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The problem with early-modern petitions: safety valve or powder keg?

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ABSTRACT

In this article the author critically discusses the notion of petitions as a peaceful way of interaction between rulers and subjects in early-modern Europe. Specifically, he targets the idea of petitions as a safety valve. According to this idea, petitions enabled subjects to vent displeasure to the authorities; by doing so they grew less restive and more content with the strictly hierarchical and unequal structures of early-modern Europe. The author questions how often petitions really performed this function, firstly by considering the limited social background of the petitioners and then the many rules and hindrances petitioners faced. These rules were, thirdly, put in place because petitions could galvanize and mobilize people into political action. Fourthly, previous research has underestimated the complicated link between petitioning and legitimacy. It is not at all certain that petitions increased the legitimacy of the political system. Clearly, the complexity of the issue warrants new approaches. The empirical evidence for this article mainly comes from early-modern Sweden, Denmark-Norway, England and the Holy Roman Empire. Consequently, this article weds petition research usually separated by language barriers, providing a fuller European perspective where Northern Europe is fully integrated into the discussion.

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Introduction

Petitions were one of the means premodern subjects from all over the world could use to approach their rulers with requests. As previous research has noted, petition channels stood open to anyone, rich or poor, male or female.¹ To provide some examples, workers in ancient Egypt filed complaints through petitions, as did their latter-day equivalents in the UK's royal dockyards of the 1700s and 1800s. In eighteenth-century Japan, daimyos and shoguns placed petition boxes in towns and castles to welcome complaints and suggestions from anyone, while Ottoman subjects directed petitions to their rulers on such topics as taxes and education.² Indeed, petitions still exist today and are protected by constitutional law in the EU and the United States. The British and German parliaments continuously receive petitions.³

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Focusing on early-modern Europe, petitions were a staple of the political culture. Historians often describe them as a peaceful tool for interaction between subjects and their rulers.⁴ As David Underdown puts it, writing about early-modern England, petitions constituted a peaceful alternative for conflict resolution. If the petition failed, however, an escalation of the conflict into violence could follow.⁵

My aim with this article is to question the validity of this notion of petitions as inclusive and peaceful. I do this by critically examining the concept of petitions as a safety valve (the concept presented in the next section) that eased tensions and pressure in early-modern society. I consider four factors. Most petitioners were, firstly, not from the unruly lower masses and, secondly, the authorities regulated petition channels in order to control the type of issues which people could petition about. Thirdly, they did so not only to ease the workload petitions caused, but also because petitioning could just as well create or exacerbate unrest. Finally and fourthly, it is not so simple as to say that petitioning, even successful petitioning, led to increased harmony between subjects and ruler. We need to consider people's experiences of the petitioning process.

When discussing these issues, I take a macro European perspective to facilitate a discussion of general issues with petitions, without getting bogged down in particular contexts. I draw on my own research as well as a number of studies on European petitions. A common claim about petition research is that it is scarce. This lacuna has been highlighted for, for example, Sweden,⁶ Denmark,⁷ Germany,⁸ the Netherlands,⁹ Spain¹⁰ and the UK.¹¹ Looking across the entire European continent, Peter Blickle wrote in 1997 that 'the political significance of *petitiones* and petitions has never yet been adequately acknowledged.'¹² To be sure, there was a time not too long ago that this claim was correct. Now, however, the field is expanding and maturing and new research on petitions is being produced regularly.¹³ There is an opportunity for researchers to make comparisons, even comparative work, across regional and state borders to develop their analytical understanding of petitions, as has been shown by, for example, Dan Carpenter.¹⁴ I hope this article further illustrates this point.

I mainly deal with petitions from Sweden, Denmark-Norway, England and the Holy Roman Empire, submitted to the central organs of the state between 1500 and 1800, although I occasionally venture outside of these frames (especially on pp. 16–17). The use of Swedish and Danish-Norwegian petitions is of particular relevance. Firstly, because these two kingdoms experienced very different constitutional trajectories in the eighteenth century. Between 1719 and 1772, the Swedish Diet often functioned as the de facto government and a de facto Supreme Court. Denmark-Norway, on the other hand, was ruled by an absolute king and the peasants of Denmark lived in serfdom. The two states, thus, present two extremes on the constitutional scale but still display striking similarities when considering petitions. Secondly, Scandinavian historical research is not often considered by people researching petitions, to a large degree because of the language barrier. This article, on the other hand, provides a European perspective that properly includes northern Europe.

In this article, I first present the safety valve concept. I then, in turn, discuss the four factors presented earlier, before ending with a brief conclusion. I use the term petition throughout the article. This is an analytical term: in Sweden and Germany, for example, the term used was *supplik* and *supplikation*. I make no distinction between informal and

formal petitions, nor is there a focus on issues of a certain kind or magnitude. I mostly focus on petitions submitted to the central organs of the state because including locally submitted petitions would have required a much longer text. I, nonetheless, contend that my arguments are applicable to all petitions.

Petition channels as safety valves

When one reads previous research on petitions one encounters the concept of the safety valve. This concept is sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, sometimes loosely and sometimes never defined. For example, Swedish historian Pär Frohnert argues that the petition 'or its equivalents existed in most societies as built-in safety valves'.¹⁵ Likewise Lex Heerma van Voss uses the analogy.¹⁶ Although it is unclear what is meant, there are two likely interpretations of the safety valve. Firstly, safety valves were consciously created or used in a way that legitimized the regime without really altering the circumstances that caused dissent. People could use them to 'vent' their displeasure with the political system or society that otherwise would have resulted in uprisings or unrest. As Steinar Supphellen puts it when writing about Norwegian petitions: 'Discontent could resolve itself peacefully, the feeling of powerlessness and being trapped inside a system could be reduced.'¹⁷

Untroublesome acts of disobedience or protest are also what Max Gluckman meant when he described the safety valve purpose of, for example, rituals of role reversal between men and women in certain societies.¹⁸ The ritual releases stress and tension while at the same time confirming the proper order by mocking it. This idea about the therapeutic role of contained disorder has also been put forth by Peter Burke when discussing the functions of the premodern European carnivals.¹⁹ If we apply the same idea to petitions, it would mean that by allowing people a window for complaint and by allowing them a greater freedom of expression than they otherwise enjoyed, society at large could continue with business as usual without having to worry about unrest.

Although not using the term safety valve, Winfried Schulze's idea of *Verrichtligung* (juridification) should also be mentioned here. According to Schulze, the reaction to revolts and unrest in the sixteenth century led rulers to embark on a juridification process where they vastly expanded court and appellate systems to allow subjects (mainly peasants) the possibility to resolve local conflicts (mainly with landlords) in a peaceful manner. Although the supposed juridification process did not 'domesticate' the peasants, it contained these conflicts within non-violent bounds and mostly localized, thus preventing peasants from joining together to fight for universal rights instead of local ones.²⁰ As part of a juridification process, then, petitions helped society to resolve disputes through negotiation and bargaining, not through disorder and bloodshed.

Secondly, one could simply imagine a second definition of the safety valve as a channel through which people could alter wrongs or remedy misfortunes. In this sense, petitions not only defused dissatisfaction, but also facilitated a positive view on the state's role in people's lives. James Shaw, who has studied Florentine trade petitions sent to Cosimo de' Medici (1537–69), describes how people petitioned the Florentine prince in order to solve problems that the regular judiciary could not.²¹ In this way, the Prince could resolve thorny issues that left the courts uncertain.

