

Sweden's Media Landscape and Democratic Engagement: An Analytical Report

Introduction

Sweden is home to roughly 10.5 million people and is widely recognized as one of the most advanced democracies in the world. In 2024, Sweden ranked among the top countries on the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index with a score of 9.39, reflecting its strong institutions, robust rule of law, and political pluralism¹. Sweden has a long history of press freedom, being the first country to establish constitutional guarantees for freedom of the press with the 1766 Press Ordinance². Today, Sweden's media landscape is characterized by a mix of powerful public service media (such as Sveriges Television (SVT) and Sveriges Radio (SR)), commercial outlets, and digital platforms.

According to the famously known Reuters Institute's 2024 Digital News Report, Swedes favor more of traditional media such as television for news consumption, though digital platforms are growing rapidly, especially among younger demographics. SVT remains the most trusted and most used news brand in the country³. With nearly universal internet access, Sweden also has a high social media usage, with platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok gaining importance for political news, particularly among the youth⁴.

We will explore through this writing six critical dimensions that influence citizens' democratic engagement in Sweden: (I) the supply of political information, (II) the quality of news, (III) media concentration and diversity, (IV) fragmentation and polarization, (V) relativism in news and misinformation, and (VI) the degree of inequality in political knowledge. Drawing on scholarly literature, media agency reports, and international datasets, it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the Swedish media environment shapes democratic participation.

I. Supply of Political Information

Sweden's media system is distinguished by its accessibility, trustworthiness, and pluralism. The supply of political information is mainly done through traditional public service media (like SVT), commercial press but also more and more increasingly: digital platforms. The Swedish media model historically always considered informing citizens as a cornerstone of democracy, and the country's robust public service broadcasting system is a key feature in maintaining this supply and belief.

Sveriges Television (SVT) and Sveriges Radio (SR) are publicly funded and they still remain primary sources of political information for Swedish citizens. According to the 2024 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, approximately 51% of Swedes consume news from SVT weekly, making it the most

¹ The Economist Intelligence Unit. *Democracy Index 2024: Age of Conflict*. London: EIU, 2024.

² UNESCO. *Freedom of the Press Act (Sweden, 1766)*. <https://en.unesco.org>

³ Statista. "Most Trusted News Brands in Sweden 2024." Accessed May 2025.

⁴ Nordicom. *The Media Barometer 2024: Use of Media in Sweden*. University of Gothenburg, 2024.

widely used and trusted news outlet in the entire country⁵. Similarly, SR is used by around 41% of the population weekly, maintaining its influence particularly in more rural areas and with an older population⁶.

Public service media in Sweden, as many in Europe, are required by law to be clearly impartial, non-partisan, and to reflect a “diversity of views”. This mandate has therefore established SVT and SR, the two public institutions mentioned above, as the main institutions in shaping an informed electorate. Moreover, Swedish law prohibits political advertising on broadcast television, which enhances the reliance on journalistic formats to access political communication⁷.

Furthermore, Swedish newspapers are another critical component of the political information ecosystem. There are key national dailies such as *Dagens Nyheter* (liberal), *Svenska Dagbladet* (conservative), *Aftonbladet* (social-democratic), and *Expressen* (liberal) provide comprehensive political coverage. Despite a decline in “real”; printed newspaper circulation, there are more and more digital subscriptions: around 22% of Swedish adults paid for online news in 2024, which makes it one of the highest rates in Europe.

There are also an important number of newspapers that receive direct but also indirect state support. This is done in order to preserve pluralism, and ensure that even smaller, regional titles continue to inform local constituencies. These subsidies are critical in maintaining media diversity despite market pressures.

When it comes to numbers, as of 2024, 84% of the Swedish population used social media daily, and 25% said they accessed news via Facebook⁸. Among the 18/24 age group, Instagram and TikTok are increasingly prominent sources of political content, although these platforms are not traditionally seen as “concretely reliable” sources of factual news.

Despite the rise of social platforms, most of the Swedes still engage in diverse media consumption practices. Studies show that most citizens mix both some traditional but also some online sources. For example, the Nordicom Media Barometer notes that Swede’s tendency is often to consume SVT news alongside social media commentary, reflecting a hybrid news repertoire.

