

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

Fall 2026

This course is offered by The Swedish Program in collaboration with Stockholm School of Economics. SSE students should note that the course period is from calendar week 36 through calendar week 50. Attendance for all sessions is mandatory. The Swedish Program students will be graded according to the United States grading system and SSE students will be graded according to SSE's grading system.

---

*Instructor:* Jonas Brodin

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

*Class hours:* Monday and Wednesday 13.15–14.45

*Office hours:* Wednesday 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:** You may only use electronic devices for note-taking and solving group assignments. One [cannot be engaged](#) in the class while scrolling social media or browsing the internet (even if only to look up something relevant to the class discussion). Moreover, it is distracting for other students and discourteous toward them. In particular, 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>Active participation:</i>	25%
<i>Analytical paper:</i>	20%
<i>Policy brief:</i>	20%
<i>Final policy report:</i>	20%
<i>Policy colloquium:</i>	15%

**Active participation (25%):** This course requires not only attendance—which is mandatory—but also active and constructive participation in discussions and group assignments. It is imperative that you are engaged in both the general class discussions and the various in-class group assignments. Besides active engagement in class discussions and asking questions during my and other students' presentations, you can participate by being active on the Classroom stream—sharing observations, links, and recommendations—or by coming to talk to me during office hours. It is also good practice to prepare some questions you want to discuss 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. Monday classes will be lectures, although you are of course encouraged to ask questions and participate then as well. Wednesday 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 9/23.

**Policy brief (20%):** The next written assignment 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 10/21.

**Final policy report (20%):** 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 Wednesday after our last class meeting, i.e., on 12/9.

**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 should use the scheduled classtime 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.

**Academic dishonesty:** Any form of academic dishonesty is a violation of our code of conduct and will result in disciplinary actions. Plagiarism or other forms of cheating will result in an automatic F for the assignment, and may also result in an immediate F for the course as a whole, based on the assessment of the Director of Studies and the Executive Director. If you want to use AI to assist your writing, you must adhere to the following guidelines: AI-assisted writing is permissible as long as its use is properly documented and does not substitute for students' doing the actual writing work. For all written take-home assignments, students who have used AI to assist them are required to submit a summary describing how they have used AI to help them complete the assignment (producing text, proofreading, finding citations, etc). In addition, students also have to clearly indicate which passages have been produced or assisted by AI, for example in a footnote that details how AI was used in that particular instance. Failure to acknowledge one's use of AI to complete an assignment will count as academic dishonesty and be subject to the same penalties as outright plagiarism or other forms of cheating.

**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:

8/31 *Introduction*

Reading: Sandel, *Justice*, chapter 1

9/2 *Policy lab: Political participation & representation*

Reading: Dahl, "[What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?](#)"

Linz & Stepan, "[Toward Consolidated Democracies](#)"

Achen & Bartels, "[Democracy for Realists](#)"

Dalton, "[Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation](#)"

9/7 *Approaches 1: Utilitarianism, libertarianism, & neoliberalism*

Reading: Sandel, *Justice*, chapters 2-3

9/9 *Approaches 2: Liberalism*

Reading: Sandel, *Justice*, chapter 6

9/14 *Approaches 3: Socialism*

Reading: Marx & Engels, [Manifesto of the Communist Party](#),  
preamble + sections I & II

Graeber, [Bullshit Jobs](#), Preface

9/16 *Approaches 4: Capabilities*

Reading: Nussbaum, "[Capabilities and Human Rights](#)"

9/21 *What is the welfare state?*

Reading: Esping-Andersen, "[The Three Political Economies of the Welfare State](#)"

Judt, "[What Is Living and What Is Dead in Social Democracy?](#)"

9/23 *Policy lab: Social trust*

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!**

9/28 *From the golden age to retrenchment*

Reading: Berman, [The Primacy of Politics](#), chapters 1 + 7-8

9/30 *Gender equality in the labor market*

Reading: Blau, "[Gender Inequality in the Labor Market: Continuing Progress?](#)"  
England, "[Gender Inequality in Labor Markets](#)"  
hooks, "[Dig Deep: Beyond Lean In](#)"  
Klasen, "[From 'MeToo' to Boko Haram](#)"