Regardless, both interpretations of the safety valve imply that interaction through petitions decreased discontent in situations that could have turned violent in one way or the other. In line with this thinking, Andreas Würglér has argued that petitions submitted to the rulers of Hesse-Kassel possibly contributed to the landgraviate's relative calm after 1525.²² Thomas Robisheaux has argued that Wolfgang II (1568–1610), ruler in the small principality of Hohenlohe in the southwest of the Holy Roman Empire, could interact with his subjects through petitions to ensure calm and cooperation when taxation increased. The peasants sought, and were to some degree granted, personal exemptions that strengthened the bonds between them and their prince, who could be perceived as redistributing resources according to some sort of moral agenda.²³

Examining a perhaps more unusual situation, David Martin Luebke shows how peasants in East Frisia submitted petitions to their prince as a manipulative strategy in unstable times. During a rebellion, the peasantry petitioned their ruler to present grievances and in order to excuse themselves from taxation, while still professing, even emphasizing, their allegiance in the conventionally obsequious idiom of petitions. This tactical petitioning helped ease tensions in irregular circumstances. Later, they used their rhetorical professions of loyalty in the petitions to clear themselves of charges of dissent. Had they not clearly stated their loyalty to the prince?²⁴ This very active political use of petitions, Luebke argues, ultimately maintained stable relations in the active phase of a rebellion and in the aftermath.

Lastly, I argue that petitions submitted to the Swedish Diet in the 1720s contributed to calming a turbulent domestic situation. Following the death of Karl XII (1697–1718), the Estates became the *de facto* rulers of Sweden until 1772, a period referred to as the *Age of Liberty*. The new regime had to legitimize itself, all the more so because the country was in a perilous state after two decades of ultimately unsuccessful warfare in the Great Northern War (1700–21). An inability to pay its debts and a reduction of the state budget and army meant that many state-affiliated households, primarily officer households, were left with unpaid salaries and outlays, cut salaries or without state support for their sustenance. Many of them turned to the Diet in the 1720s with petitions about these issues and many of them were accepted for further examination. Together with a swathe of other measures, such as trying to get the economy back on track, organizing oath ceremonies, and auditing potentially corrupt public servants, it is likely the reception and treatment of petitions pacified a Swedish society caught in a transition or 'peace crisis', as referred to by Petri Karonen.²⁵

These different examples seem to show us that there can be a connection between the use of petitions and the resolution of potentially volatile situations. The role of petitions described in Luebke's article is perhaps unusual, but all examples highlight how petitions are thought to have been used in commonly volatile situations: increased taxation, revolt and war-weariness. Yet, these examples have to be weighed against the factors mitigating the potential of petitions to function as a safety valve.

The social background of the petitioners

The first of these factors is the limited social background of the petitioners. If petitions functioned as safety valves they must have catered to the lower strata of society to a degree that compensated for the socioeconomically and politically inferior position of

the masses. Besides palace and military coups, it was them and their latent rebelliousness that kept sovereigns awake at night throughout the early-modern era. Of course people from other strata can also be found in the crowds.²⁶ Yet, it was the lower masses who were needed to populate revolts and riots. It was their violent and rebellious actions that early-modern rulers likened to fires, plagues and other blights that were spreading across the commonwealth, infecting society with unrest.²⁷ Their appearance in petition channels are, thus, important if we want to consider the political and societal function of petitions.

However, there is a tendency to put too much emphasis on the span of the social background of the petitioners without recognizing how skewed this span was towards the upper strata of society. For example, in a 1997 article, Beat Kümin and Andreas Würglér argue that it 'is important to note that they [petitions] came from people of all social standings, including the very poor and the very powerful'.²⁸ Discussing a petition circulated during the English Civil War (1642–51), the authors contend that as the petition contained close to 30,000 signatures, the conception of the petition 'must have involved a campaign reaching very far down the social scale'.²⁹ They do not, however, discuss the proportion of different social groups.

In terms of systematic empirical studies, Mark Knights has analysed the social background of the 16,000 petitioners who signed London's 1680 'Monster' petition. He finds that many signatures came not only from radical intellectuals and affluent merchants, but also from artisans, particularly artisans involved in cloth manufacturing.³⁰ In Sweden, the number of peasant petitioners who turned to the Diet during the Age of Liberty increased over time and comprised a fifth of all petitions in the early 1770s.³¹ The Danish King also received more peasant petitions as the 1700s progressed.³² We thus find substantial evidence of participation of the lower strata in the petition channels.

Yet, the relative frequency of lower-strata petitioners has to be considered low. The lion's share of the petitions submitted to the Swedish Diet in the Age of Liberty stemmed from the middle and upper strata, mostly small-town corporations (artisans and merchants), officers and civil servants. People from groups that constituted a mere few percentages of the Swedish population wrote 85% or more of the petitions. The results are similar when looking at petitions to the Royal Chancery in Denmark-Norway in the eighteenth century: at least 40% to 50% of the petitions stemmed from civil servants and burghers (artisans and merchants, some journeymen and apprentices).³³

Looking at the petitions from a gender perspective, the results are similar. Despite constituting half the population, only between 5% to 20% of the petitioners were women. In Denmark-Norway a large share of these belonged to the middle and upper strata of society; in Sweden most of them did. More women petitioned the Danish King than the Swedish Diet, mostly because of the different jurisdictions and constitutions of the two states. The Danish king received many petitions from women on standard administrative matters where the petition process was highly routinized.³⁴ Again, that we can even find women among the petitioners reminds us of the egalitarian potential of the petition channel. Nonetheless, far from half of the petitions stemmed from women and of those who did, most came from above the restless lower classes.

One possible counter-argument is that both of these studies reflect a development over time. For some reason, the number of petitioners from society's lower strata was higher before the eighteenth century and towards the end of the same century. Until there is evidence of such a development, however, it is more feasible that the large masses of subjects did not materialize in these channels. Another counter-argument would be that people of a certain status could use the channel for their clients and network members of lower rank, but at least in the Swedish example this rarely happened. People sought resources for themselves.³⁵

A third counter-argument would be that this article is mainly focused on petitions submitted to the central organs of the state, whereas most early-modern subjects submitted their petitions to the local authorities. Perhaps people from the lower rungs of society simply did not need to petition their regents because petitions submitted locally carried out the safety valve function. However, we cannot assume that locally submitted petitions were more representative. Research on locally submitted petitions in Sweden show that although the frequency of lower strata petitioners was higher, most of the petitions still originated from people from the middle and upper strata of society.³⁶ Moreover, although most petitions concerned personal or local issues, this did not mean that people turned to the local arenas in order to solve them. On the contrary, reaching outside of the locality with a petition was a way to bypass biased and vested structures as, for example, Cecilia Nubola and Bertrand Forclaz argue based on studies of early-modern Italian petitions.³⁷ Lastly, as we will see in the next two sections, many petitioners sincerely believed that turning to the king was the best course of action. Therefore, it is unclear if petitions submitted locally really could be argued to have carried out a more effective safety valve function.

Fourthly, one could of course say that petitions were a safety valve for people belonging to the middle and upper strata, i.e., burghers, civil servants, officers and nobility, but these people already had privileged access to several other arenas and channels as a result of their status. I would argue that the term 'safety valve' loses its analytical value if we apply it to groups that were clearly favoured by the system, except in extreme cases such as Sweden in the 1720s.