Furthermore, Sweden keeps a very well-developed infrastructure for political information. The supply side is characterized by a strong public broadcasting with a diversified press and high internet penetration. However, there is an increasing reliance on social media among young citizens that represents a shift that could deeply challenge the traditional sort of “gatekeeping” role of journalists and introduce more risks related to misinformation and also political polarization.

⁵ Reuters Institute. *Digital News Report 2024: Sweden*.

⁶ Nordicom, *Media Barometer 2024*, pp. 22–23.

⁷ Swedish Radio and Television Act (2010:696), Chapter 6.

⁸ Nordicom. *Media Barometer 2024*, p. 31

II. Quality of News

The quality of political news in Sweden is broadly considered high, upheld by long-standing and clear professional ethics, strong institutional regulation, and a tradition of editorial independence. There is also a dual structure of public service and commercial media which ensures that Swedes have access to a wide variety of political perspectives, thus rooted in factual reporting.

At the core of Sweden's "high news standards" are public service broadcasters, especially Sveriges Television (SVT) and Sveriges Radio (SR). These institutions operate under mandates that legally require them to be impartial, fact-based but also and importantly free from commercial or political influence⁹. Their funding, which previously depended on license fees, now comes from a dedicated tax managed through an independent foundation, thus allowing more of a clear editorial autonomy. They are also governed by a Public Service Charter which also emphasizes their democratic function, including the duty to: "provide comprehensive political coverage and represent a range of social and ideological perspectives".

In 2024, SVT was trusted by 73% of Swedes, and SR by 69%, according to Statista's national media trust index. Both of these outlets consistently top audience trust rankings in the Reuters Digital News Report and Eurobarometer surveys. Their commitment to investigative journalism and rigorous fact-checking reinforces their credibility across the political spectrum in the country.

Sweden's newspaper sector is also a major demonstration of high journalistic standards. Flagship broadsheets such as *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD) clearly distinguish between opinion and reportage, offer nuanced political analysis and are also capable of maintaining editorial boards with clearly stated "ideological leanings" (liberal for DN, conservative for SvD) thus ensuring transparency for readers¹⁰. Although there are more and more commercial pressures on newspapers, especially online, these outlets continue to publish long-form political content, interviews, and special election supplements that, seemingly, enrich democratic debate in Sweden.

Academics assessments are also a base of our work, and these assessments confirm Sweden's high performance in media quality. Back in 2022, a Nordicom study evaluating bias and fairness in political coverage found that more "mainstream" Swedish outlets adhered more closely to norms of balance, more specifically in election reporting¹¹. However, that same study also noted that right-wing populist parties (particularly the Sweden Democrats), are often portrayed more negatively, especially when it comes to discussions about immigration or multiculturalism. This reflects a general trend across European media and has become a major point of contention within Swedish political discourse.

Perceptions of bias are also increasingly politicized. The Sweden Democrats have frequently accused public broadcasters of ideological slant, as victimization is one of their main electoral strategies: "the media doesn't want us to tell the truth to you, the citizens" In fact, they assert that SVT and SR favor liberal narratives. This has led to declining trust among SD supporters, who are also getting more and more numerous in Sweden nowadays. Some of their voters now turn to alternative or partisan online sources. Nonetheless, no significant evidence suggests that SVT or SR systematically exclude or

⁹ Sveriges Television. "Public Service Mandate." www.svt.se.

¹⁰ Nordicom. "Political Journalism and Bias in Sweden." Media Studies Yearbook 2022.

¹¹ Djerf-Pierre, Monika and Jesper Strömbäck. "Framing the Populist Right in Swedish Media." *Journal of Political Communication*, 2022.

misrepresent any major party. In fact, SVT features regular debates and interviews with leaders from across the political spectrum during elections, therefore fulfilling its democratic mandate.

Sweden also shows strong media accountability institutions. In fact, the Swedish Press Council (PON) and the Press Ombudsman (PO) are institutions who oversee adherence to ethical guidelines. Citizens themselves can lodge complaints, and outlets who can be found guilty of violations are required to publish rectifications. And it goes the same way for broadcasting media, the Swedish Broadcasting Authority performs a similar role. These systems not only protect consumers but also serve as deterrents against sensationalism or misreporting.

