

**Democratization in Scandinavia:**

**The Case of Sweden**

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*Democratization in Scandinavia: The Case of Sweden*

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## ABSTRACT

This report has been produced within the framework of a project on comparative democratization in Scandinavia. The purpose of the work for the paper has been to survey the international literature on democratization in search of a useful theoretical framework for the project. In the paper the international literature is also scanned for the insights provided on the specific case of Sweden. The literature may quite neatly be sorted into three theoretical traditions: the *modernization* approach, the *structural* approach, and the *transitional* approach. These traditions are characterized and assessed in terms of their usefulness for the task at hand. The conclusion is that for historical and comparative studies of democratization, the most fruitful perspective may be described as a synthesis between the structural and transition approaches. This composite theoretical framework actually fits Dankwart Rustow's classical version of the transitional approach quite well. But his 'genetic model' has to be amended and modified in several respects. In particular, the paper argues, it needs a more elaborate understanding of the impact of the state-building process. In the case of Sweden, for example, the importance for the democratization process of the formidable political institution which has been labelled *Ämbetsmannastaten* should be accounted for both theoretically and empirically.

## 1. Introduction

A bird's-eye view of democratization in Scandinavia suggests several significant similarities among the three major countries.<sup>1</sup> They were all early democratizers by global standards – by about 1920 the process had been accomplished in all three – but only average or worse among West European countries. The transformation was rather piecemeal and peaceful in Scandinavia in comparison with other countries and regions even though emotions certainly ran high there as well at times. In all three countries small farmers and workers and their organizations were key actors in the process. In the labour movement of all three countries there were revolutionary elements – in Norway they even dominated for a while – but no-where did they eventually win out. The fact that in all three countries monarchy survived indicates a comparably high level of consensus and willingness to compromise in the transition process. And all three countries stayed democratic during the interwar years when so many fellow European countries saw democracy break down.

A somewhat closer look at the same set of transformations will reveal many substantial differences as well. For example, an important feature which separates Norway from the other two countries is that the Norwegian case must basically be understood against the background of that country's national struggle of liberation. Democratization and nation-building ran parallel and were closely intertwined in Norway; in Denmark and Sweden nation-building was not unimportant but constituted an established background condition rather than a process evolving in parallel fashion with the arrival of mass politics and democratic institutions. Other differences concern the relative strength of both the various collective actors and the character of their relations in the process of democratization in the three countries. Briefly put, while liberals and liberalism were significant in all countries at the key moments of democratization, they were relatively less so in Sweden where the labour movement had gained the upper hand by the time of the democratic breakthrough.

Such brief and preliminary observations on similarities and differences between the Scandinavian countries apart, this paper will focus on the case of Sweden. I will here primarily scan the international literature on democratization in order to put the Swedish case in perspective. The paper does not contain a full narrative of the Swedish developments and events

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<sup>1</sup> For English-language overviews, see e.g. N. Andrén, "Five Roads to Parliamentary Democracy", in E. Allardt et al, eds., *Nordic Democracy*. Det Danske Selskab, 1981, p. 44-52; B.J. Nordstrom, *Scandinavia Since 1500*. University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 213-227.

which by about 1920 had produced the political institutions considered necessary for a parliamentary, liberal democracy. However I will towards the very end hint at what such a new narrative might look like.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Theories of democratization

Over the past two decades, the study of democratization has become a growth industry in political science and related disciplines. Evidently this has been largely due to the greater salience of the phenomenon of democratization itself. What is now, following Samuel Huntington, generally called the 'third wave of democratization', spanning in his terminology, the period from 1974 onwards, has greatly increased the number of democratic countries in the world.<sup>3</sup> According to one estimate no less than 117 or 61 percent of the world's countries were democracies in 1998. This was up from 39 countries or 27,5 percent in 1974.<sup>4</sup> Most of the recent literature has in empirical terms no doubt concerned these third-wave transitions in a single or several or sometimes even all countries affected. Often such comparative studies have involved two or more cases selected on a regional basis – Southern Europe, Latin America, East and Central Europe etc, with suggested generalizations limited to a specific region.<sup>5</sup> But there has also been a much greater interest in recent years in democracy and democratization processes in earlier periods – during the first and second waves in Huntington's terminology – sometimes also as part of efforts at theory-building through generalization across all 'waves' of democratization.

The literature abounds with propositions concerning what conditions or factors may have most effectively brought about democracy. In his careful inventory of the literature published until about 1990, Huntington identifies no less than 27 variables or sets of variables that are purported to have been instrumental in transitions to democracy; several among which are clearly contradictory.<sup>6</sup> Despite this plenitude and variation, it seems to

<sup>2</sup> A full-length narrative is contained in my forthcoming book, with the working title *Democracy in Sweden: A Historical and Comparative Perspective*.

