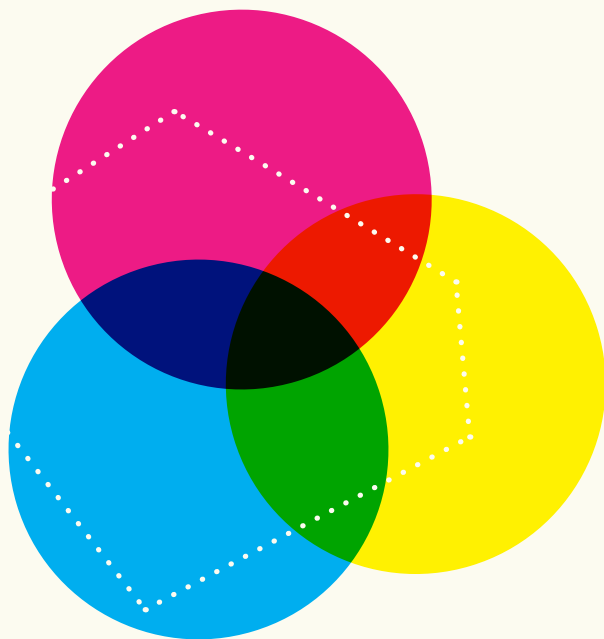


Freedom of Expression in the Digital Media Culture

A study of public opinion in Sweden



Ulla Carlsson and Lennart Weibull

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Summary

Freedom of expression is fundamental to democracy, and media serve as custodians of that freedom. Prevailing norms and values among the populace constitute the preconditions for freedom of expression, but also set its limits. Digital technology has democratized the public sphere, but the new technologies also imply problems as to the limits of freedom of expression. Particularly problematic is the relationship between freedom of expression and personal privacy.

The present study reports a survey of Swedish citizens' views on the limits of freedom of expression, and in which areas limitations of freedom of expression might be acceptable. Public acceptance of possible curtailment of freedom of expression may be taken to represent dissatisfaction with the ways contemporary media operate. When freedom of expression is confronted with the need to protect vulnerable groups somewhat more than half of the population are prepared to accept measures that limit freedom of expression in order to protect personal privacy and dignity.

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About Sweden

The people

Sweden has a small population of only around 10 million inhabitants. Over the past 50 years it has become a multicultural country due to migration. Today, almost one-fifth of the residents of Sweden were either born abroad or have parents who were born abroad.

Form of government

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy. The monarch is head of state, but has only representative and ceremonial functions.

Sweden has a single-chamber parliament, the Riksdag. Eight parties are currently represented in the Riksdag. At present they form two blocs – the Alliance (the Moderate Party, Liberal Party, Centre Party and Christian Democrats), on one hand, and the Social Democrats, Left Party and Green Party, on the other. The nationalist Sweden Democrats are not affiliated with either bloc. Following the 2014 parliamentary election, a minority coalition of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party took over after two terms of Alliance rule.

Sweden became a member of the European Union (EU) in 1995. In 2003, the Swedish people voted against joining the monetary union, the so-called Euro zone.

Economy

At the end of the 1800s, Sweden was one of the poorest countries in Europe. Rapid industrialization changed this dramatically. Over the following 50 years, Sweden became one of the richest countries in the world. Record economic development was strongly tied to the building of railways, providing access to natural resources such as forests, iron ore and hydropower in northern Sweden – assets that still constitute the basis of the Swedish economy.

Education

Sweden has nine years of compulsory education, which begins at the age of seven. Today almost all children attend non-compulsory pre-school classes at the age of six. In practice this means ten years of schooling in total. Upper secondary school programmes run for three years. Students can choose from a variety of programmes that either provide general qualifications to study at universities/university colleges or are more vocational in nature.

Source: Swedish Institute, <http://sharingsweden.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/introducing-sweden.pdf>

“Everyone shall be guaranteed the following rights and freedoms in his or her relations with the public institutions:

1. freedom of expression: that is, the freedom to communicate information and express thoughts, opinions and sentiments, whether orally, pictorially, in writing, or in any other way;
2. freedom of information: that is, the freedom to procure and receive information and otherwise acquaint oneself with the utterances of others;...”

(Instrument of Government, Ch. 2, Art. 1; official translation)

In Sweden the universal right to freedom of expression is set out in constitutional law, more precisely, in Chapter 2, Article 1 of the Instrument of Government (IG). Already in its first paragraph the key relationship between freedom of expression and democratic rule is formulated: “All public power proceeds from the people. Swedish democracy is founded on the free formation of opinion and on universal and equal suffrage” (IG, Ch. 1, Art. 1).

In addition to the Instrument of Government, freedom of expression and freedom of information are regulated through two other laws, all of constitutional status [‘fundamental laws’ in the Swedish terminology]: the Freedom of the Press Act (FP) and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression (FFE). By international comparison, freedom of expression in Sweden is quite comprehensive, particularly with respect to protections enjoyed by the media. The basic principles have their roots in the Freedom of the Press Act of 1766, which was the first such law to be enacted in any country. The principles set out there, and not least the principle of public access to official documents, remain a central feature of Sweden’s constitutional heritage. Another characteristic is that both laws are very concrete concerning media technology.