We also need to ask ourselves to what degree the opinions of the lower strata were of any interest to the authorities. We do know that petitions played a key role in early-modern legislative and administrative reforms and that the authorities were interested in the information petitions relayed. Beginning in the Holy Roman Empire, petitions have been shown to play a part in the legislation process in the principality of Hesse-Kassel, the margraviate of Baden-Durlach, and the town of Leonberg. In Bavaria petitions played a key role in the formation of the central government. Inundated with petitions, the authorities had to regulate and systemize their work routines in order to cope.³⁸ We see the same patterns in Denmark-Norway. Petitions could be used as information sources, to enact or correct reforms; they also affected state formation by forcing the Danish king to transfer jurisdiction to his local and regional civil servants.³⁹

We also know that these law-changing and administration-altering petitions not only came from the middle and upper strata of society. This is shown by Claus Bjørn in his study of peasant petitions complaining about *hoveri*, the corvée and tithes in 1768–69. When the Danish authorities in 1768 issued a decree that encouraged proposals and complaints about Danish agriculture, the peasantry took the authorities aback with the

sheer number of petitions. Consequently, the authorities issued a new decree in 1769 that further regulated the *corvée*. The peasantry did perhaps not determine the regulations' exact content, but they certainly made it an issue in the first place, and ensured the speed with which the Danish authorities moved to issue the new decree.⁴⁰

At the same time, this potential of petitions to accomplish reform has to be put into context. That reforms could involve, and even be instigated by, petitions from the lower strata is one thing, but how often did this happen and concerning what types of reform? If we are to go by the systematic results on the social background of the petitioners presented earlier, most petitions concerning reform most likely came from the middle and upper strata as it was they who petitioned the most. There is also the question of to what extent we can draw comparisons between a small margraviate like Baden-Durlach and a fully fledged early-modern bureaucratic state like Denmark-Norway. There is clearly a need for systematic and comparative efforts on this issue.

There is also evidence which reveals a disinterest in lower-strata petitions from the powers that be. For example, the Danish petition channel was not more inclusive in order to compensate for the lack of a central, representative assembly. To some extent, the authorities even discouraged the lower strata from petitioning. Immediately after 1660, when the Danish King became absolute ruler and after which he and his successors stopped summoning the Estates, the peasantry in Denmark inundated the king with petitions. However, immediate attempts to regulate the petition channel and strangle access to it succeeded.⁴¹ According to Claus Bjørn, Danish authorities and the upper echelons of Danish society in the long eighteenth century viewed the peasantry with disdain and suspicion; even though the peasants were of course formally allowed to submit petitions, any complaints were considered open challenges to the ruling order. For example, a complaint from peasants in 1696 led to an investigation not of the complaint, but of the origin of the grievances. Who among the peasants who had goaded the others was more relevant than the peasants' circumstances.⁴²

This lack of interest was not unique to Denmark-Norway. In Age of Liberty Sweden, the Council of the Realm were mildly interested in sending a judicial representative, the so-called *Justitiekanslern*, the Chancellor of Justice, to the rural areas in order to gather information and create tangible change. Reading the councillors' reflections on the matter, the real purpose of the journeys of the Chancellor of Justice around the realm was to pacify the peasants by showing up, a sign that their king cared for their well-being.⁴³ The same pattern can be found in the dispatch of extraordinary judiciary commissions in early-modern Sweden at times of unrest who, among other things, received petitions concerning malfeasance.⁴⁴ Suffice it to say, the information the authorities wanted to see relayed through petitions was supposed to come from certain parts of society. Insight into how things worked at the grass-roots level was limited, and to some extent not wanted. That this disregard was limited to early-modern Sweden and Denmark-Norway is not likely.

Thus, given the low amount of interaction between rulers and their lower strata subjects through petitions, and given that it is questionable whether or not rulers were interested in information from the lower strata, how can we make a claim that petitions functioned as a safety valve? Those most likely to grow disaffected do not appear to have used this channel to a degree that compensated for their inferior position. Of course, the benchmark for social inclusivity has to be other contemporary channels,

where petitions certainly seem to have been more inclusive than, for example, representative assemblies. Frequency is, furthermore, not the sole way to measure the degree to which petitions could have functioned as a safety valve. It is, however, a good measure. And according to this yardstick, we know that the same minorities that were favoured by the early-modern socioeconomic and political structures in general wrote the vast majority of the petitions as well. Thus, the relatively narrow social width of the petitioners has to be taken into account when we consider if petitions functioned as a safety valve.

Rules and hindrances

A final counterargument towards the findings of the last section would be that it is not important how many petitions people from the lower strata wrote; it is important that they wrote and what they wrote about. Because anyone could write a petition, petitions potentially allowed authors and recipients to share information that would not have come to the authorities' attention in a more restricted setting. But for unfiltered information exchanges to occur, for petitions to function as safety valves, petitions had to allow subjects some freedom of expression. In other words, they needed to function a bit like carnivals did. Carnivals allowed people a wide berth to express themselves through jest and joke, which in turn allegedly allowed dissent and unrest in society to evaporate. Consequently, carnivals functioned as safety valves under the condition that many rules stopped applying without any repercussions.⁴⁵

But petitions were no carnivals. Authorities regulated petition channels all over early-modern Europe, in some instances quite heavily, and people could not express themselves more freely in petitions than elsewhere. Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia (1713–40) created rules for, among other things, what counted as a petition, and a 1719 decree in Schleswig-Holstein decided that a petition could only contain one request at a time.⁴⁶ In Hesse-Kassel, a 1539 decree stipulated that petitioners had to procure signatures from local civil servants in order to petition the prince. Certain types of requests required additional procedures and signatures.⁴⁷

In Denmark-Norway after 1632, petitions were supposed to be directed first towards the regional administration, who would examine the request and then either refer it to the king or deal with the petition themselves.⁴⁸ In the Swedish Age of Liberty Diet, people had to follow certain rules, were only allowed to petition about a limited set of issues, and under certain circumstances had to follow strict procedures. Breaking these provisions could result in heavy fines. Collectively signed petitions, unless pertaining to a corporate body's field of activity, as well as unsubstantiated accusations of misconduct levelled against a servant of the crown, resulted in severe punishment. These contingencies stopped people from bringing justified complaints to the authorities.⁴⁹

Thus, rules made it harder for subjects to reach the central authorities, which was precisely the point.⁵⁰ The authorities attempted to cut down on the number of petitions they had to examine in order to have time for other matters. These efforts did not necessarily lead to a lessening of the number of petitions in the long run, but the authorities streamlined the issues of the petitions and screened those that broke the rules or challenged the social order.