<sup>3</sup> S. Huntington, *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. U. of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> L. Diamond, "The End of the Third Wave and the Start of the Fourth", in M.F. Platter and J.C. Espada, eds., *The Democratic Invention*. The Johns Hopkins U.P., 2000, p.14f; for another somewhat less optimistic estimate, see R. Dahl, *On Democracy*. Yale University Press, 1998, Ch. 2 and Appendix C.

<sup>5</sup> For overviews, see B. Geddes, "What do we know about democratization after twenty years?", *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol 2, 1999, p. 129-148, and V. Bunce, "Comparative Democratization. Big and Bounded Generalizations", *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 6/7, 2000, p. 703-734.

<sup>6</sup> Huntington, *The Third Wave*, p. 371f.

me to be possible to identify a few reasonably coherent categories of theories in the field of democratization theory. The most fruitful effort in this vein that I have come across is that of David Potter et al in their work *Democratization*. They argue persuasively that most important theorists and theories in the field can usefully be divided into three types: the modernization, transition, and structural approaches respectively. In Figure 1 below I have briefly summarized some pertinent features of these three schools of thought.<sup>7</sup>

Fig. 1: Three approaches in democratization theory

	<i>Modernization approach</i>	<i>Structural approach</i>	<i>Transition approach</i>
<i>Key text</i>	Lipset 1959	Moore 1966	Rustow 1970
<i>Explanatory Focus</i>	Socio-economic conditions	Changing structure of class power	Elite agency in political conflicts
<i>Method</i>	Variable-oriented	Case-oriented	Case-oriented
<i>Issues within approach</i>	-Economic versus other variables -Emergence versus survival	-Role of trans-national power -Which class?	Historic versus proximate causes -Role of civil society

The basic claim of the *modernization approach* is, in Lipset's own words, that the "more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances it will sustain democracy."<sup>8</sup> The well-known theory behind the claim, modernization

<sup>7</sup> D. Potter, D. Goldblatt, M. Kiloh, and P. Lewis, eds., *Democratization*. Polity Press, 1997, p.10ff. For authors who have largely followed suit, see J. Grugel, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction*. Palgrave, 2002; and G. Pridham, *The Dynamics of Democratization: A Comparative Approach*. Continuum, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> S.M. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy", *APSR*, Vol 53 No 1, March 1959, p. 69-105.

theory, argues that there is one general process of societal development characterized by a gradual separation and specialization of social structures; one of the final facets in this chain of development is a specific political structure, democracy. Lipset's path-breaking study has been followed by a legion of similar investigations, typically confirming the original findings while adding nuances to them.<sup>9</sup> In addition, however, several studies have argued that other variables, such as literacy or formal education levels, are at least equally or even more important than purely economic ones in supporting democracy.<sup>10</sup>

Another much debated issue within the tradition has concerned the question of 'emergence versus survival' i.e., whether economic development favours the initiation of democracies or their continuation or both. In what is arguably the most impressive contribution to this research tradition since the Lipset study, Adam Przeworski et al have recently investigated 141 countries during the period 1950-1990. They provide the following summary of their findings:<sup>11</sup>

The most important lesson that we have learned is that wealthy countries tend to be democratic not because democracies emerge as a consequence of economic development under dictatorships but because, however they emerge, democracies are much more likely to survive in affluent societies. We find it difficult to explain why dictatorships fall and democracies emerge. Although we are willing to believe that economic development may open the possibility for transition to democracy, even when the conditions for democracy are ripe, the outcomes of political conflicts are indeterminate. Hence, we failed to detect any thresholds of development that would make the emergence of democracy predictable. In sum, modernization theory appears to have little, if any explanatory power. (...) In turn, we found that the survival of democracies is quite easily predictable. Although some other factors play roles, per capita income is by far the best predictor of the survival of democracies.

In other words, some thirty-odd years after Lipset's original contribution, he has been proven wrong – provided of course that his main thesis was that economic development could best explain the *emergence* of democracies. If he rather meant to say that affluence supported democratic *survival* once democracy had arrived then Lipset was basically right according to Przeworski et al. Lipset's theoretical discussion in the

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<sup>9</sup> For overviews, see e.g. L. Karvonen, *Demokratisering*. Studentlitteratur, 1997, Ch. 2, and T. Vanhanen, *Prospects of Democracy. A Study of 172 Countries*. Routledge, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. A. Hadenius, *Democracy and Development*. Cambridge U.P., 1992.

