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# In the absence of a Public Accounts Committee

## The Swedish Experience

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### **Abstract**

Sweden is one of the countries which does *not* have a Public Accounts Committee. Since the Swedish National Audit Office was formed in 2003, two non-PAC models for the channelling of audits to Parliament have been tested. This chapter discusses the Swedish experience from these. It suggests that one reason why Sweden has avoided forming a PAC is the wish to preserve a political culture focused on collaboration and pragmatic improvement, rather than confrontation and accountability debates. The current model is successful in this regard. Findings emphasise the importance of a fit between political culture and systems for accountability.

### **Key words:**

Public Accounts Committee; Swedish National Audit Office; political culture; performance audit; parliamentary control

## Introduction

Public accountability is a corner stone in modern democratic governance, helping both citizens and parliaments to oversee government activities (Diamond & Morlino 2005; Przeworski, Stokes & Manin 1999). A key arena, where these accountability issues typically are played out, is the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). The PAC helps to balance the power of the government and the opposition, but it also has a symbolic function, representing a willingness among these parties to cooperate in matters of accountability (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst 2008). This is an important function, given the incentives of the PAC members - typically Members of Parliament (MPs) - to instead, act in partisan interest.

Thus, PACs may foster a political culture of cooperation and transparency, downplaying partisan hierarchy and authority. However, PACs may also foster the opposite culture; they may create conflict by holding policy-makers accountable and seeking headlines, instead of focusing on the subject matter and on how issues can pragmatically be resolved (Bowerman et al 2003; Travers 1999). One reason for such an approach could be that the auditing bodies also need to show that they themselves provide value for money (Talbot & Wiggan, 2010; Lonsdale, 1999). The easiest way to achieve this is to consistently point out problems and show that these are grave, although this may curb both objectivity and quality (Pollitt & Summa 1997; Bowerman, Humphrey & Owen 2003; Bringselius 2013).

Brian Landers, formerly Chief Internal Auditor at Sainsbury's and Financial Director of the British Prison Service Agency, has described his experience from the British PAC. In his account (Landers 1999), he describes the PAC as a feared institution consisting of overly critical backbenchers and people with 'a vested interest in scoring points' (p. 206). When the British National Audit Office (NAO) was formed, it became equally critical as the PAC, and equally interested in creating headlines, as maintained by Landers (1999, p. 201).

Thus, it is obvious that the system with PACs comes with a set of risks. Yet, for many countries, a political system without a PAC would be hard to imagine. Sweden, however, has chosen another trajectory. The Swedish reluctance to introduce a PAC may be viewed as surprising, in particular, considering that the Swedish Supreme Audit Institution, the SNAO (Swedish National Audit Office), was formed as late as 2003, through a reform which provided excellent opportunities to align with the model of many other European countries.

The Swedish experience with the absence of a PAC is interesting not only to understand alternative models of democratic governance, but also to understand the relation between these models and the national political cultures. This chapter analyses why some countries

chose not to have a PAC, building on the Swedish experience from two (non-PAC) models for the channelling of SNAO performance audit reports to the Swedish Parliament. The chapter is the result of a review of documents and administrative law, but it also builds on data from a longitudinal case study of the SNAO, stretching from 2002 to 2013. This study includes 102 interviews and extensive document studies (for further details, see Bringselius 2008, 2013, 2014).

The chapter makes two main contributions. First, it suggests a framework to analyse and compare the relations of SAIs with Parliaments and auditees. Second, it argues, based on findings from the Swedish case, that the choice not to have a PAC may be best understood in relation to the national political culture. In Sweden, there is a political culture focused on informality and pragmatic cooperation. This can be contrasted with countries where the political culture is more focused on accountability issues. In these countries, PACs are common. Although PACs may downplay partisan interest (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst 2008), they are still focused on confrontation in relation to the auditee, and this is not an approach that all countries are fully comfortable with.

The chapter is organised as follows. First, there is an introduction to Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs). In this section, an analytical framework is also developed. The research design is then outlined. After this, the Swedish administrative model is introduced, with a special focus on the Swedish National Audit Office (the SNAO). A more thorough account of the Swedish case, lacking a PAC, is provided in the next section. A discussion follows and the chapter is finally closed with conclusions.

