

## The structure of Government

### Sweden



## Sweden overview

Population	10 million <sup>1</sup>
Population per sq km	22 <sup>2</sup>
Government expenditure as % of GDP	50% <sup>3</sup>
Place in World League	
People's trust in government <sup>4</sup>	14 (49%)
People's satisfaction with life <sup>5</sup>	9 (73%)
GDP per capita <sup>6</sup>	19
Legatum Prosperity Index <sup>7</sup>	6
Freedom in the World <sup>8</sup>	3

Note: all data in this report are pre-2020 to exclude the effects of Covid-19

## Governance overview

Sweden is a constitutional parliamentary monarchy. The government is separated into the typical three branches: legislature, executive and judiciary. The prime minister acts on behalf of the Monarch.

There are three levels of governance: Central government, Councils and Municipalities. One council has the powers of both a municipal and a county council.

### Electoral system

Elections to Parliament (the Riksdag), and to County and Municipal Councils use a proportional open list system, which requires a party to obtain a minimum of 4% of votes to become eligible. Around 90% of the seats are constituency seats and the remaining 10% are 'top-up' seats to ensure proportionality.<sup>9</sup>

### Direction of devolution

Top down. The Constitution of Sweden<sup>10</sup> states that “local authorities are responsible for local and regional matters of public interest on the principle of local self-government,” and “any restriction in local self-government should not exceed what is necessary with regard to the purpose of the restriction.”<sup>11</sup> A judicial review is required before any powers are removed from local government.<sup>12</sup>

The powers exercised by local authorities, however, can be determined in broad terms by the central government.

### Political style

Swedish politics is multi-party, and is characterised by a need for coalitions and/or consensus-building to pass legislation. There are eight parties in the Swedish Parliament and the largest has less than one third of the seats.

### Income equalisation<sup>13</sup>

The principle of income equalisation across local government is written into the Constitution of Sweden: “local authorities may be obliged to contribute to costs incurred by other local authorities if necessary to achieve an equal financial base.” The equalisation system consists of central government grants and income equalisation between councils.

### Unusual features

The Social Democratic Workers’ Party has been in power for 70 of the last 100 years, in coalitions with various combinations of smaller parties. It has been the largest party in the Parliament at every election for over a century.

Turnout at elections are exceptionally high partly because Parliamentary, County and Municipal elections take place on the same day. The exception is EU Parliament elections, which take place at a different time, with the turnout significantly lower at 55% in 2019.<sup>14</sup>

## Swedish Parliament

Parliament is unicameral.

<b>Members</b>	349
Population per member	28,800
Full or part time	full time
Pay ratio to national average wage	2.3
Weeks of sittings per year	34-36

### Elections

Electorate	national
Frequency	4 years
Turnout last time <sup>15</sup>	87%

**Legislation process<sup>16</sup>**

Most bills are brought before Parliament by the government, members or groups. Bills are reviewed by the Law Council to check their constitutionality and are considered by a relevant committee<sup>17</sup> before they are passed to Parliament.

**Responsibilities**

Benefits and social security, immigration, defence, foreign policy, employment, broadcasting, trade and industry, nuclear energy, oil, coal, gas and electricity, consumer rights, data protection, the Constitution.

**Of total government expenditure**

Spent at central government level 64%<sup>18</sup>

**Source of funds<sup>19</sup>**

Raised locally 100%

**Who decides**

Tax type: central government.  
Tax rates: central government.

**Who collects tax**

The Swedish Tax Agency.

**Unusual features**

Turnout is exceptionally high in Sweden, even in local government elections, partly because general elections take place on the same day as County and Municipality elections. The only exception is European elections or any special elections which take place outside the usual four year cycle: turnout in EU elections was significantly lower, at 55%.<sup>20</sup>

## County Councils

**Governance**

Counties are the level below Parliament. County Administrative Boards, run by central government, are headed by centrally-appointed County Governors, who have six year terms.<sup>21</sup> They are the de facto civil service heads of the County governments.

Councillors elect an executive council. The leader is typically the leader of the largest party on the council.

Counties	average	high	low
Number	21		
Population	475,000	2.3 million	60,000

### County government

Members <sup>22</sup>	77	149	55
Population per councillor	6,200	15,400	1,100
Full or part time	most part time <sup>23</sup>		
Pay ratio to national average wage varies			

### Elections

Electorate	local
Frequency	4 year
Average turnout <sup>24</sup>	84%

### Legislation process<sup>25</sup>

The executive committees put forward proposals to the Assembly of Councillors for approval, amendment or rejection. Executive committees can delegate specific issues to Council committees.

### Responsibilities<sup>26</sup>

Budgets and tax rates, economic operations, health care, regional growth, including allocation of EU Structural Funds, and public transport.<sup>27,28</sup> Health care and public health are typically counties' greatest sources of expenditure.

### Expenditure as % of

total government expenditure<sup>29</sup> 13%

### Source of funds<sup>30</sup>

Raised locally <sup>31</sup>	81%
Block grants	9%
Mandated grants	9%
Fees and charges	1%

### Main taxes

Income tax only.

### Who decides

Tax type: Parliament.

Tax rates: Councils.<sup>32</sup> Tax rates average 12% with a variation of ± 1%.

### Who collects tax

Swedish Tax Agency.

## Municipalities

### Governance

Municipalities are governed in much the same way as Counties.

