The building of the Scandinavian states: establishing Weberian bureaucracy and curbing corruption from the mid-seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century
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Abstract
The Scandinavian states are universally seen as very well-functioning bureaucracies with some of the lowest levels of corruption in the world. In scholarly debates on state building, Francis Fukuyama has used the Scandinavian countries and the phrase "getting to Denmark" as a metaphor for the apparent mystery of how states can come to be governed by well-developed bureaucracies and highly functioning state institutions. This chapter presents a study of state institutions and bureaucracy in Denmark-Norway and Sweden over a 250-year period from the mid-seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century. The study demonstrates how bureaucracies conforming to Weber's later model were gradually established in the Scandinavian monarchies in this period. The chapter also presents the results of three empirical studies of Denmark, Norway and Sweden which indicate how the level of corruption in the state administration had been limited around the middle of the nineteenth century. In Denmark, the institutional framework set up after the establishment of the absolute monarchy in 1660, along with continuing reforms to improve the administration in the period of absolutism between 1660 and 1849, came to form an important basis for an administrative culture based on the rule of law. In Sweden the rule shifted between absolutism and constitutionalism, but both the Danish-Norwegian and the Swedish monarchies saw the establishment of strong and comprehensive state hierarchies with a king at the top level who set out to guarantee the rule of law and attempted to be merciful to his subjects. Lutheranism played a decisive and durable role as moral backbone in the Scandinavia societies and in the establishment of the countries shared political culture. These elements, in combination with the establishment of Weberian-type bureaucracy, had, by the end of the nineteenth century, worked to limit corruption in the state administration of the Scandinavian countries.

Keywords: History of state-building; rule of law; anti-corruption; history of corruption; Weberian bureaucracy; Lutheranism; loyal civil servants
The phrase 'Getting to Denmark' has recently become a metaphor for the question of how to transform weak states in developing countries into well-functioning societies along the model of Denmark and other Scandinavian countries. As Francis Fukuyama put it:

For people in developing countries, “Denmark” is a mythical place that is known to have good political and economic institutions: it is stable, democratic, peaceful, prosperous, inclusive, and has extremely low levels of political corruption. Everyone would like to figure out how to transform Somalia, Haiti, Nigeria, Iraq or Afghanistan into 'Denmark' (Fukuyama, 2011, p. 14).

A good question, though, is how Denmark actually got to be Denmark, or how the Scandinavian countries historically became what they are today. Classically, historians, social and political scientists have considered the process of state building and the formation of a Weberian bureaucracy a precondition for a stable, responsible and well governed public administration. The Weberian ideal model of a bureaucracy can also serve as a benchmark in a historical study relating the actual development of the system (Weber, 1922). This study will analyse the process of establishment and construction of bureaucracies primarily in Denmark from the seventeenth century, and will relate this process to historical bureaucratic developments in Sweden. Until 1814 the king of Denmark was also king of Norway, so the dual monarchy – ruled primarily from Copenhagen – has in several respects a shared history of state and administration. In this sense, the study relates to all three Scandinavian states, even if Denmark is the main focus. The establishment of what can be characterised as an increasingly Weberian and professionalised bureaucracy between 1660 and 1870 will be in focus. In other words, the administrative and legal structures, the ethics of public office, and the identity and ethos of the civil servants of the state in many ways laid the foundation of today’s state administration and the relatively well-functioning societies in the Scandinavian countries cited by Fukuyama.

The analysis presented of Danish–Norwegian and Swedish administrative and legal history and the establishment of bureaucracy will be combined with a comparative overview of how these countries tackled the problem of administrative corruption at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The comparison of three empirical studies of corruption will work as a diagnostic tool for analysis of the real functioning and ability of the bureaucracy, since corruption is, to a large degree, a dysfunction in state administration. In the ideal bureaucracy described by Max Weber at the
beginning of the twentieth century, corruption does not exist; in this sense, therefore, the handling of this “disease” of the state administration can tell us something about the bureaucracy’s degree of development, capacity and efficiency historically. The Weberian model of the ideal bureaucracy has been criticised for not contributing to an understanding of how a bureaucracy actually works – only how it should do so in an ideal world. In this regard, the empirical studies of corruption in the Scandinavian monarchies may provide an insight into how it actually worked in an attempt to make up for this.

Within the field of recent research on anti-corruption, “getting to Denmark” also serves as a synonym for the ultimate goal of the continuing drive to fight corruption effectively. This research has focused on the historical paths that have been followed to control corruption in the states known to be the least corrupt in the world at present, which according to the index of Transparency International include all three of Denmark, Norway and Sweden (Johnston, 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013; Teorell & Rothstein, 2015a, 2015b).

In this context, several statistical analyses of the factors characterising the well-functioning states of today have concluded that the quality and history of state institutions plays a highly significant role (Charron & Lapuente, 2013; Uslaner & Rothstein, 2016). So what was the process of historical development behind the apparent success of the state administration in the Scandinavian case? What type of rule, state building, administrative and legal history, cultural and religious development laid the grounds for these countries’ position today as best performers in terms of high quality of government, defined as low corruption, high governmental efficiency and the prevalence of the rule of law?

The historical realms of the Scandinavian countries

The Scandinavian states are among the world’s oldest monarchies and have a long history of state building, with several key changes in relation to the type of state control and the geography of the territory. During the Middle Ages the countries formed into monarchies, which gradually became more powerful. The first Danish king converted to Christianity around the year 960, and in the following centuries the influence of the Catholic Church contributed to the establishment of institutions in the kingdom until the Danish–Norwegian Lutheran Reformation of 1536. In Sweden, King Gustav Vasa introduced a Lutheran Reformation by 1527. In 1536 the Danish king Christian III confiscated the enormous properties owned by the Catholic Church and made these state property, which strengthened the economy of the state considerably. A similar process took place in
Sweden. Between 1397 and 1523, all the Nordic countries – Denmark–Norway and Sweden–Finland – were united in a composite state known as the Kalmar Union and ruled mainly from Denmark. The borders of this Nordic union – the largest country in Europe at the time – extended from Greenland in the west to present-day western Russia in the east, and from northern Germany to the North Cape. After Sweden’s uprising and secession from the union in 1523, the Danish and Swedish monarchies were each left ruling over medium-sized European states. For roughly three centuries, from the early sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, the multinational realm of Denmark geographically included Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein and a number of colonies in the West Indies, West Africa and India. In 1814 the territory of the former Danish empire was further reduced by the loss of Norway in the Napoleonic war, and in 1864 the loss of Schleswig and Holstein – after a military defeat to Prussia and Austria – left the Danish state as a small country in the European context (Bregnsbo & Villads Jensen, 2005; Teige, 2014a, 2014b). Finland, unlike Norway, was never a kingdom in its own right, but for more than six hundred years was part of Sweden until in 1809 it was lost to Russia. In 1809 Sweden lost one-third of its territory with the surrender of Finland, and the existence of Sweden as a sovereign state was severely threatened. In 1814, with the loss of Norway, the Danish monarchy lost five-sixths of its territory. After the Danish defeat in the Napoleonic war, King Frederik VI had to cede the enormous territory of Norway to the Swedish king as part of the peace treaty. Sweden and Norway were after 1814 in a formal union sharing foreign policy and monarch until Norway in 1905 became an independent constitutional monarchy. In 1814 the Danish state had been close to being eradicated in the negotiations after the Napoleonic war. Ultimately it bore the greatest territorial loss of any of the countries participating in the war (Glenthøj, 2013). Since the Napoleonic war, Denmark and Sweden have not been at war with one another again.