There are of course many examples of princes who disregarded regulations they themselves had issued in order to receive petitions directly from their subjects. Princes saw it as just and proper to engage with their subjects this way, and also realized the propagandistic values of being seen as diligent and attentive rulers. Receiving petitions delivered by hand had the potential to increase their legitimacy.⁵¹ A famous example of someone who viewed receiving petitions as important is Louis IX of France (1226–70). He would meet his subjects after Mass, in his Paris Garden, or lean against an oak tree in Vincennes together with his advisors. Some 400 years later, Louis XIV of France (1643–1715) would portray himself as an accessible father figure to his people in the mould of his predecessor.⁵² The Bavarian prince-elector Maximilian I (1597–1651) also thought it important to receive petitions delivered outside of the formal system, while Frederick the Great of Prussia (1740–86) received petitions from his subjects on his travels. Aware of his approachability, petitioners would stand next to a tree visible from his palace chambers, and ‘wave their petitions at him’.⁵³ None of these examples, however, comes close to Joseph II of the Holy Roman Empire (1765–90). He is renowned – at least among historians – for his travels around his realms, where he received countless petitions. On one occasion, he arranged for a sackful of petitions to be hung from his carriage for people to see. According to Derek Beales, Joseph II thought it important that people could circumvent the local administration as he often did not trust his local servants. Receiving petitions also helped him cultivate his image as the people’s emperor.⁵⁴

However, Joseph II is also famous for a reason; he is somewhat of an exception. It is important to remember that as states grew larger and more complex, the chances for direct interaction between subjects and rulers shrunk. To put it in the words of Renate Blicke:

Documents handed personally to the sovereign represent but a fraction of all the petitions and complaints addressed to rulers in the early modern period. This part of the petition system must be viewed as one small piece in the greater tableau of political practice, a stylized remnant of the otherwise largely suppressed possibilities of a physical encounter between rulers and ruled.⁵⁵

Similarly, J. H. Elliot describes petitions submitted to early-modern Spanish monarchs as remnants from an earlier age ‘of much closer personal relations between a king and his subjects’.⁵⁶

Consequently, even if rulers wanted to interact with their subjects, their chances to do so decreased over time. These face-to-face meetings became the exception, not the rule. Most petitions travelled to sovereigns in the formalized channels and these were, as we have seen, mostly used by the middle and upper strata of society and guarded by rules and procedure. Seeing as face-to-face meetings were an exception, their safety valve potential was consequentially exceptionally limited.

Of course, many petitioners disregarded the rules. As David Martin Luebke puts it: ‘It is no exaggeration to say that eighteenth-century judicial systems were vulnerable to creative appropriation, even manipulation, “from below.”’⁵⁷ In Denmark-Norway, people refused to comply with legislation. Norwegian peasants especially found it essential to travel to Copenhagen to meet the king instead of contacting the local

authorities. New and repeated ordinances litter the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reminding people of the obligations and rules associated with petitioning the king.⁵⁸ The Swedish authorities had to resort to the same type of reiteration of regulation in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁵⁹

Yet, we must remember that for most people, breaking the rules resulted in hardship. The rules existed for a reason. As Luebke puts it, the power of petitions should not be exaggerated, as many were rejected or sent to lower instances for further examination.⁶⁰ And even if people broke the rules successfully, it certainly did not mean that they managed to evade punishment. Renate Blickle has found about 20 occasions between 1525 and the late 1700s where Bavarian peasants collectively travelled to their prince in order to submit their complaints in person. The prince always took the petition, as was his duty if he wanted to keep his image as a caring father figure, but the people most often did not get what they wanted, and those who took part in the journey were arrested.⁶¹ The same can be found when looking at delegations to the Habsburg emperors who often faced imprisonment if they went to Vienna.⁶² The Bavarian and Habsburg authorities did not view these actions kindly.

Even harsher consequences faced the peasants in villages subordinate to the prince-bishop of Basle. In 1726 they started protesting against a plethora of ordinances and the like that the authorities sought to codify. In 1730, the members of several of these communities met on a field to elect representatives tasked with pleading their case at their prince-bishop's court or to the Holy Roman Emperor. This they did for several years, not without success. Then, in 1740, the local authorities branded their behaviour as insurrectionary and had the delegates arrested and executed.⁶³ Of course, several factors caused their downfall, but people who dared to question the formal societal hierarchy treaded a thin line between what was allowed and the insurrectionary. Had their actions been uncontroversial the peasant delegates would have survived.

On the other hand, the focus of this article lies in petitions to the central arenas and most petitioners turned to local authorities. And, as we saw on page 3, this fits very well with the juridification theory which posits that authorities localized and tamed conflict through judicial arenas. According to this line of thought, it doesn't matter that people's chances of petitioning and meeting their prince decreased drastically – because this was precisely the point. They were supposed to channel their political energy into the local legal arenas instead. However, petitions seem a poor fit with the juridification theory – for two reasons.

A first problem can be found in Renate Blickle's and Luebke's research. In her study of fifteenth-century Bavarian conflicts between peasants and lords, Blickle has shown how the peasantry, even in cases where petitions served as means for peaceful conflict resolution, distinguished between regular legal arenas and the prince's patriarchal capacity.⁶⁴ Even if the local courts and the prince both technically were used as legal channels, the peasants clearly viewed petitioning the prince as something qualitatively different because of his patriarchal guardianship of their well-being and safety. Thus, it is not likely that local judicial courts pacified the peasantry and kept their conflicts local if they did not view them as satisfactory replacements for their regent.

This distinction presented a problem when the courts were perceived not only as suboptimal, but even illegitimate. In his study of restive peasants from Hauenstein, present south-west Germany, Luebke argues that some peasants perceived legal arenas

as obstructive, biased and expensive. These peasants sought to avoid them and combined local protests and violence with no less than 12 delegations dispatched to the Habsburg emperor between 1700 and 1750, armed with petitions and proxies. They shunned the legal arenas in order to interact directly with the emperor in his patriarchal capacity. Moreover, they treated peasants who did use the legal forums with hostility, as people who acted wrongly and deceitfully. Thus, as Luebke argues: 'The effect of juridification heightened frictions within the peasantry to the point of violence.' Luebke, furthermore, argues that peasant animosity to the regular judicial apparatus seems to have been a common occurrence, not isolated to Hauenstein.⁶⁵

A second and similar problem with the juridification theory is that it posits a connection between the use of legitimate channels and a decrease in illegitimate actions or resistance. There are several telling examples of seventeenth-century Finnish conflicts between peasants and landlords. These conflicts revolved around taxation, the legal status of the peasantry, and the encroachment of peasant property by local manor owners. It is clear that the peasantry utilized their entire arsenal of actions, both legitimate options as well as subversive ones: they turned to the legal courts; the government; the Diet; local protest; refusal to pay taxes; strikes; and even violence. The crown, in its turn, did not hesitate to use military means and punishment, often executing those perceived as leaders. It also seems that one local conflict, the conflict between the peasants and a manor owner in Elimäki parish, southern Finland, served to mobilize the general populace. The conflict and its leaders became galvanizing symbols for the Finnish peasantry in their struggle against noble encroachment, and was cited as an example of the injustice of the manor owners.⁶⁶

Similar correlation between unrest and petitions can be found elsewhere. The mutinies that rocked the British Navy in 1797 contained a strong element of petitioning, whereby the rebellious sailors chose to communicate their grievances in this legal manner while at the same time pursuing their highly illegal actions.⁶⁷ Likewise, the very tense situation in the Netherlands in the 1780s saw so-called Patriot societies 'holding meetings, producing leaflets and newspapers, filing petitions, and improving their military capacity in weekly training sessions', all at once. After the societies gained control of large parts of the country, the intervention of the Prussian Army was required to put a stop to a development spiralling out of control.⁶⁸

In all of these cases social unrest continued in tandem with the use of legal courts and petitions. The use of these legitimate channels stopped neither the peasants nor the crown from using violence. Local conflicts could even antagonize larger parts of the peasantry, as in Finland. It is then a key question of to what extent the juridification theory can be applied to petitioning. If it can, when does it stop applying? And how likely is it that locally submitted petitions could function as a safety valve if peasants viewed the local courts as limited or even as adversaries? From their perspective, petitions to the central authorities remained the most viable option and, as we saw earlier, the opportunities to petition the sovereign grew increasingly limited.

