouraged to ask questions and participate then as well. Thursday classes will be what I have called policy labs: these are not discussion sections as such, but rather a space to work out and critique specific policies in a number of different policy areas using different methods.

**Analytical paper (20%):** Following the first section, on approaches to public policy, you will write a short (around 5-6 pages) analytical paper, in which you will analyze an ethical thought experiment through the lens of two of the approaches we have discussed in class. I will post guidelines for the paper on Classroom. The analytical paper is due one week after we finish the section on approaches, i.e., on 9/21.

**Policy brief (20%):** The next written assignments is a policy brief. This is a structured paper organized according to a specific format. For the policy brief, you will analyze

one of the topics or case studies we have discussed either in lecture or in the policy labs, using one of the approaches we examined in the first section of the course. I will post guidelines for the policy brief on Classroom. The policy brief is due on 10/19.

**Final policy report (25%):** Instead of a final analytical paper, at the end of the semester you will hand in a joint policy on a topic of your choosing. For the report, you will pair up with one other student. Together, you will research your chosen topic throughout the semester, so that you can produce an authoritative introductory report on that topic. You should also expect to be called on as the class expert on your topic during class discussions. The final policy report should be about 10-15 pages in length. It is due the Thursday after our last class meeting, i.e., on 12/7.

**Policy colloquium (15%):** Rather than present the findings of your joint research report to the rest of the class, you will present it during the policy colloquia, on one of the class sessions during the last week of the semester. I will meet with two or three of the groups each time for the colloquium, which will consist of a focused conversation on each of the groups' chosen topics. During the colloquium, the groups that do not participate that class session will have time to work on their final policy reports.

**Late assignments:** Assignments that are submitted after the deadline and without prior agreement will be marked down. The late penalty will be progressively more severe the later the assignment is submitted.

**Course learning outcomes:** At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Define and apply several fundamental approaches informing public policy
- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge about the social democratic welfare state and its justification
- Acquire knowledge about a policy area of their choosing
- Compare, analyze, and critique policy options for a range of policy areas
- Draw out policy implications and come up with recommendations from empirical data
- Produce a well-structured and compelling policy brief
- Prepare for and participate in a panel discussion on a specific policy topic
- Produce a research-based policy report

Schedule:

8/29	<i>Introduction</i>	348
	Reading: Sandel, <i>Justice</i> , chapter 1	
8/31	<i>Policy lab: Political participation &amp; representation</i>	348
	Reading: Dahl, " <a href="#">What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?</a> " Linz & Stepan, " <a href="#">Toward Consolidated Democracies</a> " Achen & Bartels, " <a href="#">Democracy for Realists</a> " Dalton, " <a href="#">Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation</a> "	
9/5	<i>Approaches 1: Utilitarianism, libertarianism, &amp; neoliberalism</i>	542
	Reading: Sandel, <i>Justice</i> , chapters 2-3	
9/7	<i>Approaches 2: Liberalism</i>	348
	Reading: Sandel, <i>Justice</i> , chapter 6	
9/12	<i>Approaches 3: Socialism</i>	133
	Reading: Marx & Engels, <a href="#">Manifesto of the Communist Party</a> , preamble + sections I & II Graeber, <a href="#">Bullshit Jobs</a> , Preface	
9/14	<i>Approaches 4: Capabilities</i>	536
	Reading: Nussbaum, " <a href="#">Capabilities and Human Rights</a> "	
9/19	<i>What is the welfare state?</i>	536
	Reading: Esping-Andersen, " <a href="#">The Three Political Economies of the Welfare State</a> " Judt, " <a href="#">What Is Living and What Is Dead in Social Democracy?</a> "	