In Denmark–Norway, the Lutheran Reformation of 1536 played a crucial role in the formation of the institutions of central government and society as a whole. This was also the case in Sweden after the country’s gradual Reformation from 1527 to 1536. After the Reformation, the monarchs in these countries became the secular head of the churches, which gradually formed into a state church – in Denmark from 1536 and in Sweden from 1593. As head of the church, the monarch and thereby the state gradually took over the responsibility and obligations for the population’s well-being that had traditionally belonged to the church. From the perspective of state building, this top-down model of reform enlarged the administrative tasks of the Danish and Swedish states, and also enhanced state capacities. A very strong Lutheran uniformity became
distinct in all the Scandinavian states, with the Protestant Lutheran church an ingrained part of the
state. This continued to be very influential as a basis for these countries’ political culture and values
well into the twentieth century (Østergaard, 2010; Knudsen, 2000a; Ihalainen, 2011, pp. 95–98).
Alongside an expanding role in ensuring the welfare of their people as head of the Church, the
Danish kings also had military ambitions. Together, these two elements played a major role in the
process of state building. A constant rivalry between Denmark and Sweden between the sixteenth
and eighteenth centuries created what has been termed a “fiscal-military state” (Lind, 2012; Glete,
2002; Tilly, 1990). To build up the military institutions and finance an army, the state needed to be
able to collect taxes effectively, and for this purpose it needed a civil administration. The populace,
on the other hand, wanted something in return for their taxes. By the beginning of the eighteenth
century, and most likely already during periods of the seventeenth century, the two Scandinavian
monarchies were the most militarised of the European states, and this played a decisive part in the
expansion of the state administration (Lind, 2012; Bregnsbo, 1997).

The growth of the absolute states
In the early modern Danish state, the nobles had privileges from the Crown, including exemption
from taxation and the right to own land and to fish and hunt, which enabled them to accumulate its
wealth. Until the introduction of absolutism in 1660, the nobles of Denmark held the majority of the
offices in the central and local administration, which gave them substantial influence on the
dealings of the Danish throne (Wolter, 1982). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there were
several wars between Denmark and Sweden; in 1658, the Danish kingdom had to cede all the
Scanian provinces east of the Øresund to Sweden. In so doing, the Danish kingdom lost control of
the entrances to the Baltic Sea, and the capital, Copenhagen, was left exposed on the new eastern
border. The long-held Swedish ambition of conquering its arch-enemy completely was very close to
being fulfilled at this point (Østergaard, 2008).

In Denmark, the military defeat of 1658 and a crippling economic breakdown in
which the state came close to bankruptcy led to a political crisis in 1660, which forced the nobles to
transfer some of their power and privileges to the king. It also resulted in a change of the governing
rule. After a military coup and strong support from the bourgeoisie and the ecclesiastical estates,
King Frederik III (r. 1648–1670) was acclaimed as hereditary sovereign in 1660. A new
constitution, the King’s Law, signed in 1665, gave the Danish king unrestricted and absolute power,
his main task being to keep the kingdom undivided and enforce the Lutheran religion. The king
possessed supreme power and the authority to make laws and ordinances without consultation. In this regard the King’s Law swept away the elective monarchy dominated by the aristocracy and gave the Danish realm the most sovereign form of absolutism in all Europe (Lind, 2000; Tønnesen, 2013). In retrospect, this formally pure royal absolute rule, though exercised under various forms over the centuries, proved remarkably durable, lasting for more than 180 years until the introduction of a liberal constitution in 1848–1849.

In Sweden, there was not the same continuity with respect to the form of state rule that changed several times between autocracy and constitutionalism. Here absolutism was introduced in 1680, lasting until 1718, when it was abolished after Sweden’s defeat in the Great Northern War; in 1772, absolutism was reintroduced after a royal coup and lasted until 1809. In the period in between the rule of absolutism – traditionally called the age of liberty – Sweden was ruled in combination by the king and by the representative institution of the Swedish parliament. In Sweden, unlike Denmark, the aristocracy was not abolished after the introduction of absolutism, but was represented in the Diet as members of the Council and the noble estate until 1789. The clergy, the burghers and the peasants were also represented in the Swedish parliament. The Diet continued to be summoned in the years of absolute rule, though it met more rarely (Ihalainen & Sennefeldt, 2011; Rothstein 1998; Nilsson, 2017).

Changing the bureaucratic framework
Following the introduction of absolutism, the administration of the Danish king was reorganised in a highly hierarchical manner centred on the monarch and based on the rule of law. The central administration was divided into a military and a civil component and organised in departments called kollegier (as already seen in Sweden) based on professional rather than geographical criteria (Cavallin, 2003). Under the King’s Law of 1665, the Danish monarch possessed the unrestricted right to appoint and dismiss all royal officials. For the first absolute kings, high priority was given to consolidating their new absolute supremacy. An essential tool in this attempt was to deprive the nobility of its former political power. In the years after 1660, distinctions of rank were minimised and all citizens were considered to be on a par under the absolute king. At the same time, the monopoly of the aristocracy on land-owning and on the higher offices in the king’s civil administration and the military service was abolished. Even though the noble owners of private estates in the Danish countryside did maintain a large responsibility in relation to public administration in the collection of taxes from their tenants, their overall influence on state affairs
was very much reduced. Gradually the aristocracy lost its prominence in the civil service of central, regional and local administration, and was replaced by a new group of bourgeois bureaucrats. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, only ten per cent of royal servants had an aristocratic background, and these mainly held positions in the foreign service (Gøbel, 2000; Jørgensen & Westrup, 1982). The rationale for the Crown was that civil servants of non-noble origin were more likely to be loyal to the king. They did not have a political agenda of their own to the same extent as the nobles, and were in general more dependent on income from the offices they held. In the years shortly after the introduction of absolutism, a key issue for the royal government was to create an administration loyal to the king (Jespersen, 2000). In Sweden, too, royal power was centralised during the seventeenth century. From 1680, after the introduction of absolutism, control over the state administration was also strengthened (Cavalin, 2003; Fällström & Mäntylä, 1982).