To conclude, it is clear that across the continent, petitions were very much the subject of regulation, oversight and punishment. Of course, the formal rules could certainly be bypassed, but the individual cost for each and every petitioner who broke the rules could still be very high. While it is significant that people continued to petition the powers that be in an illegitimate manner or about illegitimate issues, the benefits

provided by petitions in terms of less turmoil have to be thought of in this context. One could argue that these rules provided early-modern society with a greater stability, which is likely true. However, that was repression, not a safety valve, at work. Lastly, we saw that these rules needed to be repressive to some degree because petitioning and political mobilization often went hand in hand, which brings us to the next section.

Agency and petitioning

The essence of the safety valve allegory and the idea that petitions were peaceful means for interaction is the idea that people became less unruly when listened to. People wrote petitions and by doing so they calmed down. Yet, I would argue that people's political agency could just as well increase if they were listened to, not least because petitions functioned as means for mobilization.

We first turn to Sweden. Alexander Jonsson has examined petitions submitted to the county governor of Västernorrland in the north of Sweden in 1685, 1698, 1716 and 1735. The first year lay in Karl XI's reign (1660–1697), the next two in Karl XII's reign (1697–1718). All three fall under the period known as *Karolinska enväldet*, a period when Swedish kings ruled more or less unopposed by the Diet and the Council of the Realm. This absolutist rule grew more severe under Karl XII, who exposed the realm to two decades of prolonged warfare, quashing attempts to summon the Diet in order to seek the Estates' council in a moment of crisis. The year 1735 on the other hand lies in the Age of Liberty, a period where, as we know, the Estates held most of the power and where the Diet was summoned at least every third year. Each time, the peasantry was allowed to submit *gravamina*.⁶⁹ Moreover, the Swedish realm was by that time recovering well from the war. Following the safety valve logic, the amount of submitted petitions to the county governor would have been larger in 1716 than in 1735 considering that (a), there was less to complain about in 1735; and (b) there were more central arenas to turn to than in 1716. Yet, the exact opposite is the case. The county governor received twice as many petitions in 1735 as he did in 1716.⁷⁰ The sum of interaction increased *despite* better times and more channels.

Similar findings come from Denmark-Norway in 1768, when the authorities were taken aback by the sheer amount of peasant petitions (see pp. 6–7). According to Bjørn, the state's subsequent interest in agricultural reform in the second half of the eighteenth century led many Danish peasants – feeling the proverbial wind in their sails – to act more determinedly for their rights.⁷¹ The impetus for their increased activity not only stemmed from themselves; it also stemmed from a perceived benevolence on the part of the state. More evidence that access could increase petitioning by itself comes from Bohemia in 1679 and 1680. During these years the Habsburg emperor was inundated by petitions from enserfed peasants but, again, not because their conditions had worsened. Rather, the emperor had evacuated his court from Vienna to Prague and was, thus, more accessible than before. Additionally, he had issued legislation in favour of the enserfed peasants who viewed him as favourable to their position.⁷² Both instances show that access did not appease the peasants but mobilized them.

Petitions could also be used to recruit and mobilize people into coordinated action. Drawing on evidence from anti-slavery petitions in the ante-bellum United States and petitions on the Protestant faith in sixteenth-century Nîmes, France, Daniel Carpenter

shows how petitions were used not only to mobilize, but also to recruit and increase support. Moreover, their quality as recruitment tools was independent of whether or not the petition was not granted.⁷³ Proof of the ability of petitions to mobilize people also comes from sixteenth-century England. In 1525, protest meetings were held in Lavenham and Sudbury, in the southeast of England. The sole intention of these meetings seems to have been to discuss unpopular taxes and to compile a petition which they would sign and deliver to the king. Nothing came of it as two local counts deftly disarmed the situation, even securing a pardon from the king.⁷⁴ Regardless, these episodes, as well as the Danish, Swiss, German, Austrian and Finnish examples in sections 1 and 2, shows that the possibility to petition the king mobilized people.⁷⁵ And not only one or two people: petitions could galvanize large groups and turn into powder kegs.

That the authorities were well aware of this problem is illustrated by the rules and hindrances, but also by the conundrum, scribes presented. Illiterate subjects who wanted to petition could turn to people in their social network, to manuals for letter writing or to scribes who sold their services. It is therefore not surprising to find such scribes in every corner of early-modern Europe. In certain regions, such as Sweden, England and Florence, they were treated with acceptance under certain conditions.⁷⁶

Other early-modern European rulers were considerably less comfortable about scribes. In Prussia, legislation issued in 1787 prescribed prison sentences for scribes and others found to be inciting unruliness and unrest.⁷⁷ In Norway, where peasants were known to be occasionally rebellious, the authorities feared that peasants would use petitions to political ends. Part of this potentially dangerous scenario were the dreaded freelancing scribes and others who they thought roamed the countryside, inciting the peasantry. Thus, seventeenth-century legislation stipulated that all petitions had to be written by certain civil servants, *sorenskrivare*, in rural areas and by appointed scribes in towns. In Denmark, where surveillance of peasants was much easier thanks to the manor system, these restrictions did not exist.⁷⁸ Rulers, thus, recognized that petitions could cause unrest and required scrutiny: their attitude towards scribes reveals it. If petitions merely mollified unrest, the measures in Norway and Prussia would not have been necessary.

If nothing else, the inhabitants of later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe only needed to turn to England for proof of the explosive potential of petitions. There, the English Parliament had employed petitions to force Charles I (1625–49) to redress grievances and amend legislation against his will in 1628. During the Civil War in the 1640s, still humble and praising unity, petitions of political character – printed, circulated and signed – became tools for propaganda and political mobilization. According to David Zaret, they formed a constitutive part of the new public sphere.⁷⁹ In the end, Charles I was dethroned and executed. Before the French Revolution and the execution of Louis XVI (1774–91), also preceded by petitions demanding his dethronement, the shadow of Charles I's destiny loomed over monarchs as a terrifying example.⁸⁰ The role of petitions in these political developments hardly went unnoticed.⁸¹ The lesson was not lost on the English anyway, and sure enough, regulations for petitions followed the restoration of the monarchy in 1661. The new rules stipulated that petitions could not concern the Church or legislation, unless certain judges or civil servants approved them beforehand, and there was a cap on

the number of signatures and the number of people who could submit the petition in person.⁸²

A possible counterargument against the mobilizing power of petitions could be their rhetoric. All across early-modern Europe the authors of petitions employed a rhetoric of obsequiousness. Failure to follow the correct submissive style could result in an unsuccessful petition.⁸³ In different ways, K. J. Kesselring and R. A. Houston have argued that this symbolism and rhetoric had a power of its own. To quote R. A. Houston:

Language uses people as much as they use language ... someone who employs deferential forms becomes deferential; by the same token, an expression of paternalism makes it harder ... to treat an inferior in ways that are other than fatherly.

Thus, the use of the customary obsequious language of petitions shows 'an implicit acceptance of social, economic and political inequality' with the hope of making this inequality work to the petitioners' benefit.⁸⁴

However, there are three things to consider. Firstly, explicit acts of disobedience could be couched in this language. As seen in Luebke's study (p. 4), the peasants of East Frisia revolted against and remained loyal to their prince at the same time by way of this style. Neither did the deferential rhetoric stop people from being outright audacious in their petitions.⁸⁵ Secondly, it is important to consider James C. Scott's distinction between 'public transcripts' and 'hidden transcripts'. The public transcript refers to how people behaved and displayed proper deference to the authorities when needed. The hidden transcript refers to how people acted differently, even insubordinately, whenever the authorities looked away.⁸⁶ The language employed in petitions constitute public transcript and we risk mistaking that public transcript for truth because it is the only transcript we get to know through a petition.