At the same time, freedom of expression is not unconditional. The fundamental laws provide that the freedom may be limited for reason of national security, to maintain public order and safety, to protect individuals’ good repute and right to privacy, and to prevent crime and bring criminals to justice (IG, Ch. 2, Art. 23). Provisions concerning transgressions of these kinds – e.g., threats, slander/libel, the denigration or persecution of groups of people, espionage, and unlawful depictions of violence – are set out in the Penal Code.

When setting the limits to what should be allowed, the Instrument of Government cautions: “[P]articular attention shall be paid to the importance of the widest possible freedom of expression and freedom of information in political, religious, professional, scientific and cultural matters” (IG, Ch. 2, Art. 23).

For radio and television the FFE contains some specifications of a more practical nature, including rules for advertising. In the case of the public service media there are rules concerning objectivity, impartiality and balance as well as service to and representation of minority groups; no prior scrutiny of program content is allowed (Weibull, Wadbring and Ohlsson 2017).

In the case of journalistic media the law provides broad scope for freedom of expression. The media industry, however, has complemented these constitutional provisions with a system of ethical rules. In the early years of the twentieth century Swedish newspaper owners drew up a code of conduct, based on self-regulation, with the aim of staving off legislation. The rules are voluntary. Among other things, the code of conduct emphasizes respect for personal privacy. All the major media and media organizations in Sweden subscribe to these publicity rules, which are supervised by the Press Council and the Press Ombudsman. (*Spelregler för press, radio och tv*; cf Axberger 1994).

Freedom of expression, in both speech and text, has never been greater than it is today. Digitization has introduced new platforms for communication, which represent a host of opportunities for freedom of expression. The public sphere has been democratized, which has an enormous potential to enrich public debate. But, the new technologies also imply problems, not least with regard to the limits of freedom of expression.

Experience tells us that dilemmas arise whenever a hallowed right such as freedom of expression encounters revolutionary technological innovation, which digitization implies (cf. Ellul 1964, Winston 1998, Hirschfeldt 2016, von Sydow 2016). Critical questions arise as to the degree to which the new technologies will bring about changes that weaken the key principles codified in present fundamental laws relating to traditional media. The balance between freedom of expression and personal privacy is particularly troublesome.

The overall research question posed in this article has to do with how strongly founded freedom of expression is among the general public in this age of digital media culture. How do Swedish citizens today perceive the limits on freedom of expression, and in what areas might new limits be acceptable? Our starting point is to find out what the Swedish public thinks of the media's performance as custodians of freedom of expression. Do citizens feel that media live up to the expectations and demands that the public and institutions make of them? This approach allows one to assess the extent to which people's judgments of media performance explain their valuation of freedom of expression, relative to other values in society.

The analyses are based on responses to questions posed in the 2015 SOM National Survey (for details of the survey see appendix).

What is freedom of expression?

Freedom of expression is a cornerstone in any functional democracy. In the Swedish democratic tradition its value is generally described, as follows:

- It gives everyone the opportunity to consider a wide variety of opinions about the issues on which we make collective decisions, and makes it possible for decision-makers to reach more well-founded decisions.
- Well informed citizens and free mass media are better able to scrutinize and express their views on how public power is exercised.
- It helps to combat corruption.
- The importance of freedom of expression can also be explained from an egalitarian point of view. Governments in which decisions are made in accordance with the principle of majority rule become legitimate only if all citizens have had the opportunity to express their opinion on any given issue.

(cf. The Swedish Government's English website:

<http://manskligarattigheter.dynamaster.se/en/human-rights/what-rights-are-there/freedom-of-expression>)

Freedom of expression is a matter of law, but also a question of ethics and morality. Ultimately, it concerns the intrinsic equality of human beings, as set out in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Freedom of expression, like universal suffrage, is based on the fundamental value

and rights of individuals. Utterances, however, can inflict injury on individuals, groups of people and societies, which can give rise to demands for interventions to limit freedom of expression (Axberger 1984, Rønning 2009).

Freedom of expression is complicated. First of all, one has to distinguish between actions, attitudes and utterances. A person's actions may be subject to penalty, but his or her attitudes are not. The difficulty arises in what people say, write or otherwise express themselves. Is there, for example, any difference between racist actions and making racist comments? And, where do we draw the line between comments that can be considered acceptable and those that should be unlawful (Rønning 2015)?

In practice, some arguments for limiting freedom of expression are good; others are bad (cf. Enjolras and Steen-Johnsen 2014, Carlsson 2016a). Today, as in times past, the great majority of citizens favor freedom of speech and human rights – as long as it costs them neither discomfort, power nor money. Yet, it is not uncommon for people, even those who value freedom of expression, to call for bans on views they dislike.

Further, freedom of expression is not an absolute right. It presumes an assumption of personal responsibility and observance of mutual respect. Nor are the limits of freedom of expression constant; they are highly dependent on current cultural and social contexts (cf. Kierulf and Rønning 2009, Rønning 2013, Enjolras and Steen-Johnsen 2014).