The appointment of civil servants
The first Danish kings after 1660 used their right to appoint to actively alter the corps of royal officials and to establish an administration that was closely linked to the king himself. The successive kings’ wish to recapture the territory lost to Sweden and safeguard the royal absolute rule intensified the need for an efficient administration for collecting taxes that could finance wars. In the years following 1660, to receive a royal office was still seen as an act of grace from the king to a person he wished to support. But increasingly, and especially during the reign of Frederik IV (r. 1699–1730), qualifications assuring that civil servants would be capable of performing their duties became a prerequisite for attaining office. In 1706 a summary system was introduced in the central administration: each vacant post was presented separately, with accurate information about the office and a record of all candidates and their qualifications, and the summary reports were presented to the king, who made the final decision. This established a procedure in which the capability of applicants was central to the king’s management of appointments. An application for office needed to indicate the candidate’s objective qualifications and had to be accompanied by certificates, replacing the previous informal procedures whereby the assurance of good intentions or personal contact had in many cases been sufficient to gain office (Bjerre Jensen, 1987). Even for the short period 1700–1701 and again in 1715–1716 when Frederik IV chose to exploit his right of appointment financially by selling offices, it has been documented how capability on the part of the buyers was still a priority. The sale of offices was used as a method of financing Danish participation in the Great Northern War (1700–1720), as well as the construction of a building for
the central administration close to the king’s palace in Copenhagen. This building is still in use today and houses the ministry of finance. Under the exchequer, forty-seven offices were sold, and under the chancellery fifty-six went on sale, equalling six per cent of the appointments in each department (a method of raising money for the administration that has not been in use since 1716). But even during the period when offices were sold, the king did not compromise on the necessity for the officers to demonstrate that they were qualified to be a royal servant in this role. In practice, the sales of offices did not really affect the recruitment procedure, and the process was far from the French approach, in which offices were put up for auction and went to the highest bidder. In Denmark the civil servant never came to own his office, even though he had paid to receive the nomination. In the larger context of eliminating corruption, this may have been a crucial difference (Bjerre Jensen, 1987, p. 283–305). Things seem to have been a bit different in Sweden. Even though the sale of offices was officially illegal, the Swedish historian Maria Cavallin concludes in her dissertation on Swedish civil servants from 1750 to 1780 that it was a fairly common practice (Cavallin, 2003, pp. 124–130).

What happened in Denmark after the introduction of absolutism in 1660 was probably a fairly conscious move by the Crown to curb the power of the new corps of royal servants. It was made clear from the start that the offices that were established were to be managed by the king absolute. The power exercised by those in office was only a loan from the Crown, and they never came to own the office in person. A position could be lost at any time by a civil servant who did not act according to the laws of the country and the instructions of the administration (Bjerre Jensen 1987, 296–304). Certainly, there were many exceptions to the strict rule of law in the administration – this was not to be compared with today’s demands for transparent government. But it seems fair to say that the intentional moves made in Denmark after 1660 to create a corps of bureaucrats loyal to the king and with formal qualifications did over the years and decades contribute to the development of a state governed by law and by civil servants loyal to the king in person, and later to the state. This contributed to a Weberian bureaucracy in which recruitment to public office was by the beginning of the nineteenth century based on technical qualifications and merit. In his detailed studies of the administration and of corruption among civil servants in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the Norwegian historian Ola Teige has come to a fairly similar conclusion about the gradual progress in the level of bureaucratisation in Norway (Teige, 2006; Teige, 2014, Teige 2015).
Setting up restrictions through a formal oath of office

In both Sweden and Denmark, civil servants had to swear an oath of loyalty and fidelity on their appointment to an administrative position. In Sweden, in the years of royal absolutism the oath was sworn to the king, and in the age of liberty to the law and to parliament. Over the years the oaths came to be more formalised, written down and contributing to setting strict rules for the exercise of office. Since the oath was also sworn before God, it had a religious dimension which may have contributed to legitimating the authority of the civil servant. With God as a witness, the oath obliged the civil servant to act according to the laws, and in this way the oath came to be much more than merely symbolic. Through the formal and very important oath, the civil servant affirmed that he would be subject to the state power, the king and the laws (Cavallin, 2003, pp. 69–73).

Especially for the Danish kings who aimed to pursue a personal royal absolutism, in the first decades after 1660 the establishment of a corps of devoted servants was a priority, and the oath of office was an instrument to achieve this. To be appointed to a royal office, the civil servant had to solemnly swear the oath of fidelity and loyalty to the king and thereby oblige himself to perform his duties according to the king’s laws and guidelines. The demands specified for the civil servant were that they must be honest, hardworking and diligent, that they must work for the best of the king at all times and that they must secure the king’s fortune (The National Archive: Danske Kancelli, Embedseder A92, A95). The oath set up a standard and a specification of what was expected of someone occupying an office in the administration.

For men in the highest state offices, the oath was sworn to the monarch in person, with prostration and the hand kiss. Royal servants lower down in the hierarchy swore the oath to one of the king’s representatives with the signing of a written formula (Lind, 2000, 178–180; Bjerre Jensen, 1987, pp. 43–44). The bond of loyalty established by the oath between the absolute monarch by the grace of God and the servant is not to be underestimated. In Sweden as in other monarchies in Europe up until the mid-eighteenth century, the king’s power was believed to be divine, making the oath of the highest importance – and thereby also rendering the royal offices more attractive. As the ideological basis for the absolute monarchy became transformed from a divine right to a social contract and the administration changed from royal to bureaucratic absolutism, the oath still remained a personal contract between the absolute king and his civil servant: a moral backbone and a specification of the ethics of office. The practice of oaths in the royal administration was used more systematically after 1660, but was not an invention of the absolute rule. It had been known since the Middle Ages, when it was common for the king to
demand an oath from his Royal Life Guard, members of the court, and top officials. Conversely, Danish medieval kings would swear an oath to the people at their coronation (Jørgensen, 1947, pp. 264, 310–315).