Thirdly, it is important not to view humility and deference as qualities equivalent to passivity and inaction; they could just as well grant a person a feeling of righteousness and strength. As Patricia Higgins has noted, the women who petitioned the English Parliament in the mid-1600s used deferential rhetoric and claimed their sex to be the weaker of the two. But at the same time, they claimed to possess legal and political rights of equal stature to that of men. Their actions caused an uproar: women were not supposed to have access to Parliament.⁸⁷

There are also the thousands of Russians who marched on the Winter Palace in St Petersburg on 9 January 1905. They had written a deferential petition that they wanted to deliver in person to their Little Father, the Tsar, asking for better conditions for workers. They were led by the priest Georgy Gapon, singing religious hymns. Political agitation had been forbidden by Gapon. Yet, the Russian military fired their weapons at them, killing 130 people according to official estimates.⁸⁸ The deferential tone did not stop the petitioners from performing a clearly provocative action, nor did it afford them mercy. If anything, the righteousness of deference put the petitioners on a collision course with the Russian authorities. For this, and for the previous two reasons, I think the connection between deferential language and acceptance of certain structures is more complex than it seems at first glance.

Thus, petitions caused a lot of trouble for early-modern rulers. Petitions were risky, and could explode like powder kegs. That they most often did not is because checks

were in place and it was when these checks failed that people took the chance. Neither did the language seem to have stopped people from subversive actions. Of course, rulers and representative assemblies seem to have enjoyed basking in the glow of granting their attention to people's petitions. At the same time, many of them seem to have been acutely aware of the dangerous potential of petitions. If we want to continue to contend that petitions had a safety valve function in early-modern society, we must reconcile that property with the galvanizing and mobilizing properties of petitions.

Bias and legitimacy

The fourth factor that needs to be considered is the issue of bias and legitimacy in an early-modern setting. In the safety valve concept lies the crucial assumption that the examination and granting of requests led to an increased legitimacy of the societal and political system. If the petitioning process did not achieve this, it hardly made early-modern subjects less disaffected. This idea of legitimacy through process was perhaps most succinctly described by political thinker Jean Bodin (1530–96):

When subjects see their prince giving judgment in person, they are by this mere fact already half satisfied, even though he does not thereupon grant their requests. They reflect that at any rate the king has attended to their petition, heard their complaints, and taken pains to judge the matter. It is extraordinary how uplifted and delighted subjects are to be seen, heard, and attended to by a prince even of very modest virtues, or of some mild degree of amiability.⁸⁹

The line of Bodin's thinking is clear in the quoted passage. A subject is confronted by the fact that the ruler is examining and considering the request, face to face with the petitioner. The subject is thus satisfied even if the sovereign does not grant the petition because the subject is made aware of the fact that there is a fair, virtuous even, system at work.

I would, however, argue that the issue of petitioning and legitimacy was more complicated than described by Bodin. Firstly, early-modern Europe was a system of privileges where petitioners often found themselves caught up in a zero-sum game. The granting of, for example, the use of a common land for one party often entailed that other's access was denied. The granting of a promotion for one person to a captaincy meant that the other lieutenants were snubbed. To be sure, not all petitions concerned individual or corporate privileges but most did, as seen in Denmark-Norway or Sweden at least.⁹⁰ So even if a decision increased one person's satisfaction about the current system, there was an apparent risk that someone else's faith in the system would take a knock. And this is precisely what happened in the Dutch town of Alkmaar around New Year's Eve in 1609, at the time beset by party and religious strife since 1607. The town militia submitted a petition to the burgomasters who refused to listen, most likely satisfying the townspeople opposed to the petition. They did, however, anger the militiamen to the extent that they occupied the town for eight weeks.⁹¹

Bjørn provides the second counter argument. According to him, the Danish peasantry did not trust the court system, but nonetheless used it with resolve. The Danish peasantry were convinced that the middle and upper strata of society were conspiring against them, and that the formal institutions primarily catered to these people. A strong sense of

righteousness, however, encouraged the peasantry to use all means necessary, including the formal channels, but their use of these channels did not affect their outlook on society.⁹² They still viewed themselves as underdogs fighting against a system whose structures they paradoxically did not hesitate to use if the opportunity arose.

Although it is not clear how much of Bjørn's thesis is solidly grounded in empirical findings and how much of it is a hypothesis, it has bearing on the concept of the safety valve. The safety valve presupposes a causal relationship between the use of society's legitimate channels and satisfaction about societal structures. The impact of mentalities, bias and ideology on how the petitioning process is perceived are not considered. It does not automatically follow that an eighteenth-century peasant with biases against the system is likely to view the system as more legitimate just because he successfully used it. And if his bias remained, why would he be less likely to express discontent, be unruly or revolt?

But how does one go about measuring early-modern petitioners' level of contentment with the system? According to David Beetham, a necessary condition for classifying something as legitimate is that there is a

legal validity of the acquisition and exercise of power; there is the justifiability of the rules governing a power relationship in terms of the beliefs and values current in the given society; there is evidence derived from actions expressive of it.⁹³

The last condition is key: an absence of unrest is not conclusive proof of a political system's legitimacy. The lack of serious revolts in eighteenth-century Sweden, Denmark-

Norway or Hesse-Kassel do not suffice as proof. Absence of unrest might as well stem from repression, resignation, fear of retaliation or a lack of access. Although there are some, unscripted explicit declarations of support for the political system in the early-modern era are hard to come by. If not least because the people in authority keenly avoided any chance for the populace to voice their opinions unscripted, lest they be ready to face the risk of disapproval. Yet, the issue of legitimacy is key.

This problem has received attention from researchers studying modern petitions. Douglas Madsen makes a similar observation to Bjørn in his study of data collected in 1967 about Indian citizens who petitioned the authorities. People who were successful in their interaction with the state experienced an increase in the belief in their own ability but did not alter their views on the state's ability. Unsuccessful people experienced a small drop in their belief in their own abilities and a drastic drop in their belief in the state's abilities.⁹⁴ This interaction provided little or no gain for the Indian authorities' legitimacy. As shown by Tobias Escher and Ulrich Riehm, two thirds of the people who petitioned the German Bundestag did not find that the experience strengthened their 'faith in the political system', although up to three quarters said they would be willing to petition again.⁹⁵ Together, these studies show that petitions could very well have a limited legitimizing effect, no effect at all, or even delegitimize the system.

On the other hand, Christopher Carman has shown that there is a strong correlation between how the petition process is perceived and the amount of system trust it generates among petitioners. Studying petitions to the Scottish Parliament and using the concept of 'procedural justice', Carman argues that the outcome of the petition is

less important than if people think their petition has been dealt with fairly and transparently.⁹⁶ Furthermore, Escher and Riehm, as well as Catherine Bochel, who has studied petitions to the Welsh and Scottish parliaments, contend that people can be satisfied not only by positive outcomes, but can also have other goals with their petitions. For example, receiving attention by parliament or its subcommittees can be satisfactory enough.⁹⁷ In different ways, these findings echo Bodin's claim: a fair process and being listened to is of great value to people and for the system's legitimacy.