<sup>11</sup> A. Przeworski, M.E. Alvarez, J.A. Cheibub, and F. Limongi, *Democracy and Development. Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*. Cambridge U.P., 2000, p 137.

modernization theory mode about why there was such a strong correlation between economic level and democratic institutions points to the former interpretation while the nature of the analysis rather supports the latter stance. The debate will no doubt continue on this and related issues which has already "generated the largest body of research on any topic in comparative politics."<sup>12</sup>

If practitioners of the modernization approach have typically focused post-war democratization and used as large samples as possible, quantitative data and statistical methods in their analysis, those of the *structural approach* have been engaged in a rather different enterprise. In his pioneering work, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Barrington Moore Jr developed a theory that sought to explain why some major countries ended up as parliamentary democracies while others became communist or fascist dictatorships in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> He was convinced that such explanations were to be found in the long-term historical processes that had produced variable class constellations in different national settings. The class structure had also largely determined the role of the state in society. In its turn the relative strength of classes had been determined by the commercialization of agriculture in the early-modern period. In some instances this process – and he provided a detailed analysis of each national trajectory – had produced a strong, independent bourgeoisie which was able to counteract the traditional power of the landed upper class and of the peasantry, and to alleviate the absolutist claims of the state. To make a long story short, this was the key to explaining why democratization occurred: "No bourgeois, no democracy!"<sup>14</sup>

In later contributions within the structural approach in democratization theory, Moore has been criticized for having accorded too great a role to the bourgeoisie and for neglecting the historical importance of the working class in democratization, and also for having slighted the role of various forms of transnational power, including war and imperialism.<sup>15</sup> In what is arguably the most important contribution to the genre since Moore's landmark study, Dietrich Rueschemeyer et al in *Capitalist Development and Democracy* launch both these criticisms and perform a wide-ranging empirical analysis of no less than 38 cases from a variety of regions and

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<sup>12</sup> Przeworski et al, *Democracy and Development*, p. 78f.

<sup>13</sup> B. Moore Jr, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Beacon Press, 1966.

<sup>14</sup> Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 418

<sup>15</sup> See esp.. G. Therborn, "The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy", *New Left Review*, No 103, May-June 1977, p. 3-141.



time periods. Their main thesis is that it was world capitalism that created the structural conditions for democratization and the working class that was the key agent in bringing it about.<sup>16</sup> Their empirical analysis has been heavily criticized, not least for faulty interpretations of their own data.<sup>17</sup> In a recent study by Ruth Berins Collier their main thesis about the decisive role of the working class is also effectively criticized. In a general analysis of the 'elite versus the working class' issue she carefully investigates both historical and recent 'episodes of democratization' in 22 different countries in Western Europe and South America. Her main conclusions are the following:<sup>18</sup>

The comparative analysis does not support the general proposition that working-class pressure is a decisive or even necessary, no less sufficient, factor in democratization, or that mass democracy is dependent on mass pressure. On the other hand, working-class participation in democratization has often been a component of the process, so that a generalized image of democratization as an elite project or a process of elite strategic interaction is also misleading, even for the recent cases.

As the pioneering text in the *transition approach* to democratization, Potter et al suggest Dankwart Rustow's article "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model" from 1970.<sup>19</sup> At least two reasons may be cited against that choice. First, what is now generally called the 'transitions literature' (or even 'transitology') has obviously developed in response to third-wave democratization developments; Rustow's theorizing on the other hand built on a comparative study of the much earlier democratization processes of Sweden and Turkey. And, second, while the more typical contribution to the recent transitions literature is quite ahistorical in style and substance, Rustow's argument is explicitly historical. His theory comprises four developmental phases. The first one (which he actually labels a 'background condition') is about the emergence of national borders and national unity; at least a majority of the population within a state must have developed a coherent national identity for democratization to occur. The second phase Rustow calls 'preparatory',

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<sup>16</sup> D. Rueschemeyer et al, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*.

<sup>17</sup> Th. Ertman, "Democracy and Dictatorship in Interwar Western Europe Revisited", *World Politics*, Vol. 50, April 1998, p. 475-505.

<sup>18</sup> R. B. Collier, *Paths Toward Democracy. The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America*. Cambridge U.P., 1999, p 167.

<sup>19</sup> D.A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy. Toward a Dynamic Model", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2 No. 2, April 1970, p. 337-363. See also L. Anderson., ed., *Transitions to Democracy*, Columbia U.P., 1999, where the article is reprinted and which contains contributions characterized as 'responses and refinements' of Rustow's article.

and it is characterized by severe political conflicts between old and new elites where the new ones demand a greater say in national politics. Next, there is a 'decision phase' which implies an explicit acceptance on the part of key actors, especially the political parties, of a fundamental set of democratic rules and practices. Finally, there follows an 'habituation phase' when basic democratic institutions are in place and the rules of the game are followed by all the important actors.