In return for the loyal performance of duties by the sworn civil servants, the absolute king in Denmark and his advisers endeavoured to give the officers prestige and social status. In 1671 a law on rank was adopted which allowed the king to acknowledge dutiful and faithful service with honourable titles of rank and attendant privileges for both the civil servant and his family. This helped enshrine the principle of office and rank as something awarded in favour of merit by the king, not something acquired by virtue of birth (Bartholdy 1971, 583–584; Knudsen 2006, 35–38). In Sweden a very similar system was set up in 1680 with the first law on rank, which was renewed and specified several times in the eighteenth century. This law divided officials into forty ranks – an official hierarchy – in order to give the office-holders a prominent and respected position (Cavallin, 2003, 88–93). In both Denmark and Sweden, the bond of loyalty provided through the oath and the use of high-status titles and positions giving social status to the civil servants can be seen as important steps in the improvement of the framework for the bureaucrats.

**Legal regulations for civil servants**

In Denmark, a number of laws regulating the duties of civil servants and imposing harsh punishments such as life imprisonment and loss of office for crimes of corruption were introduced at the end of the seventeenth century to minimise exploitation in the state administration. The first explicit ban on bribery and acceptance of gifts by royal servants was introduced in 1676, and this piece of legislation was renewed and extended in 1700.¹ Under the law of 1676 it was forbidden both to give and to receive bribes, and anyone reporting the crime was granted a reward. Clerical, civil and military officials were covered by this law. Throughout the eighteenth century, the ban on bribery was reinforced, targeted at specific groups of officials such as, for example, customs officers. In the Danish Law of 1683 and also in subsequent legislation, the standards for official duties were also described: forgery by civil servants was included in the Danish Law and a clear ban was imposed. Embezzlement was to be judged as theft from the Crown. The king issued a law specifying and regulating the penalty for fraud and embezzlement in office in 1690. The sentence was hard labour for life, unless the money was repaid to the king’s treasury.²

¹ The law: Forordningen om Forbud paa Skienk og Gave at give og tage, 20 March 20 1676 and 23 October 1700.
² The law: Forordningen Om Tyves og Utroe Tieneres Straf, 4 March 1690.
The Danish Law also specified strict demands for judges in the court system. In the will of King Christian V (r. 1670–1699) of 1683, guidelines for the professional standards he wished the administration to emphasise were described. It was specified that judges should be honest and must judge strictly according to the law. It was also determined that officials should lead and report financial statements. The importance of merit and of qualifications over birth was also stressed (Worsaae, 1860).

A central challenge for all heads of state was to receive sufficient information about the actual functioning of the administration. Denmark followed several of the other early modern European states in setting up a system of petitions, or supplikker. Under the Danish Law of 1683, any of the king’s subjects had the right to send in these applications or petitions. Topics brought to the king’s attention in this manner ranged widely from issues of trade to family and legal matters, to applications for the king’s pardon, to a farmer’s assertion that he was being harassed by a landlord, to general complaints from or about the royal servants or suggestions for changes and improvements to the administrative procedures. According to the law, the supplik was sent to the king’s central administration through the local civil servant, unless it concerned a complaint about the local administration, in which case it was guided direct to the king’s administration in Copenhagen. Over the eighteenth century, the use of petitions increased dramatically. If in 1706 the Danish chancellery had received 1539 petitions, by 1799 it was dealing with 11298 petitions (Bregnsbo, 1997, pp. 87–90). The practice of petitions established a formal space for communication between the king, his administration and the people in which wishes or complaints about the system and its administration could be filed. In more general terms, it also contributed to a change from a formal top-down, non-participatory system of government to an absolutism in which the king’s subjects had a chance to be heard, while the monarch had an opportunity to demonstrate and emphasise the legitimacy of his rule by being merciful, accessible and by his ability to guarantee law and justice (Bregnsbo, 2011, pp. 55–65; Lind 2000, pp. 213–219).

Even though Danish absolutism as described in the King’s Law of 1665 was the most uncompromisingly consistent one in all of Europe, Danish rule cannot in general be characterised as just ruthlessly exploitative, but more as a regulated despotism. The Danish kings did have special responsibilities as the secular leaders of the Lutheran Church, the state was to a large extent a religious state, and the absolute rule took up the responsibility for turning the population into true Christians. Starting in the late eighteenth century, the Danish kings and their governments were

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3 The Danish Law 1-26-1, 2, 3, 4, Om Supplicationer.
inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment. Royal power in the latter part of this period has been interpreted as an absolute monarchy controlled by public opinion, in which government to a large extent was conducted in accordance with the will of the people. The royal government worked extensively in the interests of the people in maintaining law and order and in gradually introducing reforms as petitioned by citizens, which the regime could follow inter alia through the use of the supplikker. This form of communication gave the king’s subjects more than just the impression of being heard (Seip, 1958; Lind, 2000, pp. 213–216).

From the perspective of state building and establishing a Weberian bureaucracy, the imposition of standards for regulating the ethics of office and the legal framework criminalising corruption were significant. In the Danish case, it is possible to say that by the end of the seventeenth century the state had adopted laws defining the duties of civil servants and had specifically criminalised bribes, forgery, fraud and embezzlement. Meanwhile, the system of supplikker gave the Crown a channel for receiving information about maladministration by the civil servants. This must in general have increased the possibility of malpractices and abuse of power being discovered, and in so doing helped in its prevention. At the time the laws were passed, they were probably to a large extent part of the absolute monarchs’ attempts to preserve their position of power and legitimacy. But over the years the legislation contributed to the establishment of an administration with a corps of civil servants largely loyal to the king and the laws of the country rather than governed by private self-interest.

The educational background and recruitment based on merit
In both Sweden and Denmark, attaining an office came to depend more and more heavily on formal qualifications over the course of the eighteenth century. At the University of Copenhagen a university examination in law was introduced in 1736; at the same time it was decided that no official was in future to be awarded the office of judge without a formal law degree. The establishment of the law school was intended to improve officials’ skills and their knowledge of Danish law (Løgstrup, 1991, pp. 504–513; Iilsø 1985, pp. 111–121). Before this, Danish officials of noble origin had often studied law, languages, philosophy or theology at other universities in Europe; others had received practical training in the office of a civil servant, where they had started out copying letters, keeping books and so on and in the process had learned the administrative procedures, the formal language used in the documents, and the laws. After 1736, new legal graduates, mainly of bourgeois origin, gradually came to occupy the offices in the administration,
thereby contributing to the professionalisation of the civil service. As the eighteenth century progressed, jurists gradually took over the bureaucratic offices, starting in the central administration in Copenhagen and spreading slowly to most regional and local higher public offices. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, recruitment to the royal nominations in the administration was fundamentally meritocratic: the conditions for building a state governed by the rule of law had been improved. In general, the official requirement for the Danish royal servant’s formal knowledge of the law had been strengthened, and in 1821 a new law made a law degree a prerequisite for attaining a wide range of state offices (Gøbel 2000, pp. 133–157; Feldbæk, 2000, pp. 318–325; P. U. Knudsen, 2001; Pedersen 1998, pp. 374-376).