## **Supreme Audit Institutions**

Every modern democracy has a Supreme Audit Institution (SAI), responsible for providing independent accounts on the performance of the executive branch of government. Using this information, the citizenry and members of Parliament can hold responsible members of government to account, in particular in the public debate, parliamentary hearings and public elections. However, the scope of SAI audits, the methods adopted, and the relations between the SAI and its external stakeholders can sometimes differ rather substantially between countries. Often, audit reports from the SAI are channelled through a PAC. However, this is not always the case, as we shall see.

SAIs typically conduct both financial audit and performance audit. The latter can also be referred to as Value For Money audits (VFM audits), a concept commonly used for example in the United Kingdom. Whereas financial audit is highly focused on compliance with formal financial standards and regulations, there is much more room for interpretations in VFM audits. The international standard-setting organization for SAIs, the INTOSAI, defines performance audit as follows.

*“While financial audit tends to apply relatively fixed standards, performance auditing is more flexible in its choice of subjects, audit objects, methods, and*

*opinions. [...] [Performance audit] is by nature wide-ranging and open to judgments and interpretations. It must have at its disposal a wide selection of investigative and evaluative methods and operate from a quite different knowledge base to that of traditional auditing. It is not a checklist-based form of auditing.” (INTOSAI, ISSAI 3000, p. 12)*

Because different interpretations can be made, the judgements of performance auditors will play a major role, leaving the auditee vulnerable, in particular considering that audit results can have a major impact for both institutions (agencies, ministries, political parties, etc) and individuals (policy-makers, Director-Generals, and others).

		Priary goal in relation to the executive (auditee)	
		Confrontation	Collaboration
Choice of audit areas / relation to Parliament (the principal)	Integration (Almost exclusively direct assignments)		
	Cooperation (some direct assignments)	SAI with a PAC	
	Dialogue (suggestions are encouraged)		
	Total distance (contact avoided)		

*Figure 1. Analytical framework to compare relations between SAIs with a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and SAIs without a PAC.*

VFM audits can be positioned in different ways in relation to both auditee (the executive) and the principal (Parliament). First, in the literature, the importance of independence in the relation between the SAI and the executive branch of government has often been emphasized (e.g., Mohan & Sullivan 2007; Gendron et al., 2001; Jacobs, 1998; English and Guthrie, 2000; Funnel, 1994 and 1998; and White and Hollingsworth, 1999). In this relation, performance audits can focus either on confrontation or on collaboration. Or, as Travers (1999) asks, ‘Should the inspector be a bruiser?’. With confrontation, accountability is emphasized. With collaboration, local and pragmatic improvement is emphasized. In reality, audits will have a combined purpose, including both these aims. However, different SAIs will

tend to emphasize one over the other to some degree, and when there is a PAC, audits will tend to focus more on accountability than on collaboration – to settle who is accountable for the identified performance issues, is even the key role of the PAC.

Second, in relation to Parliament, the legislative branch of government, the areas for performance audits can be determined more or less independently. At some SAIs, most audits take the form of direct assignments, leaving very little independence to the SAI itself in this regard. At other SAIs, audit areas are determined with no involvement whatsoever from the principal (Parliament), meaning that there is a high degree of independence. Between these extremes, there can be various blended forms. For example, there can be *collaboration* with some direct assignments and some audits focused on areas determined by the SAI itself. There can also be *dialogue*, meaning that suggestions from Parliament are encouraged, but the SAI preserves the right to choose whether or not to meet these suggestions.

A framework with these two dimensions is outlined in Figure 1. This figure also suggests that SAIs with a PAC would typically be positioned in the box combining a confrontational approach to the Executive (auditee), and a cooperation approach to Parliament (principal). Again, this is a simplified way of illustrating some of the positions that the SAI can take in these two key relations. In reality, boundaries will not be this sharp. Figure 1 will serve as an analytical framework in this study.

To understand why some countries chose not to have a PAC, this study focuses on the following two research questions.

RQ1. How, for example, can results from performance audits at the SAI be channelled to the national Parliament, without a PAC? What is the experience from these models?

RQ2. How can we understand why some countries chose to have a PAC?

## Research Design

This chapter is based on data from a longitudinal study of the Swedish SAI, the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO), and its stakeholders. Sweden is an interesting case partly because policy-makers, despite pressures from international comparisons, have refused to form a PAC to handle SAI reports. The Swedish case is also interesting because two different non-PAC models have been adopted, with somewhat different outcomes.