The historical perspective of Rustow's model is, then, lacking in most of the plethora of studies of recent years which have concerned third-wave transitions. Typically they have instead focused proximate causes of outcomes in the short-term games played by political elites. More often than not inspired by the influential research of Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter and their colleagues on the breakdown of authoritarian regimes,<sup>20</sup> students of democratization in this tradition model transitions as processes consisting of three phases: 'liberalization', '(initial) transition', and 'consolidation' (the terminology varies but these labels are arguably the most common). The players of such democratization games are also typically stylized through descriptive terms such as 'hardliners' and 'softliners', 'moderates' and 'radicals' etc.<sup>21</sup> Also formal game-theoretic models have been used in this genre of research but they are far from the dominant mode of analysis.<sup>22</sup>

From within the approach, two of its most prominent practitioners, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, have criticized the tradition for lacking a decent 'theory of the state' in transitions to democratization. This is judged to be a serious deficiency since "(w)ithout a state there can be no citizenship; without citizenship there can be no democracy."<sup>23</sup> A similar critique has now also been launched specifically at Rustow's original model, reflecting no doubt the 'bringing the state back in'-thinking of recent years.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, mainstream studies within the genre have also been heavily criticized for neglecting the role of collectivist actors of civil society. In a recent major contribution, Graeme Gill launches a sustained attack on what

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<sup>20</sup> G. O'Donnell & P. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule. Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. The Johns Hopkins U.P., 1986.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Potter et al, *Democratization*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> In that genre, see esp. J.M. Colomer, *Strategic Transitions: Game Theory and Democratization*. Johns Hopkins U.P., 2000.

<sup>23</sup> J. Linz and A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*. Johns Hopkins U.P., 1996, p 28; cf also V. Bunce, "Comparative Democratization...", p. 713f.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. L. Anderson, "Introduction", in L. Anderson, ed., *Transitions to Democracy*, p. 1-13; esp. p. 11f.

he considers to be a far too elitist and also ‘statist’ orientation of the transitions literature. Following a theoretical critique as well as an empirical reanalysis of dozens of transitions in Latin America, Southern Europe and the post-communist countries of central and eastern Europe, he concludes that:<sup>25</sup>

... civil society forces are intrinsic to the process of democratic transition. Such forces constitute major elements in the dynamic of democratic transition. They embody the threat which persuades a section of the ruling elite of the need for an opening to society in an attempt to stabilize the regime. They give the process of regime change a democratic orientation and keep that change moving in a democratic direction. They define the powerful interests with which the regime must come to terms, and thereby identify relevant negotiating partners for regime elites. And they provide the basic underpinning of the emerging democratic system. This means that civil society forces are fundamental for each stage of the process of regime change, from the onset of crisis to the stabilization of democracy. To fail to see their role and only to see that of the elites is to misunderstand this process.

Inevitably also, Gill observes, the opening up of the analysis to civil-society collective actors, will force students of recent democratization processes to adopt a more long-term historical perspective than has so far been the case. One may add here that a similar effect would in fact ensue from a proper consideration of the role of the state in line with the recommendations of Linz and Stepan as well as others. In that sense, there is no tension between the respective strategies of ‘bringing the state back in’ and ‘bringing civil society back in’; both should be conducive to ‘bringing history back in’ as a more prominent concern in the study of both historical and recent transitions to democracy.

Are these three types of democratization theory competing or complementary? The obvious answer is: both. No doubt adherents to the different approaches harbour quite different ideas and ideals concerning both theorizing and empirical study. But a brief summary of the main points of the review above should make clear that there are some current developments of interest here, developments which may well be characterized in terms of convergence. First, we noted that the claims of the modernization approach to serve as a satisfactory explanation of the emergence of democracies have been severely undermined. It is still, however, a fruitful research tradition in the study of democratic survival. Second, the claims of the most prominent practitioners of the structural approach that the agency of one class – whether Moore’s bourgeoisie or

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<sup>25</sup> G. Gill, *The Dynamics of Democratization. Elites, Civil Society and the Transition Process*. St. Martin’s Press, 2000, p. 241.

the working class of Therborn or Rueschemeyer et al – may be considered decisive for democratization have also been undermined. From this we should not conclude that classes are not key actors in historical processes of democratization, only that we should search for more complex and specific patterns of class constellations in our cases. Finally, we saw that the preoccupation of the transition approach with short-term processes and a narrow set of elite players has been effectively challenged by critics. Transitionalists have thus been urged to bring in more of structural constraints in the form of both state traditions and civil society actors, a move, which would inevitably imply a greater import of historical analysis.