Faced with digital disruption, Swedish media organizations have been able to adapt without significantly sacrificing quality. Some of the leading outlets have invested in explainer journalism, data-driven visual reporting, and slow-news initiatives in order to put forward a more “in-depth” understanding. Public media has launched projects like SVT’s “Kolla Fakta” and “Uppdrag Granskning,” both focused on investigative accuracy, especially about social media’s info and civic literacy. Meanwhile, DN and SvD have strengthened their paywall systems, allowing them to fund independent reporting even as ad revenues fall more and more.

In terms of challenges, Sweden, just like other democracies, faces pressures from online competition, more fragmented audiences, and the need to maintain relevance among younger demographics. There is also concern over the decline of local journalism, as many regional newspapers have shrunk or disappeared. This threatens most of citizens access to local political news and has led the state to increase media support subsidies targeted at areas identified as more “underserved”¹².

To conclude, we can say that Sweden's high standards of political news quality are maintained by a deeply rooted culture of press freedom, coupled to clear professional norms, and an important regulatory accountability. While commercial and technological challenges exist, the Swedish model has largely succeeded in preserving media that fosters a well-informed, critically engaged citizenry.

III. Media Concentration and Diversity

Sweden’s media landscape balances public service plurality with growing commercial concentration, especially in the digital sphere. While a diverse range of political viewpoints remains accessible, certain market dynamics and ownership patterns are vividly reshaping how information is distributed but also, by whom.

Swedish press has traditionally been characterized by a extremely large number of publishers, but the last two decades have seen a radical consolidation." Nowadays almost all newspapers are owned by a few large media corporations: Bonnier AB, Schibsted and Stampen. The biggest media conglomerate in the Bonnier group list is *Dagens Nyheter*, along with other publications such as *Expressen*, *Dagens Industri*, *Sydsvenskan* and a string of regional titles. Aftonbladet is owned by the Norwegian corporation Schibsted, which also owns Svenska Dagbladet, and is working within digital media across 29 different platforms. Stampen also dominates the Gothenburg regional market with *Göteborgs-Posten* and other local titles.

Such ownership structures can pose worries for media pluralism, in particular as to editorial

¹² Swedish Government. *Media Support Ordinance* (2023:845).

independence and concentration of power. In 2023, a study by the Euromedia Ownership Monitor observed that while Sweden had a fairly normal concentration of media ownership compared with the rest of Europe, the trend towards cross-media ownership (print, TV and digital) has reached a new peak throughout the years, particularly on-line. However, as these conglomerates do not often impose single editorial command across titles, diversity of outlook prevails; to some extent.

In the media industry, Sweden has a better structural balance. Public service broadcasters SVT and SR have large audiences, and are complemented by commercial TV channels, among them TV4, owned by Telia Company, which is itself partly state owned. Although this opens up issues of independence, regulatory oversight means that TV4 has to be run as a commercially focused and editorially independent service.

Sweden also enforces media subsidies and regulatory frameworks in order to counterbalance market dominance. Furthermore, the Swedish Press Subsidies Council (Presstöd) has restructured support mechanisms in recent years in order to include more of “digital-born” publications, thereby adapting to evolving media consumption habits.

The emergence of global platforms like Google, Meta (Facebook/Instagram), and TikTok as dominant news gateways has further complicated Sweden’s media ecology. While Swedish publishers produce the content, the modern media distribution system relies more on algorithm-driven feeds and social recommendations. A 2024 report by Nordicom noted that these platforms now account for the first point of news contact for nearly 30% of Swedes under age 30¹³.

This platformization of news has two effects. First, it increases exposure to international and fringe content sources, often outside Sweden’s traditional regulatory oversight. Second, it reduces the visibility of legacy outlets, particularly for younger users who may not follow traditional news brands directly.

Despite this shift, Sweden’s digital news scene remains pretty competitive. In addition to the major legacy outlets transitioning to online paywalls, new entrants such as Omni, Kvartal, and Altinget offer some sort of niche or politically independent reporting. Some alternative platforms, however, including *Nyheter Idag* or *Samnytt*, promote overtly ideological or partisan content, raising a certain amount of concerns about editorial integrity and echo chambers¹⁴.

The Swedish authorities ensure that there is media diversity. They are quite proactive about it. The EUI (European University Institute) investigates media freedom and diversity worldwide. Its Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom has consistently rated Sweden as “low risk” for media pluralism in its Media Plurality Index. That’s because : 1, we have a very strong public service broadcasting system in the country ; 2, media subsidies are quite helpful in many ways; and 3, we have legal guarantees that ensure freedom of expression.