While in Denmark the monopoly of the nobles over the highest positions in the royal administration had been abolished in 1660 with the introduction of absolutism, the nobles of Sweden continued to have their privilege and priority in gaining offices in the eighteenth century, even though this came to be articulated in discussions in the public debate, where it was argued that the state and the populace should have the right to the most qualified officials regardless of descent. In Sweden a new university course and examination in legal proceedings – the rättergångsexamen – was established in 1749 for those wishing to apply for jobs in the court system. This was introduced specifically to make sure that good formal qualifications rather than kinship or connections could constitute the basis for recruitment. The following year, a similar academic examination – the civilexamen – was created for other officials. In both programmes, the study of history, practical philosophy, theology, Latin and law formed part of the course. In 1756 a new report – “Tjänstebetänkandet” – was presented by parliament, specifying the requirements for civil servants’ competence before they could be appointed to administrative office or advance in their career. Formal qualifications and seniority were emphasised (Cavallin, 2003, pp. 83–87, 163–165; Rothstein, 1998).

All in all, from the end of the seventeenth century and during the eighteenth century the bureaucratic framework was gradually changed decisively in both Denmark and Sweden. A fairly large number of specifications for the civil servants’ qualification were introduced and the regulation and level of control of the individual servants became more detailed. The administration’s competence, diligence, legal knowledge and allegiance to the king and state came into focus in a more direct way than was seen previously. The need for the civil servants to be serving the state and king rather than private self-interest was central. Recruitment came to be based primarily on formal qualification and on merit. These changes in the system of appointment as well
as the legal basis for the officials is very likely to have laid the grounds for a tighter definition and specification of professional responsibilities and duties in office, and for the development of a more general notion of the ethics of public office. The administration in both Denmark and Sweden saw the establishment of several of the components of the Weberian bureaucracy: the hierarchy of offices was defined and clear, civil servants were subject to stricter discipline and control, and candidates were in large part selected on the basis of formal qualifications. The combination of these administrative and legal reforms and restrictions might very well have been a basis for and in fact a key element in what we today can see have developed into strong state institutions of high quality.

Corruption in Denmark, Norway and Sweden in the nineteenth century

Even though the state administration of Denmark, Norway and Sweden had by the beginning of the nineteenth century been substantially reorganised, professionalised and also bureaucratisation in line with many of the ideals described by Weber, corruption did still occur.

In both contemporary and historical perspectives, empirical study of a shady crime such as corruption is notoriously difficult to undertake. Even defining the concept of corruption prompts debate among researchers and in the international organisations working in this field. The definition used in the present study is the widely-accepted one: the misuse of entrusted power for private gain. Within this definition, acts such as bribery, embezzlement, forgery and fraud are considered to be instances of corruption (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). In the historical sources of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term corruption is seldom used; when it is, it tends to have a general meaning, such as malpractice in relation to the administration. The concept of corruption as used in the present study therefore refers to these specific criminal activities as perceived and described in the laws actually used at the certain time in history.

The case of corruption in Denmark

For Denmark, an initial broad study was undertaken of cases of maladministration by civil servants in the secular part of the royal administration between 1736 and 1936. The aim was to trace exactly what the officials had to do to be suspended from office, and to investigate the variety of crimes in which the civil servants engaged (Frisk Jensen, 2013). It has not been, and will never be, possible systematically to trace those historical cases of corruption that were not discovered at the time. A basic starting-point for this initial study, therefore, was to single out cases where public officials
were relieved of their responsibilities on grounds of misconduct of malfeasance. This was done through a systematic reading of the short biographies of the several thousand men who graduated with a degree in law from the University of Copenhagen in the two hundred years between 1736 and 1936 (Falk-Jensen & Hjorth-Nielsen, 1957, vol. I–IV). Since these graduates were those who primarily occupied offices in the public administration from the end of the eighteenth century, these biographies provided an insight into corruption, as defined above, in the time period of roughly 1790 to 1936. The information gained from this search was combined with, second, a reading of the published registers in the national archives of Denmark (Rigsarkivet), and especially the surveys of material in the archive concerning the financial and legal administration. A third source of information was the several sets of published employment records of the civilian, secular part of the administration. These records hold information on the employment of civil servants, which offices they held, and in many cases also when and why their employment ended: information such as death while still in office, retirement, or suspension due to misconduct. The reading of these records was further complemented by, fourth, a systematic study of the official announcements by the administration published in Collegia-Tidende from 1798 to 1847, and in Departementsstidende from 1848. These studies combined provide valuable insight into corrupt practices among civil servants in Denmark between 1790 and 1936.

For the years 1736 to 1936, the first investigation identified 203 cases where public officials in the civil secular part of the administration were discharged on grounds of misconduct of malfeasance. For the years 1800 to 1866, the initial search for civil servants discharged on grounds of misconduct of malfeasance was combined with a detailed empirical study of a large number of court cases for the discharged civil servants (Frisk Jensen, 2013). These studies show that during the years 1811 to 1830, the number of officials convicted of and sentenced for corrupt crimes escalated. Whether this escalation represents an actual increase in the number of civil servants engaged in corruption or a closer monitoring of the civil servants by the Crown resulting in more

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6 The indexes of Collegialtidende and Departementsstidende for the years between 1800 and 1866 have been examined. In the index, all notes on “Bestalling casseret” (Office discarded) have been checked.
cases put on trial is hard to determine exactly. In 1824 though, the situation was directly characterised as an “epidemic of embezzlements” in the Danish administration, indicating that the increase in the number of cases of malfeasance was real and was perceived at the time as very serious.\footnote{Mentioned as "den herskende kassemangel Epidemi" in a letter from Supreme Court Justice Michael Lange to the top official in the Danish Chancellery, President F. J. Kaas, 13 May 1824 (Rigsarkivet, Privatarkiver F. J. Kaas, no. 5825).} This development was followed by a decrease in misconduct among civil servants, so that by 1860 Denmark had reached a very low level of corruption: a level that has remained fairly constant since.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Denmark was involved in the Napoleonic wars as an ally of France. The costs of the war were immense. In 1813 the Danish state went bankrupt, and the country was hit by a severe economic crisis lasting until about 1830. It was during this period that there were a larger number of prosecutions of civil servants in the regional and local administration in particular, but also in the central administration, for crimes relating to corruption. Closer study of the court cases shows that the vast majority of cases were about embezzlement. Civil servants were affected by the economic crises: inflation eroded their salaries, while declining activity in the community meant lower wages for the officials, who were paid in part with the sportler, which was a fee based on commission. In this situation, several officials began to “borrow” the money they held in their office. Until 1840, royal officials were permitted to borrow from the public funds so long as the money was repaid when the audit took place. If the loan was not repaid, this practice was considered a crime of corruption (Frisk Jensen 2013; Frisk Jensen 2009).