10/5 *The neoliberal welfare state*

Reading: Diefenbach, "[New Public Management in Public Sector Organizations](#)"  
Rothstein, "[Creating Political Legitimacy](#)"  
Svallfors, "[Politics as Organized Combat](#)"

10/7 *Policy lab: Corruption*

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](#)"

Craze, "[South Sudan's Democratic Mirage](#)"

#### 10/12 *Organized and disorganized labor*

Reading: Fransson & Kjellberg, "[Collective Bargaining and Minimum Wage Regime in Sweden](#)"

Greenhouse, *Beaten Down, Worked Up*, chapter 1

Desmond, "[Americans Want to Believe Jobs Are the Solution to Poverty. They're Not.](#)"

Kalleberg, "[Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies](#)"

Hilgers, "[When Your Boss Is an App](#)"

#### 10/14 *Policy lab: Inequality and poverty*

Reading: Saez, "[Income and Wealth Inequality: Evidence and Policy Implications](#)"

Robeyns, "[What, If Anything, Is Wrong with Extreme Wealth?](#)"

Gould et. al., "[State of Working America Wages 2024](#)"

*World Inequality Report 2022: Executive summary*

Desmond & Western, "[Poverty in America](#)"

#### 10/19 *The costs and benefits of family support*

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](#)"

10/21 *Policy lab: Health care*

Reading: [International Profiles of Health Care Systems, 2020](#)

Blumenthal et. al., "[Mirror, Mirror 2024](#)"

**Policy brief due!**

10/26 *Social and physical infrastructure*

Reading: Klinenberg, [Palaces for the People](#), Introduction

Leonhardt, "[Longer Commutes, Shorter Lives](#)" (also [here](#))

Rokem & Vaughan, "[Geographies of Ethnic Segregation in Stockholm](#)"

Wolfe, "[Why Jackson's Water System is Broken](#)"

10/28-  
11/10 Fall break: no class!

11/11 *Policy lab: Education policy*

Reading: Sahlberg, "[Education Policies for Raising Student Learning](#)"

Darling-Hammond, "[What PISA Can Tell Us about U.S. Education Policy](#)"

Delblanco, "[The Two Faces of American Education Policy](#)"

Samuels, "[Good School, Rich School; Bad School, Poor School](#)"

Butrymowicz, "[Is Sweden Proof That School Choice Doesn't Improve Education?](#)"

11/16 *The absentee state*

Reading: Hacker, "[Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State](#)"

Lewis, [The Fifth Risk](#), chapter 1

Dukelow, "[Recommodification and the Welfare State in Re/Financialised Austerity Capitalism](#)"

Mettler, "[Making What Government Does Apparent to Citizens](#)"

11/18 *The future of the welfare state*

Reading: Esping-Andersen, "[A Welfare State for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#)"

Raworth, "[A Safe and Just Space for Humanity](#)"

Mazzucato, "[What If Our Economy Valued What Matters?](#)"

11/23 *Policy lab: Immigration*

Reading: Allen et. al., "[Immigration and Welfare State](#)"

Brochmann, "[Norway: Rising Immigration in a Welfare State](#)"

Freeman, "[Labour Wants to Mimic Denmark's Asylum Crackdown. Here's Why It Won't Work](#)"

Lacarte, "[Immigrants and the Use of Public Benefits in the United States](#)"

Ruiz Soto, "[A New Era of Immigration Enforcement Unfolds in the U.S. Interior and at the Border under Trump 2.0](#)"

García et. al., "[New Data Shows 1 in 4 ICE Arrests Happened in Texas under Trump's Immigration Crackdown](#)"

11/25 *Policy colloquium I*

11/30 *Policy colloquium II*

12/2 *Policy colloquium III*

12/9 **Exam week: Final policy report due!**