Municipalities	average	high	low
Number <sup>33</sup>	290		
Population <sup>34</sup>	35,000	960,000	2,500

### Municipal government

Members <sup>35</sup>	45	101	21
Population per councillor	765	9,500	124
Full or part time <sup>36</sup>	most part time		
Pay ratio to national average wage <sup>37</sup>	varies		

### Elections

Electorate	local
Frequency	4 years
Turnout <sup>38</sup>	84%

### Legislation process<sup>39</sup>

The legislative process in Municipalities is very similar to the process in Counties. Most policy decisions are taken by executive committees, with Council Assemblies' focusing on scrutiny and accountability.

### Responsibilities<sup>40</sup>

Civil defence, cleaning and waste management, emergency services, environmental and health protection, housing, libraries, pre-school, primary school and secondary school, planning and construction issues, social care for elderly and disabled people, water and sewerage.

### Expenditure as a % of<sup>41</sup>

total government expenditure	23%
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### Source of funds<sup>42</sup>

Raised locally <sup>43</sup>	81%
Block grants	11%
Mandated grants	6%
Fees and charges	1%

### Main Taxes

Income tax only.

### Who decides

Tax type: Parliament.

Tax rates:<sup>44</sup> Municipalities. Rates average 21% with a variation of  $\pm$  4%.

### Who collects tax

Swedish Tax Agency.

## Further reading

Swedish Local Government Act 2015:

<https://www.government.se/contentassets/9577b5121e2f4984ac65ef97ee79f012/the-swedish-local-government-act>

Council of Europe Report: Local and regional democracy in Sweden

<https://rm.coe.int/168071a4fc>

## References

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/206/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/sweden-population/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://tradingeconomics.com/sweden/government-spending-to-gdp>

<sup>4</sup> <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933533606>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/sweden/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.prosperity.com/globe/sweden>

<sup>8</sup> [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019\\_FH\\_FITW\\_2019\\_Report\\_ForWeb-compressed.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019_FH_FITW_2019_Report_ForWeb-compressed.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.val.se/val-och-folkomrostningar/det-svenska-valsystemet/valkretsar.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/se/se137en.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Sweden\\_2012.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Sweden_2012.pdf?lang=en)

<sup>12</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/168071a4fc>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy/profile-Sweden.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/democracy/general-elections/european-parliament-elections-results/pong/statistical-news/european-parliament-elections-2019-election-results/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.val.se/valresultat/riksdag-landsting-och-kommun/2018/valresultat.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.government.se/how-sweden-is-governed/swedish-legislation---how-laws-are-made/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/national-parliaments/sweden.php>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/public-finances/local-government-finances/annual-accounts-for-municipalities-and-county-councils/pong/statistical-news/preliminary-2018-results-municipalities-and-county-councils/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/sweden/revenue-statistics-sweden.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/democracy/general-elections/european-parliament-elections-results/pong/statistical-news/european-parliament-elections-2019-election-results/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://worldpopulationreview.com/governments/sweden/>

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<sup>22</sup> <https://data.val.se/val/val2018/slutresultat/L/rike/valda.html>

<sup>23</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/168071a4fc>

<sup>24</sup> <https://data.val.se/val/val2018/slutresultat/L/rike/index.html>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.government.se/contentassets/9577b5121e2f4984ac65ef97ee79f012/the-swedish-local-government-act>

<sup>26</sup>

<https://skl.se/demokratiledningstyrning/politiskstyrningfortroendevalda/kommunaltsjvalstyresastyrskommunenochregionen/sastyrregionerna.1790.html>

<sup>27</sup> <https://skl.se/samhallsplaneringinfrastruktur/regionalutveckling/regionalutvecklingsansvar.2689.html>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.government.se/contentassets/9577b5121e2f4984ac65ef97ee79f012/the-swedish-local-government-act>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/public-finances/local-government-finances/annual-accounts-for-municipalities-and-county-councils/pong/statistical-news/preliminary-2018-results-municipalities-and-county-councils/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/public-finances/local-government-finances/annual-accounts-for-municipalities-and-county-councils/pong/statistical-news/preliminary-2018-results-municipalities-and-county-councils/>

<sup>31</sup> [https://rm.coe.int/168071a4fc#\\_Toc382224784](https://rm.coe.int/168071a4fc#_Toc382224784)

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/public-finances/local-government-finances/local-taxes/pong/tables-and-graphs/local-tax-rates-changes-by-municipality/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy/profile-Sweden.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy/profile-Sweden.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> <https://data.val.se/val/val2018/slutresultat/K/rike/valda.html>

<sup>36</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/168071a4fc>

<sup>37</sup> "There are great differences between the salaries of the... elected representatives... Sweden allows local authorities a significant margin of freedom to determine the remuneration of local representatives" <https://rm.coe.int/168071a4fc>

<sup>38</sup> <https://data.val.se/val/val2018/slutresultat/K/rike/index.html>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.government.se/contentassets/9577b5121e2f4984ac65ef97ee79f012/the-swedish-local-government-act>

<sup>40</sup> <https://skl.se/tjanster/kommunerochregioner/faktakommunerochregioner/kommunernasataganden.3683.html>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/public-finances/local-government-finances/annual-accounts-for-municipalities-and-county-councils/pong/statistical-news/preliminary-2018-results-municipalities-and-county-councils/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/public-finances/local-government-finances/annual-accounts-for-municipalities-and-county-councils/pong/statistical-news/preliminary-2018-results-municipalities-and-county-councils/>

<sup>43</sup> [https://rm.coe.int/168071a4fc#\\_Toc382224784](https://rm.coe.int/168071a4fc#_Toc382224784)

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/public-finances/local-government-finances/local-taxes/pong/tables-and-graphs/mean-tax-rates-whole-of-sweden/>