These are in my view important theoretical and empirical developments, and they all in fact tend to cross the borders of the three traditional approaches in democratization theory. This does not mean that I believe that a future ‘merger’ of the three approaches is in the cards, or that I would necessarily favour such a development; there are in fact many issues around to argue about, not least those, which reflect basic differences in ideals of theorizing and methodology. But at least these developments indicate that there is now a healthy interaction among the adherents of the different approaches to democratization theory.

Are the three approaches reasonably comprehensive? I think so, but it is equally true that some prominent democratization theorists have not been mentioned so far since they do not fit nicely into any of the three approaches. Dahl, Rokkan and Tilly come easily to mind. Robert Dahl, whose contributions to democratization theory are substantial but not on par with his extremely influential general work on the theory and empirical conditions of democracy, has in this area suggested a theory of stages which may in a greatly simplified manner be stated as follows: competitive elite pluralism first, then popular control of government. Virtually all successful first-wave democracies seem to have followed this sequence.<sup>26</sup>

Stein Rokkan’s theory of democratization was part and parcel of his immensely ambitious research program on European political development.<sup>27</sup> The core is a basic stage theory encompassing the completion of three developmental phases: *state-building* - when a centre is in command of its territory; *nation-building* - when a cultural, linguistic and religious standardization effort has resulted in a mood of national identity and loyalty among citizens; and the stage of *mass politics* - when

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<sup>26</sup> R. Dahl, *Polyarchy. Participation and Opposition*. Yale U.P., 1971.

<sup>27</sup> P. Flora, with S. Kuhnle and D. Urwin, eds., *State Formation, Nation-Building and Mass Politics in Europe. The Theory of Stein Rokkan*. Oxford U.P., 1999.

the masses have been effectively incorporated into political life. (The theory actually comprises a fourth phase: the *welfare state* - when a politics of redistribution is made possible by the institutionalization of democracy.) In a further theoretical development Rokkan identified four different elements or *institutional thresholds of democratization* during the rise of mass politics. As summarised by Peter Flora:<sup>28</sup>

For Rokkan the democratisation of a polity is a process in which collective action and institutional change interact. Normative rules and effective procedures set limits or provide opportunities for action and in turn come under pressure for change from collective movements. The core of Rokkan's analysis of democratization as a process of institutionalisation is his distinction between four *thresholds* or *locks*. He uses the image of a political movement which, on its way to the centre of political decision-making (through a territory and through a social structure), must overcome four successive barriers: barriers to political opposition (*legitimation*), political (electoral) participation (*incorporation*), access to parliament (*representation*), and participation in government (*executive power*).

Rokkan obviously put much emphasis on the orderliness of the process of democratization. In his assessment of success and failure among European countries the historical track record of especially the smaller democratic countries, and particularly the Scandinavian ones, both served to prove his theory and provided an ideal model for others to emulate. (He, as well as Dahl and Rustow, was quite critical of Moore's neglect of these countries in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.)

No doubt Rokkan's ambitious ideas on democratization theory are still worth reflecting upon, but one is also struck by their overly optimistic stance regarding the possibilities of generalizing from the historical record of some two dozen European countries. In my view, considerably more modest expectations with regard to the prospect of formulating a single, encompassing and coherent theory of democratization are in order. Democratization processes as they have occurred in the real world are simply too complex, varied and contextually dependent for such an ambitious enter-prise. As historical sociologist Charles Tilly has put it:<sup>29</sup>

(W)e have absolutely no a priori reason to believe that only one set of circumstances produces and sustains democracy even if during the last few hundred years' experience particular circumstances have often nurtured democracy. The most we can hopefully get from scrutinizing historical cases of democratization is

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> C. Tilly, "Democracy is a Lake", in C.G. Andrews and H. Chapman, eds., *The Social Construction of Democracy, 1870-1990*. New York U.P., p 365-387; quote from p. 382.

a map of alternative paths by which the process has occurred, an indication of sufficient – not necessary – conditions for that transformation, and a specification of general mechanisms that play a part in producing or sustaining democratic institutions when they form.