Still, specialists caution that the sustainable diversity of the media landscape may be in “jeopardy” because the local and regional news outlets that form its backbone are simply too weak financially to keep going. As ad dollars have drifted away to the tech platforms, a disturbingly large number of

¹³ Nordicom. *Media Barometer 2024*, pp. 36–38.

¹⁴ Truedson, Lars. “Populist Alternative Media in Sweden.” *Fojo Media Institute*, 2021.

local newsrooms have either shut down altogether or been so thoroughly downsized that they resemble the newsroom equivalent of a starving artist. That local news outlet is, of course, supposed to provide oversight of the local public officials who are always up to something or other.

Swedish Radio (SR) generates a daily five-hour news service in every county that provides the public with as much local content as possible. Each county also receives a specific news service that includes localized content for its residents. The service tries to cover everything it can that is pertinent to the citizens of that county.

The media in Sweden are more concentrated than ever, but that concentration doesn't seem to be influencing the media. It's not ownership monopolies that are influencing the media landscape. It's global digital giants that are influencing the media landscape. This makes it paradoxically all the more important and difficult to ensure that we have a balanced and diverse media landscape.

IV. Fragmentation and Polarization

For a long time, the picture of Sweden was that of a society moving toward consensus, with many levels of trust and a strong, sturdy civic culture. But like many of its fellow Western democracies, Sweden now looks as if it, too, is coming apart at the seams into media-managed, politically polarized segments. Therefore, we can ask ourselves what's happening in Sweden? And what's pushing Sweden toward a media-managed, politically polarized society?

For many years, both public service broadcasters and the commercial media in Sweden have served to strengthen social cohesion by allowing people to share as they mutually entertain private forms of public discussion. The public service broadcaster SVT and the commercial broadcaster SR reach virtually all Swedish households. Most people, including most non-Swedes, hear or see them in some form. As for newspapers, they exist on almost every conceivable ideological spectrum but generally know to stick to the same common factual standards as the broadcasters. When election time comes, more citizens pay attention to news, and the same presentation format is kept to serve the same public good of getting citizens to vote.¹⁵

This model, however, is under pressure. Audience behavior is fragmenting along generational, ideological, and technological lines. As Nordicom (2023) states, older Swedes (65+) continue to consume a massive amount of public service media and printed newspapers. In contrast, their much younger (18–24) digital-first counterparts bank almost exclusively on socially curated, digital platforms for their political news fix. This massive, almost 180-degree, information diet turn obviates the medium of communication, granting it a kind of malleability previously unseen.

Media preference is also becoming an area of political polarization. Research by the SOM Institute at the University of Gothenburg shows that supporters of the Sweden Democrats (SD) express much less trust in traditional media than supporters of other parties. SD voters seem to have a particular affinity for turning to alternative media platforms, like *Samnytt* or *Nyheter Idag*, which present a much different view of the world. These platforms are to the right of mainstream media and, in fact, often frame that same mainstream media as biased or even untrustworthy. This is a dynamic that

¹⁵ Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, MIT Press, 1989.

reflects both a national and international trend.

This fragmentation threatens to form echo chambers, where users mainly take in content that reaffirms their preexisting beliefs. Studies in recent times show that while Sweden isn't as ideologically polarized as the U.S., we're nonetheless getting more and more polarized by the day. We're also getting better at viewing the content and ideology of our perceived political opponents with a half-informed, but largely suspect, understanding.

The 2022 parliamentary election highlighted these trends. SVT and SR, while hosting fruitful, inclusive debates and covering all major parties, seemed in comparison like a serene oasis of democratic discourse. Elsewhere, the flood of partisan memes, misinformation, and selective narratives on the big social media platforms made us long for the days when we were only worried about the big three or four TV channels deciding what kind of democracy we should be living in. SD seemed especially effective online.

Digital technologies have also quite eroded the “broadcast logic” that once unified the Swedish public sphere. Algorithms on social media platforms prioritize engagement over diversity, pushing users toward more sort of emotionally charged or sensationalist content.¹⁶

In addition, subscription and click-based revenue models lead to even more audience segmentation. While trying to please their different user categories, media outlets may be tempted to follow a version of the “split-up” strategy that is appealing to their different kinds of users. Following this strategy too closely may cause media outlets to narrow their own editorial agendas and risks heightening the tribalism in our media landscape.