The study of the SNAO and its stakeholders began in 2002 (with preparations for the forming of a new SNAO in 2003) and it was closed in 2013. The case study includes 102 interviews and extensive document studies. Some of the results from the study can be found in two books (Bringselius 2008, 2013) and in a journal article (Bringselius 2014). None of these publications, however, focus on the same topic as this chapter.

This specific chapter builds in particular on studies of laws and regulations, and on documents indicating the experience of the SNAO stakeholders. This includes reports on how

officials in the governmental offices and members of Parliament perceive the (non-PAC) process used to channel SNAO reports to Parliament, and also attitudes relating to the value of these reports. Documents also include two reports from a special committee under the Riksdag, assigned to evaluate the SNAO reform and how the SNAO has developed over the years 2003-2008 (Sveriges riksdag, 2008/09:URF1, URF3). These reports lead to judicial changes, implemented January 2011.

Because other types of data from the longitudinal study of the SNAO are not being used much in this chapter, I will not go into detail here in matters such as interview guide, choice of interviewees, survey methods, etc.

## **The Swedish Administrative Model**

Sweden is a parliamentary representative democracy and a constitutional monarchy. The Swedish Constitution dates back to 1975. Before this, Sweden was formally governed under the 1809 Constitution. However, Sweden had a *de facto* parliamentary system already from 1917, when the Swedish King agreed to abandon any claims for political power.

Today, the executive power is exercised by the Government (the Cabinet). This is headed by the Prime Minister of Sweden and includes 22 Ministers, who are responsible for the ministries.

The legislative power is exercised by both the Cabinet and the Riksdag (Parliament), meaning that legislation may be initiated by any of these. The unicameral Swedish Riksdag has 349 Members of Parliament (MPs), appointed for a period of four years. The Riksdag can alter the Constitution of Sweden, but only with approval by a supermajority and confirmation after the following general elections.

In practice, many decisions in the Swedish Riksdag are resolved in the standing parliamentary committees, at meetings preceding parliamentary sessions. These committees are also authorised to take the initiative to make legislative changes. Committee chairs are distributed proportionally among the parliamentary parties. The areas of specialisation of the standing committees are similar to the jurisdictions of government ministries. These parliamentary arrangements in Sweden aim to facilitate a ‘consensual style of policy-making’ (Bergman 2003). Rather than accountability, this culture is focused on informality (Jacobsson, Pierre & Sundström 2015; Page 2012), pragmatic improvement (Anton 1969; Heckscher 1984) and an anticipatory and pro-active, rather than reactive, policy-style (Ruin 1982). Furthermore, rather than focusing on single decisions or issues, the Swedish political culture tends to focus on *systems* of decision-making, meaning general norms and structures (Anton 1969):

*[B]y emphasizing relationships expressed as norms and limits instead of goals, and by focusing on relatively stable role expectations instead of the heroic actor-individual, it underlines the structural determinants of behavior without denying the rational calculations of individuals in structured situations; and by*

*insisting on the significance of information - communication, it offers a systematic account of the sources of stability and change in system environment relationships. (Anton 1969: 91)*

In an article in a major Swedish newspaper, professor Steve Kelman (2013) argues the sense of kindness and consensus in Swedish politics is a rare thing, and that this has been a success factor behind several major political reforms. In the same article, Kelman argues that it is imperative for Sweden to be able to preserve this culture in the future, in order to secure the success also of coming reforms.

For accountability purposes, the Swedish Parliament has a number of instruments at hand to control the actions of the Cabinet, its ministries and the executive agencies. These instruments, typically referred to as the ‘parliamentary control’ (Instrument of Government, in Swedish *Regeringsformen*, Chapter 13), are the following.

- Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO)
- Questions to ministers
- The Parliamentary Ombudsmen
- The Committee on the Constitution
- No-Confidence Votes

The five instruments have different roles. For example, the Committee on the Constitution is responsible for checking for compliance with the Constitution (the four fundamental laws, in Swedish *grundlagarna*), whereas the SNAO is responsible for checking the yearly financial accounts of agencies and auditing the performance of the executive branch of government.