As shown in this section, however, the connection between legitimacy, bias and petitioning is far from as simple as described by Bodin. At the same time, it would be foolhardy to disregard proof of a completely opposite bias where people perceived the king as incapable of wrongdoing, and all errors stemming from evil or incompetent advisors.⁹⁸ We cannot, however, simply assume that petitions strengthened the legitimacy of the political system. We need to seek ways of finding sturdier evidence that petitions eased tensions if we wish to contend that petitions functioned as a safety valve.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to question the idea that petitions functioned as a safety valve by taking a European perspective on the issue. Petitions are often seen as a peaceful and system-preserving means for communication between ruler and subject. In other words, petitions are thought to have been a safety valve.

However, petitions were primarily used by the middle and upper strata of society and were regulated. Thus, people from the lower masses did not petition much and consequently did not 'vent' to an extent that compensated for their inferior position. Additionally, they were hindered from petitioning about issues seen as contentious and subversive. Those who persisted faced punishment. When these checks failed, petitions had the potential to agitate, mobilize and rally people around causes. Rulers around Europe knew this and took administrative and legal measures, not only aimed at curbing the number of petitions, but also to keep society in check. The subversive potential of the petition had to be suppressed, lest it turn into a powder keg. But even if petitioners got what they wanted, it is uncertain if they viewed the system as more legitimate as a result. As suggested by both Bodin and modern petition research, this seems to have depended on whether or not people perceived the petition process as fair.

If we want to argue that interaction through petitions was peaceful or that they carried out a safety valve function, we need to consider the issues raised in this article. At the same time, I do not think it is fruitful for the field of petition research to be divided into a dichotomy between peaceful petitioning and subversive petitioning. The relationship between petitioning, social order and social unrest is too complex for such a simplification and requires more analysis. We, therefore, need to wed the peaceful, the communicative, the oppressive, the deferential, the mobilizing, the subversive, and the psychological aspects of petitions into a common analytical framework.

Notes

1. See, for example, Neuhaus, "Supplikationen als landesgeschichtliche Quellen," 112–13; van Nierop, "Popular Participation in Politics," 284; Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, 22–3; Schmutge, "Female Petitioners in the Papal Penitentiary," 687; Blaine, "The Power of Petitions," 59–60; van Voss, "Introduction," 3–6; Würgler, "Voices from among the 'Silent Masses,'" 16; Luebke, "How to become a Loyalist," 354; Knights, "Participation and Representation," 40; Liliequist and Almbjör, "Early Modern Court Records and Petitions," 17; and Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan*, 31.
2. Roberts, "The Petition Box;" Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy*, chap. 8; van Voss, "Introduction;" Lunn and Day, "Deference and Defiance;" and Açıkgöz, "Approval and Disapproval of Textbooks."
3. Cornell University Law School, "First Amendment" (accessed April 1, 2016) https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment; EUR-Lex, "Charter of fundamental rights of the EU," <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT> (accessed February 26, 2015); UK Government and Parliament, "Petitions" (accessed November 13, 2012) <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/>; Deutscher Bundestag, "Petitionen" (accessed June 6, 2016) <http://epetitionen.bundestag.de>.
4. See, for example, Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, 102; Gustafsson, *Political Interaction in the Old Regime*, chap. 4; Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, 22–3; Fuhrmann, Kümin and Würgler, "Supplizierende Gemeinden," 269; Würgler, "Voices from among the 'Silent Masses,'" Nubola, "Supplications between Politics and Justice," 36; and Katajala, "Conclusions," 266–9.
5. Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion*, 107–8.
6. Lindblad, "Riksdagsbesvär och suppliker," 4; Frohnert, *Kronans skatter och bondens bröd*, 251; Gustafsson, *Political Interaction in the Old Regime*, 113; and Gustafsson, "Att draga till Malmö;" and Ling, *Konsten att försörja sig*, 40.
7. Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, 32.
8. Neuhaus, "Supplikationen als landesgeschichtliche Quellen," 114–16; Ulbricht, "Supplikationen als Ego-Dokumente," 149.
9. van Nierop, "Popular Participation in Politics," 284; van Nierop, "Private Interests, Public Policies," 34–6; and Oddens, "The Greatest Right of Them All," 635.
10. Corteguera, "Encuentros imaginados," 25.
11. Kümin and Würgler, "Petitions, Gravamina and the Early Modern State," 42–3; Whiting, "Some Women can Shift it Well Enough," 77–80; Hirst, "Making Contact" 27; Dodd, "Writing Wrongs," 217; and Dabhoiwala, "Writing Petitions in Early Modern England," 127.
12. Blickle, "Conclusions," 335.
13. For a few examples, see Miller, "Popular Petitioning and the Corn Laws;" Shaw, "Writing to the Prince;" Eibach and Cottier, "Popular Protest in Switzerland during the 1830s;" and Hinnemo, *Inför högsta instans*; Muller, "From Requete to Petition."
14. Carpenter, "Recruitment by Petition."
15. Frohnert, "Administration i Sverige under frihetstiden," 251.
16. van Voss, "Introduction," 4.
17. Steinar Supphellen, "Supplikken som institusjon," 185.
18. Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa*, chaps 4–5; also see Bakhtin, *Rabelais och skattets historia*.
19. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 199–203; also see Underdown, *Start of Play*, 21.
20. Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand*; Schulze, "Geben Aufruhr und Aufstand."
21. Shaw, "Writing to the Prince," 56–60.
22. Würgler, "Desideria und Landesordnungen," 203; and also see Neuhaus, "Supplikationen als landesgeschichtliche Quellen," 66.
23. Robisheaux, "Peasant Unrest and the Moral Economy;" and also see Cohn, *Creating the Florentine State*, chaps 7–8.