This does not mean that theorizing is futile or inane or worse.<sup>30</sup> It means rather that we should theorize at an appropriate level of generalization. If we adopt a global or universalizing perspective, not even the seemingly robust generalization – advanced as we have seen by prominent scholars like Dahl, Rokkan and Rustow – that nation-building must precede democratization will hold water since there are obvious real-life exceptions.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. The Swedish case

Sweden has figured quite prominently in the democratization literature. This is hardly surprising since it is one of only about a dozen countries that were democratized during the first wave i.e., around 1920 (at the end of the first wave to be sure – in Huntington’s scheme the first one ended in 1926) and which have since and so far survived. The Swedish case has also been relatively well researched and documented (see below).

What do we learn, then, about Sweden in the literature representing the three different approaches to democratization? Within the *modernization approach* individual countries are of course mostly viewed as precise yet simple observations within quantitative data sets. Countries may be considered in more descriptive detail if they serve as particularly representative and illustrative cases or when analyzed as outliers in a statistical universe. It seems as if Sweden rarely deserves mentioning in any of those capacities in the modernization literature; the country appears as a not very exciting illustration of the major thesis that modernization, particularly economic development, has caused or at least accompanied democratization. Although Sweden was one of the poorest countries of Europe well into the 1800s, and the industrialization process came quite late, there is no doubt that Sweden’s quite remarkable economic growth was well under way around 1920. And the continued story is of course an illustration of the empirical-statistical truth, most recently and beyond any doubt told by Przeworski et al, that rich democracies never die.

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<sup>30</sup> For his recent ideas about how we ought to theorize democratization, see C. Tilly, “Processes and Mechanisms of Democratization”, Columbia University, 2000 (mimeo).

<sup>31</sup> See e.g. Baogang He, “The National Identity Problem and Democratization: Rustow’s Theory of Sequence”, *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2001), p. 97-119.

In Moore's study, pioneering the *structural approach*, Sweden found no place, as hinted earlier, nor did any of the other smaller European democracies. But it also eventually inspired others to provide their own 'empirical test' of Moore's theory using Sweden as a case study.<sup>32</sup> Several important problems were identified and addressed in these contributions. First, Moore's argument that democracies necessarily developed out of a 'revolutionary break' with the past – England had its Glorious Revolution and France its French; in both cases they paved the way for the new powerful middle class which was in Moore's theory deemed necessary for democratization – simply did not fit the Swedish case very well. It is very hard to find a corresponding revolutionary break in Swedish history.<sup>33</sup> Second, while there was little doubt that the political economy of agriculture was important there as well, Sweden's experiences simply did not fit into the patterns described by Moore. Importantly, peasants must be accorded a much different and more positive role for Sweden's democratization. In Moore's scheme they were portrayed as almost as hostile or detrimental to democracy as the landed upper class. While no undisputed heroes of the democratization narrative in Sweden and other smaller European countries, they were often cast, and cast themselves, in the role of supporters of democracy in these countries. The strong political position of free-holding peasants throughout early-modern and modern Swedish history arguably affected much of what happened during the process of democratization.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, Moore's theory as applied to Swedish developments, definitely accorded a too limited role also to the working class and its organizations in the democratization process. Even Ruth Berins Collier, while strongly disagreeing as we have seen with the generalizing statements of e.g. Therborn and Rueschemeyer et al concerning the decisive role of the working class in democratization processes, admits that Sweden is undoubtedly a case where working class influence was considerable. In her analysis of a large number of 'historical' cases, she uses a typology which contains two top-down or elite-led patterns of democratization and one bottom-up

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<sup>32</sup> F. Castles, "Barrington Moore's Thesis and Swedish Political Development", *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 8 No. 3, 1973, p. 313-331; T. Tilton, "The Social Origins of Liberal Democracy", *APSR*, Vol.68, 1974, p. 561-571. See also J. Stephens, "Democratic Transition and Breakdown in Western Europe, 1870-1939: A Test of the Moore Thesis", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94 No. 5, March 1989.

<sup>33</sup> See esp. Castles, "Barrington Moore's Thesis and Swedish...".

<sup>34</sup> Stephens, "Democratic Transition and Breakdown in Western Europe...".

pattern which she labels ‘Joint Project’ democratization. The Swedish case is undoubtedly of the latter kind.<sup>35</sup>

Swedish democratization followed a process of gradual regime reform, as the franchise was extended through a series of reform acts in 1866, 1909, and 1918 in a manner similar to England’s. Although labour played no role in the initial Reform Act of 1866, one can make a case for a significant role in the Reform Act of 1907/09, and its role was clearly decisive in the final step of 1918 [...] In the end, then, the reforms of 1918/20 passed as a result of a very forceful role of labour organizations, both party and unions, acting in Parliament and in the streets combined with Liberal Party strategy and Conservative Party concessions.