- 9/21 *Policy lab: Social trust* 536
- Reading: Rothstein & Uslaner, "[All for All](#)"  
 Bergh & Bjørnskov, "[Historical Trust Levels Predict the Current Size of the Welfare State](#)"  
 Cozzolino, "[Trust, Cooperation, and Equality](#)"  
 Rothstein, "[Corruption and Social Trust](#)"
- Analytical paper due!
- 9/26 *From the golden age to retrenchment* 536
- Reading: Berman, [The Primacy of Politics](#), chapters 1 + 7-8
- 9/28 Jonas away: no class!
- 10/3 *The neoliberal welfare state* Torsten
- Reading: Diefenbach, "[New Public Management in Public Sector Organizations](#)"  
 Rothstein, "[Creating Political Legitimacy](#)"  
 Svallfors, "[Politics as Organized Combat](#)"
- 10/5 *Policy lab: Corruption* 348
- Reading: Olken & Pande, "[Corruption in Developing Countries](#)"  
 Zúñiga, "[Correlation between Corruption and Inequality](#)"  
 Persson et. al., "[Why Anticorruption Reforms Fail](#)"  
 Bullough, "[The Dark Side of Globalization](#)"  
 Heinrich, "[Corruption and Inequality: How Populists Misperceive People](#)"
- 10/10 *Organized and disorganized labor* 342
- Reading: Greenhouse, [Beaten Down, Worked Up](#), chapter 1  
 Desmond, "[Americans Want to Believe Jobs Are the Solution to Poverty. They're Not.](#)"  
 Scheiber, "[Despite Labor Shortages, Workers See Few Gains in Economic Security](#)"  
 Kalleberg, "[Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies](#)"  
 Jaffe, "[The Battle for the Future of 'Gig' Work](#)"

- 10/12 *Policy lab: Inequality and poverty* 536
- Reading: Saez, "[Income and Wealth Inequality: Evidence and Policy Implications](#)"  
 Robeyns, "[What, If Anything, Is Wrong with Extreme Wealth?](#)"  
 Gould & Kendra, "[Wages Grew in 2020 Because the Bottom Fell out of the Low-Wage Labor Market](#)"  
 World Inequality Report 2022: [Executive summary](#)  
 Desmond & Western, "[Poverty in America](#)"
- 10/17 *The costs and benefits of family support* 350
- Reading: Boushey, "[Home Economics](#)"  
 Fleckenstein & Lee, "[The Politics of Postindustrial Social Policy: Family Policy Reforms in Britain, Germany, South Korea, and Sweden](#)"  
 Saad-Filho, "[Social Policy for Neoliberalism: The Bolsa Família Programme in Brazil](#)"  
 Lundqvist, "[Parenting Support in Sweden](#)"
- 10/19 *Policy lab: Health care* 350
- Reading: [International Profiles of Health Care Systems, 2020](#)  
 Schneider et. al., "[Mirror, Mirror 2021](#)"  
 Policy brief due!
- 10/24  
 -11/6  
 Fall break: no class!
- 11/7 *Social and physical infrastructure* 133
- Reading: Klinenberg, [Palaces for the People](#), Introduction  
 Leonhardt, "[Longer Commutes, Shorter Lives](#)" (also [here](#))  
 Rokem & Vaughan, "[Geographies of Ethnic Segregation in Stockholm](#)"  
 Bloch, "[Shade](#)"  
 Wolfe, "[Why Jackson's Water System is Broken](#)"

11/9	<i>Policy lab: Education policy</i>	133
	Reading: Sahlberg, " <a href="#">Education Policies for Raising Student Learning</a> " Darling-Hammond, " <a href="#">What PISA Can Tell Us about U.S. Education Policy</a> " Delblanco, " <a href="#">The Two Faces of American Education Policy</a> " Semuels, " <a href="#">Good School, Rich School; Bad School, Poor School</a> " Butrymowicz, " <a href="#">Is Sweden Proof That School Choice Doesn't Improve Education?</a> "	
11/14	<i>The absentee state</i>	538
	Reading: Hacker, " <a href="#">Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State</a> " Lewis, <i>The Fifth Risk</i> , chapter 1 Dukelow, " <a href="#">Recommodification and the Welfare State in Re/Financialised Austerity Capitalism</a> " Mettler, " <a href="#">Making What Government Does Apparent to Citizens</a> "	
11/16	<i>The future of the welfare state</i>	536
	Reading: Esping-Andersen, " <a href="#">A Welfare State for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</a> " Raworth, " <a href="#">A Safe and Just Space for Humanity</a> " Mazzucato, " <a href="#">What If Our Economy Valued What Matters?</a> "	
11/21	<i>Policy colloquium I</i>	336
11/23	<i>Policy colloquium II</i>	A975
11/28	<i>Policy colloquium III</i>	A975
11/30	<i>Policy colloquium IV</i>	538
12/7	Exam week: Final policy report due!	