Most of these instruments have an advisory function, meaning that they do not force the executive to take action in any regard. For example, reports from the Committee on the Constitution often lead to a long debate in the Swedish Riksdag – yet, these debates almost always end with the report being put aside. With the No-Confidence Votes, an absolute majority can bring down the whole Cabinet (Instrument of Government, Chapter 12, §4), but these votes can also be directed towards individual ministers. No-Confidence votes are rare, however, and they are seldom successful when they take place. The Parliamentary Ombudsmen audit how the decisions and actions of public agencies and their staff comply with laws and other statutes. Although their decisions tend to lead to action, formally they only have the status of recommendations. Also, SNAO reports include recommendations, but the Cabinet is obliged to return to Parliament explaining what actions have been taken in response to criticisms.

The SNAO was formed in 2003, in a reform preceded by lengthy political deliberations (see Bringselius 2008, 2013). In legal terms, it was formed as a totally new institution. In terms of organisation, it was implemented as a merger of the previous two institutions for state audit: Riksrevisionsverket (RRV) and the Parliamentary Auditors. Although both these offices had



important merits, none of them had been fully autonomous. RRV reported to the Ministry of Finance, and the Parliamentary Auditors actually consisted of a group of MPs, assisted by a secretariat of circa 25 non-partisan auditors. Building on the merits of RRV and the Parliamentary Auditors, but adjusting the legal conditions under which it served, the new SNAO was expected to be state-of-the-art among SAIs.

The reform was preceded by a debate on the lack of a PAC in the Swedish Riksdag and some requested that a PAC ought to be formed. It was finally agreed, however, that the SNAO would instead report to an independent ‘board’. This board was formally tied to the SNAO, but it consisted of MPs, representing each of the political parties in Parliament. I shall soon explain further how this model worked. It was also agreed that *three* Auditor-Generals, instead of one, would head the SNAO.

## **Two Non-PAC Models in Sweden**

Instead of introducing a PAC to the Swedish political system, two different models for the dissemination of SNAO reports to the Riksdag have been tested. The first model was introduced as the SNAO was formed in 2003. The second model was introduced after two highly critical reports from a committee under the Swedish Parliament, and effectuated January 2011. In the following two sections, the two models are described and the Swedish experience from each model is reported.

### ***The first model: The SNAO board***

As explained, instead of a PAC, an independent board was formed and tied to the SNAO in 2003. The members of this board were MPs, representing each of the parties in the Riksdag. One of the responsibilities of the board was to select the specific reports to be passed on to the Riksdag (Instrument of Government, Chapter 12, §7). In doing this, they also determined if a parliamentary decision was called for, or if the report was primarily ‘for information’. Apart from this, the board had a supervisory function, but without any tools for sanctions or a mandate to override the decisions of the Auditor-Generals. This way, the Riksdag wished to ensure that the SNAO was not subjected to partisan interests.

After reports had been finished, they were sent to both the SNAO board and the Cabinet. Each year, the Cabinet had to account for the measures they had taken as a consequence of the SNAO audit reports and they chose to do this in connection with the yearly budget bill.

This model led to a number of problems. In particular, the SNAO became dependent upon the media to attract attention to its reports and increase the chances for these reports to gain some degree of impact in Parliament (Bringselius 2014). Typically, these reports were otherwise put aside rather swiftly. In parallel with this, the first set of Auditor-Generals requested that the SNAO should adopt a new approach in performance audits, in comparison to the one developed by their predecessors (RRV and the Parliamentary Auditors). Instead of traditional

3E (Economy, Efficiency & Effectiveness, see INTOSAI: ISSAI 3000-3100, p. 11) audit, they explained that audits should be focused on formal norms and aim to define which individual or institution was accountable for specific issues (Bringselius 2013). Professional autonomy was strongly curtailed; furthermore, a study (Grönlund, Svärdesten & Öhman 2011) shows that audit reports became highly focused on compliance in the years 2003-2007.

These changes led to protests from SNAO performance auditors. The relation between them and the three Auditor-Generals became increasingly tense. Auditors complained that

- ...professional autonomy was too heavily curtailed.
- ...the SNAO had become too focused on attracting media attention, rather than presenting substantial and interesting results.
- ...performance audit at the SNAO was gradually transformed from a broad, interpretive practice (as recommended also by INTOSAI, ISSAI 3000-3100) into a compliance audit.
- ...audit reports were too focused on accountability and conflict in relation to the Riksdag, rather than pragmatic support. (see also a study by Grönlund et al 2011, which confirms this)

The relation between the SNAO and Parliament was tense, partly as a consequence of the Auditor-Generals demanding that Parliament act in accordance with their suggestions in reports.