Even so, there are still some common areas for national dialogue. SVT and SR continue to draw large audiences from all kinds of demographics for when-they-matter political events. And you can still open up any of the national newspapers and find strong editorial traditions of hosting a by-no-means-unanimous debate. But this editorial influence is waning among the young, who are bypassing these spaces in favor of well-lit digital altars in the content economy.

Swedish scholars such as Jesper Strömbäck and Lars Nord have expressed concern over the fragmentation of political discourse. According to their research, while institutional trust in Sweden remains relatively high, the “epistemic foundations of democratic discussion may be being undermined by social media”, particularly by weakening consensus over basic facts¹⁷. Having different so-called “truths” has far-reaching consequences for democracy. At stake is the very possibility of citizens reaching a genuine consensus. When people cannot even agree upon a single fact, how can they possibly deliberate over and make collective decisions concerning major public issues? This key question is one of the various ones that came to my mind after reading his researches.

Some researchers note that Sweden’s **multiparty system** and strong civic education buffer against A number of research studies have indicated that the multiparty political system in Sweden, along with the high-quality civic education present in this country, acts as a buffer against the extreme sharp polarizations seen in some other nations. In Sweden, political diversity—unlike the situation in a

¹⁶ Bucher, Taina. *If... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2018.

¹⁷ Nord, Lars and Jesper Strömbäck. “Public Sphere Fragmentation and Political Journalism.” *Media and Communication*, 2023.

two-party system—means that if you and I disagree, we can argue about several shades of difference amongikhulu that allows us to have and to holdเมต

In addition, the school system in this country (who is internationally recognized as one of the best in the world), integrates into its curriculum something that is very contentious today media literacy. The public sphere in Sweden is disintegrating. In this, as in any democracy, this development poses dangers for the way society is governed. Disintegration serves to sort of unjoin the public. It also accompanies political and generational segmentation. One result of the population increasingly being split into segments is the emergence of alternative information ecosystems. These have formed over the past several decades as a sort of a “parallel universe” that certain segments of the population inhabit when they interact with the media and the political world.

V. Relativism in News and Misinformation

Though Sweden is counted among the very few places in the world where media are really trusted, the country is not at all shielded from the spreading global malaise of misinformation, fake news, and the erosion of common truth. Indeed, some of us who work directly with provisions of the Marshall Fund for the very Foundation of Swedish Media Trust might even postulate that as long as any media are available, and especially as long as any media are variable, some Swedes may continue to hold a few false beliefs. The digital ecosystem, clearly marked by worldwide platforms and algorithmic content, allows false material to spread quickly. In other words, the digital environment is designed to amplify untrue information.

Surveys conducted by the Reuters Institute and Eurobarometer show that Swedes seem to be generally quite confident in their ability to distinguish real from fake news, with trust in professional journalism remaining high compared to other EU countries. However, general concern about misinformation is growing. In 2023, a Eurobarometer report found that more than 67% of Swedish citizens worry about encountering false or misleading information online, more particularly via social media platforms¹⁸.

Furthermore, it seems that these general concerns are not unfounded. A key example emerged in 2022 when misinformation campaigns spread false claims that Swedish social services were “kidnapping” Muslim children... an accusation that sparked international outrage. These false accusations led to threats against Swedish officials. Investigations revealed that this narrative was amplified by foreign actors, particularly from Turkey and the Middle East, looking to discredit Swedish institutions¹⁹. The case highlighted how misinformation can target vulnerable groups, exploit cultural tensions, and, most of all generate real-world consequences.

Sweden’s digital media ecosystem is highly penetrated: nearly 97% of the population has internet access, and smartphone usage is nearly universal²⁰. This is a great opportunity for misinformation to spread. For political material, the social media platforms of Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok serve as an even younger version of mainstream media. But in contrast to those older platforms, the newer ones do almost nothing in the way of gatekeeping. Indeed, when it comes to fact-checking, the new

¹⁸ Eurobarometer. *Fake News and Disinformation in the EU*, Special Report 518, 2023.

¹⁹ Washington Post. “Sweden Grapples with Misinformation about Muslim Families.” March 2022.