Detailed study of the archival material for the court cases where civil servants were put on trial for corruption in the years after 1811 reveals the seriousness of this crime. Corruption was not acceptable. The absolute king, his advisers and the court of law were fairly consistent in their condemnation of the misconduct of the civil servants, despite their generally poor economic situation. Another central result of the empirical study was that not many cases of bribery were found. It appears that by the beginning of the nineteenth century bribery was no longer a common form of corruption in the Danish bureaucracy and did not form a deep-rooted part of the administrative culture.

As mentioned earlier, with the loss of Norway in 1814, Denmark experienced the greatest loss of territory in its history. The future of the state had been at stake during the Napoleonic war. Danish absolutism was under threat as other European countries experienced
revolutions and the introduction of liberal constitutions, as was the case in Norway in May 1814. The French Revolution was also still remembered. Danish intellectuals were increasingly aware of liberalism and democracy, and the majority of the population were experiencing economic hard times. Frederik VI (r. 1808–1839) and his closest advisers quite rightly feared a revolution, and corruption among the king’s civil servants was likely perceived as a threat to absolutist rule. The increase in administrative and economic misconduct among civil servants presumably drew the Crown’s attention as something that needed to be addressed and punished if the king was to maintain absolute power. This is most likely why the Danish Crown was so fairly consistent in its condemnation of corruption among civil servants. When corruption was discovered, the civil servant was usually suspended while his case was investigated thoroughly before he was put on trial. If this had not been the case and the king had given the official a pardon – as an absolute king could – and thereby accepted the misconduct, this could have led to an administrative culture in which embezzlement was an ingrained part. Instead, quite the opposite took place. This could well be one of the important elements in the combating of corruption at this point in the history of Denmark’s administration (Frisk Jensen, 2013).

The cases of corruption in Norway and Sweden
Denmark, as an ally of Napoleon, was on the losing side in the war, and in January 1814 Norway was ceded to Sweden. In Norway, however, this peace treaty was not immediately accepted. Norway declared itself to be an independent constitutional monarchy, and an assembly drafted a new and fairly democratic constitution in Eidsvoll in May 1814. This led Sweden to invade Norway in the summer of 1814, and an agreement was made to the effect that the king of Sweden also became king of Norway and the two countries conjoined in a tenuous union. In return, Norway could keep its new constitution and a kind of self-governance. In Oslo, a Norwegian parliament was elected and a central government was established on the basis of the already existing bureaucratic structures. Many of the civil servants from the former rule under the Danish king kept their positions, although they were now responsible to the Norwegian parliament, the Storting. In several respects the new Norwegian state after 1814 retained the bureaucratic framework, the laws, and the standards for the ethics of office of the former Danish absolute rule (Frydenlund 2015; Storsveen, 2015).

The Norwegian historian Ola Teige has conducted a study of corruption among Norwegian civil servants after 1814 (Teige, 2014). Teige finds a fairly large number of cases where
Norwegian civil servants engaged in embezzlement after 1814 – a situation similar to Denmark. The Norwegian parliament though did not view the cases of embezzlement quite as severely as the Danish administration. Civil servants could be dismissed if they could not pay back monies from public funds that they had borrowed, but they were rarely put on trial and sent to prison as their Danish colleagues had been. According to Teige’s analysis, members of parliament formed part of the same social group as civil servants and apparently the two groups felt a certain mutual loyalty. In the years of uncertainty, change and economic hard times after 1814 there was a certain understanding of the economic problems of civil servants and even for maladministration on their part. Not until the early 1840s did the Norwegian government enact stricter control of the administration. Teige concludes that because of this situation a drop in the level of bureaucratic corruption in Norway came some years later than in Denmark, so that it was not until the 1870s that the level of corruption in Norway matched that in Denmark. While the drop in levels of corruption in Denmark had begun prior to the Danish constitution and the abolition of absolutism in 1849, in Norway it came into place a bit later. But it did come – thanks to a strong bureaucracy with a well-educated corps of civil servants, a powerful constitutional monarchy and state, a free press, economic growth, and the political will to combat corruption (Teige, 2014; Teige 2015; Rian 2014).

Swedish political scientists Teorell and Bo Rothstein (2015a, 2015b) have detected a development in Sweden very similar to those in Denmark and Norway during the nineteenth century. In their search for the explanation of “Getting to Sweden” and their study of how and why Sweden managed to make the historical transition from a corrupt patrimonial bureaucracy to a Weberian non-corrupt professionalised administration, they have compiled and presented new empirical material. Through studying court hearings in the long period from 1720 to 1850, they found 237 cases of malfeasance among public officials in Sweden. The cases were dealt with in the Lower Judicial Audit Office (Nedre Justititerevisionen) and the Supreme Court (Högsta Domstolen). Looking just at the nineteenth-century material, Teorell and Rothstein have found an increase in the number of cases between 1820 and 1840 and subsequently a steep drop towards 1850. This study of court hearings was supplemented by statistics from the Swedish National Bureau of Statistics since 1857 and additionally by statistics on criminal court cases from the Swedish courts and the High Court, documenting how the number of court cases of corruption stayed low from around the middle of the nineteenth century (Teorell & Rothstein, 2015).

Yet another study of the Swedish bureaucracy in the beginning of the nineteenth-century by political scientist Andreas Bågenholm confirms how Weberian-style bureaucratization
was well on its way then. By studying the comprehensive reports from a parliamentary committee in 1822, he explored what at the time was identified as the problems of the Swedish administrative system. The reports and several other central sources studied by Bågenholm pointed to their identification of a need for more efficient, coherent, organized and unified public administration, but they do not describe a genuine dysfunctional system or the civil servants as systematically corrupt. The reports also contained recommendations on how to improve the efficiency of the Swedish public administration, and they were practically all in line with Weberian bureaucratization (Bågenholm, 2017).

These studies of administrative dysfunction in Denmark, Norway and Sweden in the nineteenth century are surprisingly similar in their findings, indicating that corruption in the administration of the Scandinavian states were addressed either before or within the span of a few decades in the mid-nineteenth century. This – in all likelihood – documents a fairly high degree of already established bureaucratic capacity and efficiency at this point in history. As already demonstrated, many of the features of the Weberian bureaucracy were in place by the beginning of the nineteenth century, but not all. Looking at the case of Denmark in the first half of the nineteenth century, it is possible to see how the Danish bureaucracy was increasingly being adjusted and reconstructed along the lines of Weber’s ideals, and how this might have worked to minimise corruption.