After a parliamentary committee had been initiated in 2007, to evaluate the performance of the SNAO from a Parliamentary perspective, this gradually changed. This may be one reason why the number of reports requesting a parliamentary decision diminished during the years 2008-2010, as compared to the years 2004-2007. During the period 2008-2010, a majority of the reports sent to Parliament were instead meant to be only informational, . See Table 1. The board also chose to put a considerable number of reports in the archive, instead of passing them on to Parliament. The reason why Table 1 does not include the years 2011-2012 is that a new model was introduced in 2011, as we soon shall see.

*Table 1. Decisions at the SNAO board, concerning performance audit reports, in the years 2004-2010. Source: Collected from SNAO yearly reports.*

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
To Parliament, suggesting a Parliamentary decision		12	10	17	14	7	5	7
To Parliament, for information		5	11	7	8	17	17	23
To the archive		4	9	9	3	8	6	8
<b>Total number of reports</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>38</b>

Many MPs were critical of the path that the SNAO had taken. Some argued that the SNAO was becoming too involved in policy issues. A respondent in a stakeholder survey from 2006 explained:

*The SNAO appears keen to take on an increasingly political role and profile itself by different moves. (Demoskop, Sep. 2006, p. 53)*

This argument was repeated in a stakeholder survey the year after (Gullers 2007). It was raised as a risk that the SNAO would become the tool of the opposition, instead of a *non-political* driver of improvements. Some respondents compared the SNAO to the tabloids, explaining that these auditors were only looking for issues to complain about.

*The hyperbolized statements are a weakness. They have a negative approach, they are actually only looking for errors. Instead, when you work in central government, the shared mission should be to improve operations. (Gullers 2007, p. 9f)*

Respondents from the Riksdag complained (Gullers 2007) that the SNAO board had positioned itself as an obstacle between the SNAO and the parliamentary committees. For example, they saw it as problematic that the SNAO board modified suggestions from audit reports and instead, they wished that the standing parliamentary committees themselves could choose what parts of these reports to build on.

### ***The second model: Standing committees***

In 2008-2009, a parliamentary investigation presented two highly critical reports (Sveriges riksdag, 2008/09:URF1, URF3), concerning the SNAO. This included concerns regarding the lack of a solid response to SNAO reports, but also concerns pertaining to the internal problems (high overhead costs, low productivity, employee distrust) at the SNAO and the relevance of the areas the Auditor-Generals chose to audit. The two parliamentary reports showed how the SNAO had chosen to audit many areas that were of minor financial interest to the Riksdag, in comparison to their part of the state budget. About the same time, a research study (Grönlund et al 2011) showed that SNAO performance audit had become primarily oriented towards compliance audit during the years since the reform, as opposed to traditional performance audit, as outlined by the INTOSAI (3E). The reports highlighted that this was problematic and questioned the Auditor-Generals' focus on accountability issues. Instead of identifying someone to be held accountable, they asked for a state audit focused on pragmatic support and improvements.

The parliamentary investigation suggested a number of changes to legislation, aimed to improve SNAO performance and align it more with parliamentary requirements. Suggestions were accepted by the Committee on the Constitution and the Parliamentary Board, with only

minor changes. This means that there was broad political support in the Riksdag for the criticisms raised in the two reports.

In the deliberations that took place in the parliamentary committee, some people argued again that a PAC should be formed. It was, however, agreed otherwise and from 2011, SNAO reports have instead been sent directly to the standing committees in the Riksdag. The Riksdag then passes them on to the Cabinet. For example, reports concerning the Swedish defence are today sent to the Parliamentary committee on defence. By sending reports to the concerned committee, it is expected that reports will have a genuine impact in the relevant channels and raise discussions among those who are specialised in the specific topic. Furthermore, this means that those MPs responsible for policy-making in the area also have to address feedback on the same policies. Since 2011, the Swedish Cabinet is also obliged to respond to criticism in SNAO reports within a four-month period.

It is interesting to note that the two reports from the parliamentary committee also resulted in a rare change to Swedish legislation: A section stating how SNAO performance audit should be defined was included. This stated that SNAO performance audit should be focused on traditional '3E' performance audit (Act 2002:1022 on state audit, in Swedish *Revisionslagen*, §4).