24. Luebke, "How to become a Loyalist," 3617.
25. Karonen, "Coping with Peace after a Debacle," 208–14; Almbjär, *The Voice of the People?* 221–2.
26. See, for example, Bercé, *Revolt and Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, chap. 3; Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion*; Boone and Prak, "Rulers, Patricians and Burghers;" Beik, *Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France*; and Berglund, *Massans Röst*.
27. See, for example, Schulze, "Geben Aufruhr und Aufstand," 261–4; Griesse, "Aufstandsprävention in der Frühen Neuzeit," 187–8, 208–9; Rönnqvist, "Smittande Oro?" 121–7.
28. Kümin and Würgler, "Petitions, Gravamina and the Early Modern State," 43.
29. Ibid., 50.
30. Mark Knight, "London's 'Monster' Petition of 1680," 60–3 especially; and also see Luebke, "Signatures and Political Culture."
31. Almbjär, *The Voice of the People?* 137, 249.
32. Bregnsbo, *Folk Skriver Til Kongen*, 96.
33. Frohnert, "Administration i Sverige under frihetstiden," 191–2; Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, 95–109, 240, 249; Almbjär, *The Voice of the People?* 137–50, 249.
34. Helgesen, "Supplikken som kvinnehistorisk kilde," 259–64; Gustafsson, "Islands administration på 1700-talet," 168–70; Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, 91–4, 104–9; Sandvik, "Politiske kvinner på 1700-tallet," 78–83; Almbjär, *The Voice of the People?* 233–6; Hinnemo, *Inför högsta instans*, chap. 2 as well as the research cited therein.
35. Almbjär, *The Voice of the People?* chap. 13.
36. Frohnert, "Administration i Sverige under frihetstiden," 253–5; Lerbom, *Mellan två riken*, 102–28; Jonsson, *De norrländska landshövdingarna*, 226–33; Gustafsson, "Att draga till Malmö," 89–93; Berglund, *Massans Röst*, 45–6; and Lindberg and Ling, "Spanska' citroner till salu," 14; Almbjär, *The Voice of the People?* 9–11.
37. Nubola, "Supplications between Politics and Justice," 53–6; Forclaz, "Local Conflicts and Political Authorities;" and also see Teuscher, "Threats from Above on Request from Below."
38. Kümin and Würgler, "Petitions, Gravamina and the Early Modern State," 55–6; Renate Blickle, "Laufen gen Hof;" Landwehr, *Policey Im Alltag*, 283–312; Landwehr, "'Normdurchsetzung' in der Frühen Neuzeit;" Holenstein, "Gute Policey" und lokale Gesellschaft.
39. Supphellen, "Supplikken Som Institusjon," 184–5; Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, 223–4; see also Sogner, *Aschehougs Norgeshistorie. Bd 6*, 235.
40. Bjørn, "De danske cahiers," 167–8.
41. Munck, *The Peasantry and the Early Absolute Monarchy in Denmark*, 59–63.
42. Bjørn, *Bonde, herremand, konge*, 23–35, 139–57.
43. Peterson, "'En god ämbetsman är bättre än en god lag,'" 318–21.
44. Lennersand, *Rättvisans och allmogens beskyddare*.
45. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, chap. 7.
46. Ulbricht, "Supplikationen als Ego-Dokumente," 154–5.
47. Neuhaus, "Supplikationen als landesgeschichtliche Quellen," 133–4; Fuhrmann, Kümin and Würgler, "Supplizierende Gemeinden," 307–8.
48. Supphellen, "Supplikken Som Institusjon," 156–7.
49. Almbjär, *The Voice of the People?* chap. 5.
50. See, for example, Miller, "Popular Petitioning;" Almbjär, *The Voice of the People?* 87–90, 97–100.
51. See, for example, Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, 203–14; Blickle, "Laufen gen Hof;" Holenstein, "Bittgesuche, Gesetze und Verwaltung," 346–8; Würgler, "Desideria und Landesordnungen," 192–5, 201–3; and Almbjär, *The Voice of the People?* 53.
52. Burke, *En kung blir till*, 51; Harding, *Medieval Law and the Foundations of the State*, 161–2; Gaposchkin, *The Making of Saint Louis*, 42–7.

53. Blickle, "Peasant Protest," 186; Luebke, "The Celebrated Case of the Millers," 402, 406; also see Neuhaus, "Supplizieren und Wassertrinken sind jedem gestattet," 479.
54. Beales, *In the Shadow of Maria Theresa*, 242, 246–51, 267–71, 338, 342, 361–2.
55. Blickle, "Peasant Protest," 186–7.
56. Elliott, *Imperial Spain*, 180–1.
57. Luebke, "The Celebrated Case of the Millers Arnold," 402.
58. Supphellen, "Supplikken som institusjon," 161–7; Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, 41–8.
59. Almbjör, *The Voice of the People?* 50.
60. Luebke, "The Celebrated Case of the Millers Arnold," 403–4.
61. Blickle, "Supplikationen und Demonstrationen," the Russian authorities similarly seem to have taken an intolerant attitude towards peasants trying to reach their ruler by way of petition. See Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar*.
62. Luebke, "Naïve Monarchism and Marian veneration," 78–9.
63. Bercé, *Revolt and Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 7; also see Björn, *Bonde, herremand, konge*, 27, 59–66.
64. Blickle, "Laufen gen Hof," 255–8.
65. Luebke, "Naïve Monarchism and Marian Veneration," especially 101–4, quote on p. 73; and also see Luebke, *His Majesty's Rebels*.
66. Katajala, "The Changing Face of Peasant Unrest," 167–84, also see 211–19.
67. Orth, "Voices from the Lower Deck."
68. Boone and Prak, "Rulers, Patricians and Burghers," 122.
69. *Gravamina* was a way for corporations who belonged to formally acknowledged Estates to submit grievances to the king in Sweden whenever the Diet convened.
70. Jonsson, *De Norrländska Landshövdingarna*, 226; also see Lennerstrand, *Rättvisans och allmogens beskyddare*, 240–68 for a similar example, albeit not about petitions.
71. Björn, *Bonde, herremand, konge*, 146–57, 164–9; Björn, "De danske cahiers."
72. Brakensiak, "Communication between Authorities and Subjects," 152.
73. See note 14; also see Leys, "Petitioning in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," 46; Loft, "Involving the Public," 20–1.
74. Hoyle, "Petitioning as Popular Politics," 380–1.
75. Also see Blickle, "Laufen gen Hof;" Blickle, "Supplikationen und Demonstrationen."
76. Myers, "Parliamentary Petitions in the Fifteenth Century," 387–8; Shaw, "Writing to the Prince," 65; Almbjör, *The Voice of the People?* 120–2.
77. Luebke, "The Celebrated Case of the Millers Arnold," 406.
78. Supphellen, "Supplikken som institusjon," 152–6; Björn, *Bonde, herremand, konge*, 27–35; and Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, 38–9.
79. Read Foster, "Petitions and the Petitions of Right;" Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion*, 138–9, 147, 154–6, 228–32; Zaret, "Petitions and the 'Invention' of Public Opinion."
80. For petitions demanding Louis XVI's abdication, see Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 187–8; Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris*, 302; for a similar point about the radicalization of agendas through cahiers, which are seen by some as petitions, see Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism*.
81. It would, in my opinion, be very interesting to examine how the developments of the mid-seventeenth century England affected other monarchs' opinions about petitions.
82. Taswell-Langmead, *English Constitutional History*, 745; Carpenter also views these regulations as a reaction to the political power of petitions in the preceding decades, Carpenter, "Recruitment by Petition," 714–15; Loft, "Involving the Public," 3–4, 10–13, 19–20.
83. See, for example, Myers, "Parliamentary Petitions in the Fifteenth Century," 386–8; Nicholls, "Addressing God as Ruler," 130–1; Zaret, "Petitions and the 'Invention' of Public Opinion," 1513–15; van Nierop, "Popular Participation in Politics," 288–9; Rigaudière, "Issues at Stake," 78; Corteguera, "Encuentros Imaginados," 34–5; Shaw, "Writing to the Prince," 63–4; Kubiska-Scharl and Pölzl, *Die Karrieren Des Wiener Hofpersonals*, 120–2.

84. Kesselring, *Mercy and Authority in the Tudor State*, 203–7; Houston, *Peasant Petitions*, 271–3.
85. Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion*, 117–18, 213–14; Almbjör, “Mauritz Stålhandskes behov av att klaga.”
86. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.
87. Higgins, “The Reactions of Women.”
88. Blom, *The Vertigo Years*, 122–3, 138–42.
89. Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, 133–4.
90. Bregnsbo, *Folk skriver til kongen*, chap. 10; Almbjör, *The Voice of the People?* chap. 13.
91. Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, 186–7.
92. Björn, *Bonde, herremand, konge*, 36–45, 50–9, 113–14.
93. Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 12–13.
94. Madsen, “Political Self-Efficacy Tested.”
95. Escher and Riehm, “Petitioning the German Bundestag,” 149–52.
96. Carman, “The Process Is the Reality.”
97. Bochel, “Different Dimensions of Voice and Influence,” 153–7; Escher and Riehm, “Petitioning the German Bundestag,” 142–6.
98. See, for example, Bercé, *Revolt and Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 28–32.

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