**Legal and administrative reforms in the Danish administration**

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a new system for monitoring civil servants was set up in Denmark. In 1803 an initiative was taken to strengthen control over the local and regional administration and so to ensure that practice was conducted according to the law and the instructions given to civil servants. One of the deputies in the Danish chancellery was to travel around the provinces to inspect the administration every year. It was the deputy’s job to review the organisation of the administration, how books were kept and so on, and to guide the local or regional official if errors or omissions were found. This system continued until its suspension in 1807 because of the war. In 1819, these regular inspections were reinstated as the Danish chancellery had received a large number of complaints made by the general public to the king about the conduct of civil servants. In the years from 1819 to 1830, several top officials from the central administration and judges from the Supreme Court were sent to the different regions of the country to audit the administration and especially the officials’ account books (Jørgensen, 1969; Frisk
Jensen 2013). This increased scrutiny by the Crown meant that the likelihood of maladministration being discovered increased considerably; many of the fraudulent activities of civil servants described above were discovered during these official inspection trips. In line with the determination of the Danish Crown not to tolerate maladministration, the officials were prosecuted. In many cases they were given life imprisonment. The scrutiny was probably an important element in changing the situation. It was a clear move towards strict discipline and control of public officials, which helped to establish and strengthen the elements of Weberian bureaucracy in the Danish administration.

Setting up new procedures for accounting and audits
One of the conclusions that emerges clearly from the reports made by the delegates who travelled through the regions of Denmark to monitor the administration was that the standard procedures for checking, audits, and accounting in general were out of date, badly organised, and inefficient. In 1824 this led the king to appoint a committee of top officials to prepare a new set of laws to regulate the state’s accounting procedures. A prominent member of this committee, Jonas Collin, explained how he had seen the slow and inefficient audit as the main reason for the many instances of embezzlement by civil servants at the beginning of the century. He argued that the state needed to centralise the financial administration so that expenditures and revenue were no longer divided between various departments, which hampered, even prevented a complete view of the state budget. The commission worked on this complicated and difficult task until 1835, and came up with a recommendation leading to the adoption of a new law for the administration of public accounts in 1841. Also in the year 1835, the state budget was published for the first time. Publicity and transparency in the administration were definitely not characteristic features of Danish absolute rule, and the news of the size of the government debt caused great concern, if not consternation, in the country (Olsen, 2000, pp. 417–424). The new law of 1 January 1841 introduced a more detailed keeping of accounts, separate account books for separate offices, and a considerable intensification of audits. The law also abolished civil servants’ right to borrow from public funds, and stipulated a clear demarcation between civil servants’ private and public funds. The old right of officials to borrow from public funds so long as the debt could be repaid when the accounts were checked had proved very hard for civil servants to exercise responsibly in hard economic times. The inefficiency of the audits before 1841 had provided an environment in which the officials’ debts could escalate to a point where the chance of repayment no longer existed (Frisk Jensen, 2013).
The adoption of new penal codes

By 1840, a new general penal code was introduced in Denmark which included a law on misconduct in office. The crimes of malfeasance in the forms of embezzlement, fraud and forgery were described in far greater detail than in the old laws of the late seventeenth century, and new standards for meting out penalties were introduced. In the old penal code, the punishment for embezzlement had been fixed, which gave the civil servant no incentive to stop committing corrupt acts: the penalty would be the same no matter whether a small or a large amount had been stolen from the public funds. The penal code of 1840 was drafted by one of the most competent senior officials in Danish jurisprudence of the time, A. S. Ørsted. In addition to a long career both in the central administration and as a judge in the courts of Copenhagen, he had also been one of the deputies inspecting the provincial administration several times in the 1820s. Ørsted also had a thorough knowledge of the criminal laws of malfeasance in other European countries, which inspired his draft of the penal code (Tamm 1989, pp. 158–161, 184–190; Frisk Jensen, 2013). The 1840 penal code was changed again in 1866 to include a separate chapter specifying the forms of misconduct by public servants in even greater detail. This alteration also introduced the general principle of no punishment without law.

Salaries and pensions for civil servants

During several of the trials at which civil servants in Denmark were convicted of corruption after 1810, the salary system and the insufficiency of their wages were mentioned in the defence. By the early nineteenth century, a fixed salary was in place for royal appointments in the central administration, the Supreme Court, and the higher regional courts. However, officials in the Danish regional and local administration were primarily paid in the form of a small fixed amount combined with a percentage of service and legal fees called sportler (Feldbæk, 2000, pp. 326-331). The system of sportler also existed in Sweden from at least the middle of the seventeenth century, but in the nineteenth century it came to be more and more regulated and standardized (Sundell, 2014). Even though the service and legal fees also in Denmark were regulated officially in the beginning of the nineteenth century, they continued to represent a potential source of extra income for civil servants. By the 1850s, salaries had been raised and civil servants in general had become a part of the well-to-do middle class. In 1861, a new law on the salary system for the state’s civil service was passed which abolished the fee system and granted fixed salaries to all categories of officials. In the previous century, many of the civil servants’ official duties had been added and positions had been
accumulated in an attempt to provide civil servants with a decent wage; by the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, the majority of civil servants were full-time employees (Knudsen, 2000, pp. 542–544; Knudsen, P. U. 2001, pp. 381–386). In the terminology of Weber, the office came to be the sole occupation of the official, and to constitute a full career.

In the early years of the absolute monarchy, pensions for civil servants had been considered an act of royal grace for which the civil servants could apply in connection with their resignation. In an attempt to solve the persistent problem of financing pensions, a public pension system for deserving elderly officials was established in 1712. The funds to finance the pension system were, however, insufficient throughout most of the eighteenth century. From the late eighteenth century it became fairly standard practice for officials on their resignation to be given a pension amounting to around two-thirds of the amount of their previous salary. Subsequently the constitution of 1849 stated the right of civil servants to receive a retirement pension at the age of seventy, or in case of illness. The detailed rules of the retirement reform were specified further in an act in 1851, which also stated that the right to a pension could be lost in the event of misconduct in office (Frisk Jensen, 2013, pp. 230–232).

This set of legal and administrative reforms introduced during the first fifty to sixty years of the nineteenth century, in combination with the determination of the Danish kings and their senior advisers to condemn misconduct among civil servants, probably made it more worthwhile to work according to the rules and draw a pension than to try to increase one’s income by corrupt means. This probably contributed to a new – and fairly non-corrupt – overall setting for the Danish administration by the middle of the century. At this point in time in the process of state building in Denmark, several additional central elements in modernising the state framework were introduced. The liberal constitution of 1849 changed the absolute rule to a constitutional monarchy, established a bicameral parliament, separated the powers, and granted the freedoms of press, religion, and association. The king in person maintained a central role in the government until 1901, when cabinet responsibility was introduced. By 1915, women and servants were enfranchised.