The parliamentary reports also requested that the SNAO should focus on support, rather than accountability. The first set of Auditor-Generals had been very explicit internally (Bringselius 2008, 2013, 2014) about their aim to ensure that all performance audit reports from the SNAO pointed out not only problems, but also a person or institution that the Riksdag could – and should – hold as being accountable. This focus on being held accountable is rare in the political culture of Sweden, which is characterised rather by pragmatism, informality and pro-activeness, as I have explained.

Preliminary findings (e.g. Gullers Group 2011) indicate that the new model for the dissemination of SNAO reports to the Riksdag works rather well. The standing committees can now address feedback from the SNAO, on policy problems and the performance of executive agencies in their area, in a pragmatic way. Committee members are specialised in the relevant area and therefore, they typically have the necessary know-how to relate to reports. The relation between the Riksdag and the Auditors-General has also been improved with the new model, partly because they meet regularly for presentations and discussions. However, there is a high awareness on the side of both parties, that the Riksdag is not allowed to decide what areas the SNAO should audit.

A problem is, however, that the response from the Cabinet tends to be of a rather general character. One reason for this may be that four months is too short a time to be able to actually plan any major changes, following criticism from the SNAO.

As I have explained, the relation between the SNAO and the Riksdag became increasingly tense during the first 5-7 years. Since the changes implemented in 2011, with a new model for the dissemination of SNAO reports to the Riksdag, this relation has gradually improved. Today, it is less formal and less focused on accountability. This is the result of a deliberate

work from the side of the SNAO, where the SNAO, for example, has arranged meetings and seminars for all parliamentary committees, in order to improve its dialogue with these (Bringselius 2013).

## Discussion

How does the Swedish model(s) compare to a model with a PAC? This chapter describes how it is possible for legislatures to handle their oversight function without a PAC – and how there also may be benefits with these alternative models. The Swedish case offers experience from two different models for the channelling of results from SNAO audits to the Riksdag (Parliament).

The first model, with an independent body between the SNAO and the Riksdag, called a ‘board’, did not turn out to be very successful. This was partly because neither the Riksdag, nor the Cabinet, had strong incentives to respond to reports, or even bring them up on the political agenda. The SNAO reports became increasingly critical during these years, partly aiming to attract more public interest, but this led to criticism from the Riksdag and other stakeholders, where the SNAO was accused of being ‘overly critical’ (Bringselius 2014). There was very little personal contact between the Riksdag and the Auditors-General.

The second model has proved to have more merit, although effects will need to be explored further. This model, which is valid since year 2011, means that reports are sent to the relevant standing parliamentary committees in the Riksdag. Accordingly, reports are always included on the political agenda and in the relevant context, to those with a vested interest in the area in question. This model makes the Cabinet obliged to respond to SNAO reports within four months time, thus, giving also the Cabinet incentives to take action following criticism from the SNAO. With this model, the SNAO has become less focused on accountability and moved more into the supportive function that the Riksdag has requested (in particular in the two highly critical reports from 2008 and 2009, Sveriges riksdag 2008/09:URF1, URF3).

One of the aims behind the Swedish trajectory has been to ensure that SNAO reports are being used – yet, without introducing an accountability-focused political culture. This cultural aspect is more important, this study suggests, than what is generally acknowledged in the literature on PACs and other systems for state oversight. As I have explained, the Swedish ‘policy style’, or political culture, is characterised by informality (Jacobsson, Pierre & Sundström 2015; Page 2012), a consensual and pro-active style of policy-making (Bergman 2003; Ruin 1982; Kelman 2013) and by pragmatic improvements (Anton 1969; Heckscher 1984). This includes a focus on improving systems, rather than holding individuals or institutions accountable, as noted by Anton already in 1969. The decision to avoid forming a PAC in Sweden can be understood as a consequence of this culture.

This political culture is functional for many actors, since they can avoid conflict, but yet have administrative improvements and carefully work to develop public policy. This may be one reason why it has persisted, despite the excellent opportunities that were provided for the

introduction of a PAC, first in the SNAO reform in 2003, and then in the legislative changes implemented in 2011.

This does not mean, however, that any country could manage without a PAC. In Sweden, social trust, including citizen confidence in the performance of the public administration, is higher than in many other countries (Inglehart 1999). With this trust as a foundation, it is easier to enter pragmatic and informal discussions, following criticism in state audits, such as those conducted by the SNAO. There is an assumption that officials, managers and policy-makers want to do a good job, rather than an assumption that they must risk being held accountable in order to achieve this performance.

