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## SNS RESEARCH BRIEF SUMMARY

### The Swedish Commissions of Inquiry 1990–2016\*

Before a major legislative initiative is debated in parliament, a considerable amount of work occurs in formulating policy proposals. In Sweden, the government typically appoints an independent commission, known as a commission of inquiry, with members coming from the government, opposition parties, academia, interest groups, and the private sector. The broad commission membership has often succeeded in negotiating compromises and incorporating different perspectives on the implications of different proposals. Recently, however, both scholars and policymakers have expressed concerns that commissions of inquiry may have changed in ways that make it harder for them to fulfill their roles.

This report describes the development of Swedish commissions of inquiry in the 27-year period from 1990 to 2016. Drawing from all commissions of inquiry initiated in these years, and which produced a policy proposal or a policy recommendation, we show that the share of parliamentary commissions declined considerably, while the share of special investigator inquiries, which lack political representation, increased. Parliamentary commissions made up 20 percent of all commissions in 1990; by 2016 their share was only 3 percent. At the same time, the share of special investigator inquiries had risen to 90 percent. The proportion of politicians as members of

commissions has also decreased, while the share of civil servants increased.

Furthermore, we show that commission members express less dissent in the form of reservations and special comments, and that the government has become slightly more active in giving directives to the commissions. We also find that the number of new commissions and the length of their tenure have remained relatively stable. Finally, the appointment of new commissions of inquiries does not appear to be related to the electoral cycle.

We conclude that the changing composition and decreased amount of dissent may indicate that the resolution of political conflicts is postponed to later phases of the legislative process, where negotiation of political compromise is more difficult. This would have been less problematic in the past when Sweden had governments with more stable parliamentary support. However, in the present political climate characterized by polarization and a divided party system, this may mean that the government's ability to resolve political conflicts is reduced.

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\* This is a summary of a research brief in Swedish “Det statliga kommittéväsendets förändring 1990–2016”.