



## Sweden — Va-PoReg Country Report

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06/06/1809 Start Constitutional Monarchy: On 06/06/1523 Sweden seceded from the Kalmar Union, which existed from 1397 to 1523.<sup>189F<sup>1</sup></sup> The ‘1809 Instrument of Government’ transitioned Sweden’s absolute monarchy into a stable constitutional monarchy adhering to the rule of law and significant civil liberties. It was adopted on 06/06/1809.<sup>190F<sup>2</sup></sup> According to LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. No executive elections were present. Full male suffrage was introduced in 1909 for those aged 25 and above, but only to one of two equally weighed houses of parliament. Data from Polity5 identifies the time between 1907 to 1917 as a transitional from a constitutional monarchy to a democratic parliamentary monarchy.

10/19/1917 End Constitutional Monarchy/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy: The transition to a regime where the king no longer held sway was initiated in 1917 when Gustaf V, compelled by circumstances, endorsed the concept of a parliamentary system. We code this regime change event as an elite concession under mass pressure, since the king did not voluntarily initiate the move toward a parliamentary system but did so only after the 1917 national elections brought liberals and social democrats to power, compelling the transition. Gustaf V pledged to Prime Minister Nils Edén that he would cease seeking counsel from clandestine advisors outside the official cabinet and refrain from further political meddling.<sup>191F<sup>3</sup></sup> From then on, the political influence of the King was considerably reduced, and an unwritten constitutional precedent was set that would remain in effect until in 1975 a new constitution formalized the only ceremonial role of the monarch. Restricted male suffrage was already introduced in 1909, in 1911 it was extended, but requirements regarding completed military service and income remained. Universal suffrage for men and women aged 23 was enacted in 1919. But still requirements regarding military service and income remained.<sup>192F<sup>4</sup></sup> Based on our observations, multiparty, executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED declares the constant presence of competitive elections. Although Sweden is classified as an electoral oligarchy, the elections already exhibit cleanliness according to V-Dem’s CEI. Additionally, V-Dem’s EF&FI affirms free and fair election conditions. In addition to that, no political liberties were present (LIED), whereas our interpretation of V-Dem’s PCLI already indicates full political liberties. However, based on the LDI, the country is rated with an ambiguous score for liberal democratic indicators. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. For the relevant period, V-Dem’s JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

09/26/1921 End (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy: On this date, the second round of the parliamentary elections, almost universal suffrage was applied for the first time. The share of the population which participated in the elections rose from 11.2 per cent in 1920 to 29.3 in 1921 (Widfeldt 2010: 1859). However, until 1922 men who refused to do military service were excepted from universal suffrage. Until 1945 people living on benefits, declared legally incompetent or declared bankruptcy were excepted from universal suffrage. Voting age changed to 21 in 1945, to 20 in 1965, to 19 in 1969 and to 18 in 1975. The elimination of voting restriction for men due to refused or non-fulfilment military service was a consequence of women’s suffrage. Maintaining these restrictions would only have affected one gender and therefore would have been inconsistent. The largest group to be disenfranchised in the 1921 elections, was the

group living on benefits numbering around 42,000. A total of 2.2% of voters were disenfranchised in these elections (Sundevall/Berg/Sandin 2024: 4-8).<sup>193F<sup>5</sup></sup> Due to the small number of people affected, we classify Sweden as a full democracy even before 1945. However, it must be pointed out that this restriction of the suffrage makes Sweden a borderline case between an electoral and a liberal democracy. Between 1932 and 1976 the Social Democratic Party held government, and Sweden became a welfare state.<sup>194F<sup>6</sup></sup> After a committee was appointed to review the constitution of 1809 in 1955, the Riksdag consisting of two chambers was changed to a one-chamber Riksdag in 1971. On 01/01/1975 the amended constitution came into force, which limited the powers and responsibilities of the king to merely ceremonial purposes, lowered the voting age to 18 and guaranteed the people the right to demonstrate.<sup>195F<sup>7</sup></sup> In 1976 Thorbjörn Fälldin of the Center Party, ended the dominance Social Democratic Party. The elections of 1982 put the Social Democrats back on top with Olof Palme becoming prime minister. Palme was assassinated in 1986 and succeeded by his deputy prime minister Ingvar Gösta Carlsson. Since then, governmental power alternates between different parties and election outcomes tend to lean more to the political right.<sup>8</sup> Sweden has a parliamentary system of government with a unicameral system, the Riksdag. The head of state is the monarch who has almost only ceremonial functions. Safeguarding civil liberties and political rights is a high priority in Sweden. As per FH's classification for this regime period, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. Based on our observations, multiparty, executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Therefore, LIED indicates the presence of political liberties since 1922 with one exception between 1933 and 1945. Constant political liberties were given according to our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI. Equal rights for all members of society are ensured by the Swedish state. Political parties operate freely in a competitive environment. In addition, freedom of religion, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly are constitutionally guaranteed and upheld in practice, the judiciary operates independently.<sup>196F<sup>9</sup></sup> On 09/11/2022, general elections took place, leading to the formation of a right-wing government holding a narrow three-seat majority. In October, a ruling coalition was established comprising the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberal Party, with backing from the far-right Swedish Democrats.<sup>197F<sup>10</sup></sup> The election was deemed free and fair.<sup>198F<sup>11</sup></sup> LIED affirms the elections were constantly competitive for the entire time. Since 1921 the elections have consistently scored high in cleanliness according to V-Dem's CEI and the overall election conditions are considered as free and fair (V-Dem EF&FI). As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

(Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Jahn 2009, Redslob 1918)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalmar\\_Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalmar_Union)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instrument\\_of\\_Government\\_\(1809\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instrument_of_Government_(1809))

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy\\_of\\_Sweden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_Sweden)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.riksdagen.se/en/how-the-riksdag-works/the-history-of-the-riksdag/the-development-of-democracy-in-sweden/#1901-1950-40>

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal\\_suffrage#cite\\_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37)

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Sweden#20th\\_century](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Sweden#20th_century)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/06/07/archives/sweden-approves-new-constitution.html>;  
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Sweden/The-welfare-state>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, Sweden\_R: 2, Sweden\_V: 2

<sup>9</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/sweden/freedom-world/2022>

<sup>10</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/sweden/freedom-world/2023>

<sup>11</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/sweden/freedom-world/2023>

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