If Sweden was one case among many others in the most influential works pioneering the modernization and the structural approaches, the country starred in the founding text of the *transitional approach*. Rustow developed his theory, as hinted earlier, on the basis of his intimate knowledge of two rather dissimilar countries, namely Sweden and Turkey. Swedish political history had also in fact been the topic of his dissertation and of his first book, *The Politics of Compromise*, published in 1955.<sup>36</sup> In connection with his seminal “Transitions to Democracy” article he also published a separate piece on Sweden, “Sweden’s Transition to Democracy: Some Notes toward a Genetic Theory”.<sup>37</sup> Not surprisingly, then, Sweden’s development fits well into his dynamic theory of democratic transition. In Rustow’s narrative the country was early on a unified nation-state without destructive language, ethnic or regional conflicts. The continuous incorporation of new social classes and groups was a far from harmonious process but during the critical ‘decision phases’ of his model – especially in 1907 – the necessary will to compromise was present among key actors. This was not only due to the basic national unity but also depended on other relevant features of Sweden’s political culture. In the course of the 1800s, Sweden had developed a strong tradition of “legality, liberalism, and a complex constitutional government”.<sup>38</sup>

The validity of a somewhat ‘whiggish’ general narrative of this kind has been questioned by many Swedish historians in recent years. A more specific criticism of Rustow’s analysis has been levelled at his choice of the *Riksdag* decision of 1907 as the critical moment of the Swedish

<sup>35</sup> Berins Collier, *Paths Toward Democracy*, p. 83

<sup>36</sup> D. A. Rustow, *The Politics of Compromise: A Study of Parties and Cabinet Government in Sweden*. Princeton U.P., 1955.

<sup>37</sup> D. A. Rustow, “Sweden’s Transition to Democracy: Some Notes Toward a Genetic Theory”, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 6, 1971, p. 9-26.

<sup>38</sup> Rustow, “Sweden’s Transition to Democracy...”, p. 15.



democratization process. That decision implied general suffrage for men in national parliamentary elections, but women were still disenfranchised and voting rights in local and regional elections were still severely limited on the basis of income and wealth. Furthermore, it would take another decade until the principle of parliamentary government was fully accepted. Whether intended or not, a focus on 1907/09 instead of 1918/20 also implied that Rustow could legitimately downplay the role of international events for Sweden's democratization. As Therborn and many others have noted it is hard not to take into account the impact of World War I and of three crumbling empires and two-and-a-half socialist revolutions on the Swedish democratization process in 1917/18.<sup>39</sup>

We may finally note that the Swedish case has also been cited within that subspecies of the transition approach that uses rational-choice models. Przeworski has within such a framework analyzed the 1907/09 decision in Sweden.<sup>40</sup> Since the old elites, represented by the Conservatives, accepted general male suffrage, the model requires that they get something in return, preferably in the form of 'constitutional guarantees' for a continued position of power. This clearly occurred, Przeworski argues, since the reform implied not only general male suffrage but also a transition from majority to proportional elections, a reform measure that the new elites, the Liberals and Social Democrats, initially opposed.

#### **4. Towards a (partly) new narrative – some notes**

In this paper I have surveyed the field of democratization theory in order to identify the most useful theoretical framework for the analysis of the Swedish case. I have also summarized what has specifically been stated about Sweden's democratization process. Not surprisingly for the reader who has travelled with me this far, I am inclined to characterize the most fruitful and appropriate perspective as *a synthesis of the structural and transition approaches*. Such a description may in fact fit Rustow's version of the transition approach quite well.<sup>41</sup> His dynamic or genetic model differs, as we have seen, significantly from mainstream 'transitology' due to its explicit concern for long-term historical processes which create considerable constraints upon short-term elite conflicts during the

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<sup>39</sup> Therborn, "The Rule of Capital...", p. 9f; see also Rueschemeyer et al, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, p. 113ff.

<sup>40</sup> A. Przeworski, "Democracy as a Contingent Outcome of Conflict", in J. Elster and R. Slagstad, eds., *Constitutionalism and Democracy*. Cambridge U.P., 1988, p. 59-80.

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, "Introduction", p. 10.