Finally, it is interesting to reflect on how PACs' affect the audit approach of, for example, Supreme Audit Institutions. With their focus on accountability, it may be hypothesised that PACs lead to more compliance audit, compared with traditional performance audit (focused on the three Es). On the other hand, this may be the consequence also of a model that cannot secure that audit reports gain some degree of impact. This was the case at the SNAO until a new model was introduced in 2011 (see also Bringselius 2014, on SNAO relations to the media). Since the changes implemented in 2011, also explicitly stating the acts under which the SNAO should serve, this audit approach has changed.

Today, there is much more of a collaborative culture between the SNAO and the Riksdag, with its standing committees as a key actor. Thus, we conclude that the parliamentary oversight function can work well also in the absence of a PAC. Under the influence of globalization and harmonization within the EU, however, Sweden is likely to experience increasing pressures to form a PAC.

		Priary goal in relation to the executive (auditee)	
		Confrontation	Collaboration
Choice of audit areas / relation to Parliament (the principal)	Integration (Almost exclusively direct assignments)		
	Cooperation (some direct assignments)	PAC	Sweden before 2003
	Dialogue (suggestions are encouraged)		Sweden 2011-
	Total distance (contact avoided)	Sweden 2003-2010	

Figure 2. Models for the channelling of results from the SNAO to Swedish Parliament during the period 2000-2014, as compared to a model with a PAC.

Finally, returning to the analytical framework presented in the first part of this chapter, the Swedish non-PAC models can be positioned according to Figure 2. Before the reform in 2003, the Swedish SNAO was focused on collaboration with the auditee and cooperation with the principal, i.e. the Ministry of Finance. Again, at this time, the SNAO did not enjoy full autonomy, but took assignments from the ministry, although they also initiated some studies themselves. During the period 2003-2010, the SNAO took on a position of confrontation in relation to the auditee and total distance in relation to the principal (Swedish Parliament). Lacking a PAC, they had to turn to the media to make sure that audit reports gained some attention and could have some impact (see also Bringselius 2014). After the judicial changes implemented in 2011, the SNAO has moved to a position where it collaborates more with the auditee and also with the concerned Parliamentary committees. Initiatives from these committees are encouraged and there is an ongoing contact between the SNAO and these. In Figure 2, this is referred to as *Dialogue*. There is still no PAC in Sweden, but with the new position, it appears as if the SNAO finally has taken on the position that Parliament once hoped for when forming it in 2003 – namely a position of pragmatic collaboration with the auditee and equally pragmatic dialogue with Parliament and the different subject committees. Of course, it requires extensive work to maintain a running dialogue with all these committees, as compared to what would have been the case with only one PAC, but Sweden have chosen that it is still worth maintaining this model.

## Conclusions

For many countries, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is an important democratic institution, and it would be hard to imagine a political system without it. Yet, this is the case in Sweden. When the (new) Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO) was formed in 2003, many people expected that a PAC would be formed. Instead, an independent body with Members of Parliament was formed and was prescribed to choose which specific SNAO reports should be passed on to Parliament and with what recommendation. This model led to a number of problems. It was replaced by a new model in 2011. The body with Members of Parliament was abandoned, but still, no PAC was formed. Instead, SNAO reports are now being sent directly to the standing committees in Parliament. Today, the Cabinet is also obliged to respond to each report within a four-month period.

This chapter has made primarily three contributions. First, it has depicted the Swedish experience from two non-PAC models, showing that it is possible to make use of audit reports without the accountability debates typical of PACs. In particular, this aims to avoid the auditor becoming ‘a bruiser’, as Travers (1999) argues in a common temptation. Second, it has also suggested a framework to compare how SAIs related to the auditee and to Parliament in performance audits. Third, to explain the Swedish choice of a non-PAC model, the chapter has argued that there is a correlation between the political culture and the existence of a PAC. In Sweden, there is a political culture focused on collaboration and pragmatic improvement, rather than confrontation and accountability debates. By turning to the standing committees, building a working relation with these, the Swedish culture can be preserved at the same time as audit results are disseminated to those who are most interested. It should be noted, that some of these also will be found among the auditees - the executive agencies. To estimate the impact of audits, in a pragmatic politico-administrative culture, it may be equally important to consider the (sometimes informal, subtle or longitudinal) actions taken by these, following audits, as it is to understand to what extent Parliament takes action. Findings emphasise the importance of a fit between political culture and systems for accountability.



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