²⁰ Statistics Sweden (SCB). “Internet Usage by Age and Region, 2024.”

platforms are more like the Wild West. And yet, far from informing us, these platforms seem to be politically misleading us.

Another problem is that some alternative outlets in Sweden, such as Samnytt, Nyheter Idag, and Fria Tider, are often associated with ideologically driven or “conspiracy” reporting. While these sites have relatively small audiences compared to the mainstream outlets in question, their narratives are frequently shared in right-wing echo chambers and online forums, that are becoming more and more popular in Sweden²¹.

The rising view that every news provider is equally slanted and untrustworthy is bad for the news business. It is particularly bad in a democracy because it is something that unfriendly political actors very often sow when they are getting unfavorable coverage. Take the Sweden Democrats, a far-right party, for instance. They have just told a group of journalists that the national public broadcaster, SVT, and the major newspapers in Sweden are left-wing and biased. This is not only the SD's telling these journalists with whom, they seem to have a problematic relationship, what to say to the public. It is also what the SD says in this regard and what figures like this that add up to an increasingly close relationship between disinformation and independent journalism.

Thankfully, in response to these emerging threats, Sweden has been active and developed some of the most advanced counter-disinformation infrastructures in Europe. In 2022, the Swedish government established the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency (*Myndigheten för psykologiskt försvar*), tasked with 3 extremely important tasks: 1. identifying, 2. analyzing, and 3. countering foreign and domestic disinformation campaigns²². Public broadcasters also play a key role. For example, SVT's Kolla Fakta (“Check the Facts”) and SR's *Faktiskt.se* collaborate with other kind of Swedish media to investigate viral claims and publish corrections. These initiatives, coordinated by established journalists, follow transparent editorial standards and publish source material openly²³. Furthermore, media literacy is also emphasized in Swedish schools, where, even from an early age, students are taught to critically evaluate sources and identify manipulation strategies..

Academic researchers caution that technological solutions alone are insufficient. Jesper Strömbäck, for instance, tells us that media fragmentation but also the erosion of traditional gatekeepers have created a certain chaotic environment in which misinformation can thrive more easily²⁴. While Sweden's high media literacy and public trust offer an apparent resilience, He warns that relativistic attitudes toward truth could, in the long term, weaken discourse in a democracy.

Also, some research has revealed that even citizens with a good education may be caught in the web of confirmation bias. They, too, are likely to share stories that are not true but do fit with the sorts of things they already believe.²⁵. Thus, the fight against misinformation is not just about removing false content off the internet but about reinforcing norms of, as stated in numerous scholarly research, “epistemic responsibility”, that we could define as the civic duty to seek truth and challenge misleading narratives, even when they are politically convenient.

Sweden takes a holistic approach to dealing with relativism and misinformation in the media. Its

²¹ Truedson, Lars. “Swedish Alternative Media: Narratives and Influence.” Fojo, 2022.

²² Swedish Psychological Defence Agency. “Mandate and Activities.” www.mpf.se.

²³ Faktiskt.se and Kolla Fakta. “Fact-Checking in Sweden.” 2023 Annual Report.

²⁴ Strömbäck, Jesper. “Media Fragmentation and Democratic Decline.” *Political Quarterly*, 2023.

²⁵ Lindholm, T., et al. “Cognitive Bias and Media Consumption in Sweden.” Umeå University, 2022.

public education and media oversight ensure a strong front against disinformation. And if that's insufficient, well, the state has a couple of interventions up its sleeve, too. What is now increasingly common is that an alternative information ecosystem has grown up around ideological echo chambers, and for these echo chambers, anti-journalistic rhetoric has become the common currency. This ideological alternative information ecosystem now demands much of our attention, because it seems to be growing around us. We must observe it, carefully but also calmly, for any signs that it might be attempting to infiltrate our democratic society.

VI. Inequality in Political Knowledge

Even though Sweden ranks as one of the most informed and media-literate societies in the world, political knowledge is not evenly spread among the populace. Educational level, income, and even the type of media used (or not) seem to create an increasingly vicious cycle that benefits some Swedes with political knowledge (and thereby more influence in the democratic process) while disadvantaging others, and the disadvantaged seem to be growing in number.