The administrative and legal reforms of the first half of the nineteenth century supplemented an institutional structure and framework for the bureaucracy that was already to a large extent – according to the standards of the time – based on law and justice and had already undergone a professionalisation. Offices had been constructed so that the power exercised by the civil servants was only a loan from the Crown; the possibility of dismissal was ever present. The royal officers had sworn an oath to the king, and with his oath received a specification of their
duties in office. The loyalty demanded by the kings from their civil servants had led to a clearer
demarcation between their interests as private citizens and their duties in office. Special attention
had been given to the establishment of the judicial institutions, and qualifications such as a formal
training in law came to be a prerequisite for attaining office. Malfeasance in the form of bribery,
fraud and embezzlement had been criminalised. In the larger perspective, an increasingly Weberian
type of bureaucracy had been unfolding in the state of Denmark ever since 1660.

The Scandinavian states, Lutheranism and the Weberian bureaucracy of the nineteenth
century
At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Danish–Norwegian and Swedish state
administrations had many of the central features of an efficient working bureaucracy as described
by Max Weber. Bureaucratic corruption had not been eliminated, however. The detailed study
undertaken of civil servants convicted and sentenced for corrupt crimes in Denmark, Norway and
Sweden has provided an insight into some specific problems with respect to the level of control of
the civil servants. In Denmark, corruption – mainly in the form of embezzlement – was still possible
at this point because of the lack of a clear demarcation between civil servants’ private and public
finances, the absence of fixed wages and full-time work, and the lack of systematic control over the
civil servants’ accounts. As the Danish administration moved towards an even more Weberian
model with the reforms of the first half of the nineteenth century, these shortcomings in the
bureaucratic structure were addressed and remedied. This is the point at which, between 1819 and
1830, control over civil servants’ accounts and practices of administration was strengthened with
the introduction of additional inspections by deputies from the central administration. By 1841 a
new practice for keeping accounts had been introduced along with systematic and more efficient
audits, and the formal separation of private and public accounts for civil servants had been adopted.
The new penal code of 1840 renewed and updated the criminal laws of malfeasance and corruption,
which helped to specify what was acceptable and legal behaviour in office. Around 1850, salaries
for civil servants in general had improved to the point where their wages were sufficiently generous
to make corruption less likely. By 1861, fixed salaries were in place for personnel throughout the
administration, and in 1849 a pension was guaranteed to civil servants retiring owing to age or
illness. This complex of legal and administrative reforms, passed largely between 1840 and 1866,
brought the administration of the Danish state a great deal closer to the ideals described by Weber at
the beginning of the twentieth century with the bureaucracy of Prussia as the very model. It is an
important part of the explanation of how the level of corruption in Denmark came to be low even by the mid-nineteenth century (Frisk Jensen, 2013). Studies undertaken on Sweden and Norway show a clear parallel with Denmark in this regard during the nineteenth century (Rothstein, 2011, pp. 111-119; Teige, 2014). Even though the timing might have varied, a number of legal and administrative reforms of largely the same kind as seen in Denmark were also introduced in both Norway and Sweden. None of this happened overnight, so to say, but it did largely come into place between 1800 and 1880, bringing the Scandinavian states further towards a modern Weberian bureaucracy. In a greater Wester European context, the Scandinavian countries were not at all alone in launching administrative reforms according to Weber’s ideal types before or during the nineteenth century. In fact, after the French revolution several of the German states saw new and extensive bureaucratic reforms as part of a process of modernization which was also the case in France and England (Bernsee, 2013). In a wider aspect of the development in the early modern Scandinavian countries, the importance of the nationalized religion of the Lutheran Scandinavian states, the Lutheran doctrines and practises as a moral backbone for both the state and the population in general cannot be overlooked. In combination with the gradual development of Weberian bureaucracy in the century’s after roughly 1650 this has most likely been central in curbing the level of corruption in both Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

A study such as this one of state building in Scandinavia could certainly have been expanded by empirical analysis of additional elements in the state building processes that are common to the Scandinavian countries: the tradition of rural self-government in Denmark in spite of the absolute rule, the agrarian and egalitarian nature of the country, the long-standing monarchical traditions, the Lutheran-based political culture and values, and a strong link between church and state. Another central element in limiting corruption is most likely connected to the relatively high levels of literacy for both men and women in the Scandinavian countries at a comparatively early point in time. As Bo Rothstein and Eric M. Uslaner have concluded in their study on the roots of corruption there is a strong statistical link between levels of education in 1870 and levels of corruption today (Rothstein & Uslaner 2016). Societies that achieved a high literacy level in the nineteenth century or earlier are to a great extent those that have succeeded in fighting contemporary corruption.

Conclusion

The Scandinavian states of today are highly well-functioning bureaucracies with some of the lowest levels of corruption in the world. This historical study of the building of the Danish–Norwegian and Swedish states has demonstrated how bureaucracies has been established since the Middle Ages and
were gradually expanded in the years from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century towards what might be seen as a Weberian model of bureaucracy. The construction of the state administration evolved over several centuries as part of the establishment of strong state powers based on law and order and in the context of a Lutheran Church which exerted a certain influence and thus constituted a moral backbone for both the individual civil servant and the rule as a whole. In this process, elements such as the rule of law and the creation of civil servants loyal to the king and state were of particular relevance. These conditions were established gradually as part of the process of political centralisation and state building, in the Danish case especially after the introduction of absolutism in 1660. Initially these conditions developed primarily to consolidate the supremacy and power of the absolute monarchy. For this to be possible, the absolute kings required loyal civil servants to exercise their will as head of both state and Lutheran state church. In the course of the eighteenth century, a conscious endeavour by the country’s rulers came to create a reliable and dedicated administration that gradually transformed the administration towards the Weberian ideals of the bureaucracy and to a great extent minimised the use of bribery in the administration during the eighteenth century. By the middle of the nineteenth century the combination of this model of bureaucracy, a number of legal reforms that changed civil servants’ working conditions and the strong will of the Danish rule to ensure that maladministration was minimised proved effective in curbing the level of corruption in the state administration. This established a low base level for bureaucratic corruption that has on the whole been maintained since the mid-nineteenth century. The fairly low level of corruption in the administration of state, in combination with the rule of law and a well-functioning bureaucracy, is very likely to have been a fundamental prerequisite for the establishment of the early Scandinavian welfare states in the nineteenth century. The low level of corruption has created the basis for the structure of legitimacy for and trust in the administration, and has contributed to the population’s willingness to pay taxes on the level that is necessary for financing the welfare state.

References