‘decision phase’. Linz and Stepan are also among the adherents of the transition approach who have sought to formulate a theoretical model which is more ‘structural’ and historical than the mainstream contributions. They have explicitly developed a typology of transition patterns that may be described as path dependent.<sup>42</sup>

But Rustow’s ‘synthesis’ suffers in my view from a number of more or less serious deficiencies and thus has to be amended in important respects – in fact considerable additions are in my view needed. Most importantly, with regard to *structure*, and as hinted above, his genetic model needs a more elaborate *understanding of the impact of the state-building process*. His clear emphasis on the ‘nation’ aspect of the ‘nation-state’ should be balanced in the direction of a more even emphasis on ‘nation’ and ‘state’.<sup>43</sup> The nation-building process as ‘a background condition’ ought not be controversial as far as the Swedish case is concerned. Although historians and social scientists, in Sweden as in so many other countries, have been arguing intensely during the last decade or more about the exact time of birth of the modern nation-state or modern nationalism, there is still little doubt that Sweden was very early in this regard. Although early nationalism may differ somewhat from that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, something which is perhaps best-labelled ‘proto-nationalism’ came already with the intensified state-building phase in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Sweden.<sup>44</sup> This national identity was considerably strengthened and made increasingly popular in the ensuing centuries and Sweden well satisfied Rustow’s criterion of national unity at least in the 18<sup>th</sup> century i.e. well before the onslaught of mass politics.<sup>45</sup>

But the observation about the early arrival of a quite strong sense of national unity in Sweden does not mean that we ought to regard the building of a national state as a mere ‘background condition’ for the ensuing democratization of the country. Instead we must ask – in the spirit of historical institutionalism – if there were other significant and perhaps not as easily discernable impacts of state-building on future developments. My thesis, which can only be sketched here, is that the early state-building process in Sweden, in particular as it evolved during the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, created a novel political institution with great consequences

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<sup>42</sup> Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, esp. Ch. 4.

<sup>43</sup> See, again, Anderson, “Introduction”, p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> See H. Gustafsson, *Gamla riken, nya stater. Statsbildning, politisk kultur och identitet under Kalmarunionens upplösningsskede 1512-1541*. Atlantis, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> J. Nordin, *Ett fattigt men fritt folk. Nationell och politisk självbild i Sverige från sen stormaktstid till slutet av frihetstiden*. Symposion, 2000.

and a dramatic longevity: *Ämbetsmannastaten*, or the 'Bureaucratic state'.<sup>46</sup> Swedish top-level bureaucrats dominated the public life of the country for almost three centuries to an extent which was arguably not rivalled by any other country in Europe except perhaps Prussia in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> and Norway in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In a historical-institutionalist mode we should also look for the importance of timing and sequencing. Here it is of some consequence that *Ämbetsmannastaten* was already there when the modern party system began to form. To quote political scientist Thomas Anton:<sup>47</sup>

Not until [the 20th] century were party organizations significant in Swedish governance, by which time the social status, legal autonomy and decision-making influence of Swedish administrators had become an important and thoroughly accepted 'tradition' of Swedish life. [...] Perhaps the best evidence of the power of this tradition was the refusal of the Social Democratic Party leaders to challenge it.

Thus, in order to understand the dynamics of democratization in Sweden one has in particular to understand the position and actions of high-level bureaucrats. I am not suggesting that they were omnipotent; if they had been the democratic breakthrough would probably have been postponed much further in time since the majority were still by 1917/18 staunch conservatives and were enemies of democracy. But things had slowly begun to change. Already during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and at an accelerating pace during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ideological rifts may clearly be observed in the state bureaucracy. Especially in what were the pioneering organizations of the Swedish welfare state attitudes and behaviour began to change.<sup>48</sup> The bureaucrat-cum-reformer which was to become such a powerful agent in Swedish political life was born and they were soon to constitute a very significant breed.<sup>49</sup>

Thus my (partly) new narrative of the Swedish democratization process adds or, rather, gives a place of pride to what is arguably a key element: an understanding of the role of the powerful institution I have labelled *Ämbetsmannastaten*. Admittedly this understanding is probably more consequential for the analysis of the more long-term development of 'Sweden's democratization' than in explaining the specific events which

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<sup>46</sup> There is no satisfactory English term; the German term is *Beamtenstaat*.

<sup>47</sup> T.J. Anton, *Administered Politics: Elite Political Culture in Sweden*. Martinus Nijhoff, 1980, p. 77.

<sup>48</sup> B. Rothstein, *Den korporativa staten. Intresseorganisationer och statsförvaltning i svensk politik*. Norstedts, 1992, Chap. 6.

<sup>49</sup> For a good story about this, see H. Hecló, *Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden. From Relief to Income Maintenance*. Yale U.P., 1974.

led to the democratic breakthrough in 1917/18. The powerful Swedish central bureaucracy certainly had to adapt – and some did it by choice rather than unwillingly – but it fairly soon found a new and almost as powerful a role as an active reformist bureaucracy working in tandem with the Social Democratic leadership in designing and implementing that particular democratic vision which became the Swedish welfare state.