Overall political awareness in Sweden is relatively high. According to the SOM Institute (2023), over 70% of Swedes say they feel “well-informed” about national politics, and voter turnout remains consistently high, one of the highest in Europe even, exceeding 80% in recent elections²⁶. YStill, when we look closely at the data, they tell a different story. They reveal some very persistent inequalities. People with education, and especially the kind of education that is relevant to politics, do much better on these tests of political knowledge than people who don't have that kind of education²⁷. And it isn't just about having a high school or college diploma. The kind of education top citizens receive is a big part of what stretches the inequality in political knowledge. A study by Strömbäck and Djerf-Pierre (2022) found that media use is a key determinant of political knowledge, with frequent users of public service media and broadsheet newspapers demonstrating the most accurate understanding of the Swedish political processes²⁸.

Younger Swedes, while almost all of them being highly digitally connected, are less likely to engage with in-depth political reporting. Instead, their news consumption often consists of “short-form” video content, memes, shorts, reels even, and headlines encountered via TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube. And, even if these platforms offer political information, it is pretty known that they also rarely prioritize analytical depth or context. Therefore, it is clear that this shift contributes to generational inequalities in political understanding, especially regarding complex topics, that require more than a “Black and White” understanding such as European integration, climate legislation, or even tax reform.

Another basic composition of political knowledge is the status of a citizen's income. Citizens with a higher income are more likely to take part and pay attention to the political world. They do this, in part, by subscribing to good-quality newspapers and following the quality political news that those sources provide. It is my argument that citizens in and from the extended reach of the lower and working class are also underrepresented in the realm of presidential politics because they are less likely to follow and properly pay attention to the developments in that “extended realm”.

²⁶ SOM Institute. *Swedish Public Opinion 2023: Annual Survey Results*.

²⁷ Nord, Lars. *Voters and Media: What People Know*. Mittuniversitetet, 2021.

²⁸ Strömbäck, Jesper & Djerf-Pierre, Monika. “Political Knowledge and Media Use in Sweden.” *Nordicom Review*, 2022.

Geographic inequality also plays a role. Urban areas, particularly Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö, are “media-rich” environments, offering local editions of national papers, regional television, and diverse civic organizations. In contrast, just like in many other European countries, rural areas have experienced a decline in local journalism, with many municipalities now classified as some sorts of “news deserts.” This trend undermines rural resident’s news access, their global vision over a plurality of opinion and therefore their capacity to participate in informed debate on regional but also national issues²⁹.

Media literacy initiatives are also central. In fact, the National Agency for Education (Skolverket) incorporates a new topic : “digital literacy” into school syllabi, encouraging students to develop their capacity to evaluate online sources critically. Independent NGOs like Statens Medieråd (The Swedish Media Council) also produce free guides and curricula for teachers and parents to combat misinformation and, ultimately help them to improve young people’s media habits³⁰. Even with such efforts, experts are concerned that digital fragmentation and selective exposure, where people follow only news that is ideologically aligned, may undercut these interventions. This is especially evident among politically disengaged groups, who interact with political content only when it is algorithmically surfaced in entertaining feeds.³¹

Finally, Sweden continues to be at the forefront of democratic education and media literacy. Yet political knowledge gaps are present and growing. Most political knowledge gaps are evident across age, educational stratification, and income groups and geography. The public policy, educational, and media institutions counterbalance political knowledge gaps in Sweden. Yet this counterweight is becoming weaker, and the composition of the counterweight is changing.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that Sweden’s media landscape reflects a strong democratic foundation, balancing tradition and innovation in a rapidly changing environment. Public broadcasters and a diverse press continue to ensure access to political information and uphold high journalistic standards, despite pressures from digital disruption and claims of bias, especially from populist actors. Media concentration and the growing role of global tech platforms present challenges to pluralism, while signs of audience fragmentation point to a slow erosion of shared civic space. Sweden has responded proactively to misinformation through institutional tools and fact-checking efforts, yet anti-media rhetoric and online disinformation persist. Inequalities in political knowledge, shaped by education, income, and media use, remain a concern. While Sweden continues to meet the core criteria of a healthy media system, safeguarding its democratic role will require continued vigilance and adaptation.

²⁹ FOJO Institute. “Local Journalism in Crisis.” Linnaeus University, 2023.

³⁰ Statens Medieråd. “Teaching Media Literacy: Guidelines for Swedish Schools.” 2023.

³¹ Flaxman, S., Goel, S., & Rao, J. “Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2020.

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