Swedish legislation guarantees freedom of expression, but also defines its limits. These limits are necessary, but not in themselves sufficient. Freedom of expression is both a product of, and is limited by, the values and norms that prevail in society at any given time. For example, statements that are ethically indefensible are not necessarily unlawful. Unless there is consensus as to how freedom of expression should be exercised, the public sphere is at risk of shrinking and losing its vitality. The formal freedom to express one's views is reduced. In extension, there may be repercussions on social cohesion as a vital underpinning in a democracy, and challenges to it arising out of individuals' need to develop and assert their identities (Norris 2012, Strömbäck 2013, 2016, Enjolras et al. 2014, Rønning 2015, Carlsson 2016a, Donsbach 2016).

It is especially in times of comprehensive social change – be it in the form of ideological shifts or more dramatic technological changes –

that freedom of information is put to the test. At such times freedom of expression may even be perceived as a threat to social norms, and calls for curtailing it will be raised. In situations like this, taking legal steps to limit freedom of expression has proven risky.

In sum, freedom of expression can never be taken for granted. It must continually be reasoned and given substance in each era of change. The nub of the issue concerns how the relationship between the right to express one's views and the responsibility it entails is defined and operationalized. Expressions and responsibility are intimately related; they are one reason why the bounds of freedom expression are an issue in public discourse (Rønning 2015).

The defense of freedom of expression demands a continuous dialogue as to where the bounds should be drawn. This question acquires particular relevance in societies where many cultures, traditions and political convictions exist side by side. Prerequisite to such a dialogue is a public sphere that fosters people's readiness to listen to each other, despite their differing views and values, i.e., a willingness to seek consensus, based on the recognition that what is said is more important than who says it, that the evidence proffered has to be verified, and that arguments should clash and be weighed against one another (Mill 2010, Mouffe 2016, Carlsson 2015).

Freedom of expression and the media

The health and vigor of any society depends on good governance, i.e., well-functioning public institutions. Equally important, however, is the ability of citizens to express their views and communicate with each other in the public sphere without hindrance. A climate that inspires confidence in social institutions and mutual trust among citizens constitutes the basis for freedom of expression, for both individuals and various interest groups. Such a 'climate' is largely a consequence of the existence of a variety of independent media (cf. Sen 1999, Norris 2004, 2012, Charron et al. 2013, Castells and Himanen 2014, Carlsson 2016a).

Issues of confidence and trust come to the fore in times of rapid and far-reaching change (Holmberg and Weibull 2017). Much of the world is currently experiencing such change; predictions about, and expecta-

tions of, the future are increasingly uncertain. The problems that confront us are complex: climate change, economic and social inequality, war, conflicts and poverty, all of which have resulted in vast numbers of displaced persons and migrants, terrorism, nationalism and populism. The challenges may be traced to such monumental shifts as globalization processes and technological advances. When political, economic, and technological changes coincide, the societal context changes, as well, which can have consequences for the status of public institutions, public confidence and trust, and freedom of expression. Contexts are changing at all levels, global, regional and national. (Cf. Rothstein 2011, Altvater et al. 2013, Castells and Himanen 2014, Mouffe 2016, Picard 2016, Olsen 2017).

The people of Sweden have a long tradition of confidence in public institutions. In global rankings Sweden ranks high on measures of democracy, liberty and trust (Hallin and Mancini 2004, Rothstein 2011, Holmberg and Weibull 2017). But, the picture is mixed and varies with respect to different institutions. The degree of trust in society at large remains high, exceptionally high in a global perspective, but levels have fallen noticeably among marginalized groups, and gaps between social groups have widened (Holmberg and Rothstein 2015). Sweden continues to rank among the top ten countries in the world in indexes of freedom of the press, albeit the specific ranking within the top ten has fluctuated somewhat from year to year (Reporters Without Borders 2017, Freedom House 2017).

The idea that freedom of expression is of key importance to the public sphere is a fundamental assumption in Western conceptions of democracy. Media, and news media in particular, represent the core of the public sphere. By virtue of their professional scrutiny and gatekeeping functions media can provide citizens with impartial and reliable information, thereby enabling them to form and exchange their views and engage in critical reflection – activities crucial to the vitality of democratic society.

The Freedom of the Press Act and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, the two constitutional laws that regulate freedom of expression in Swedish media attest to the media's independence of the powers of state. Government cannot influence the content of media;

instead, the media have the status of an ‘estate’ in their own right, with their own responsibilities with respect to news reporting and opinion formation. Swedish media policy documents generally describe the media as having three basic functions in society: *information*, *scrutiny* and providing a *forum for debate*, but just how the media shall carry out these functions is up to the media themselves. The vital importance of these roles to society constitutes the basis for extending public subsidies to the media (SOU 2015:94).

The media, for their part, have acknowledged their social responsibility by instituting a strong self-regulation system of ethical guidelines and institutions to maintain their observance. Today, the code of ethics, which has developed successively over the years, has fifteen basic principles. They include the principles that media should be generous in permitting individuals to reply or rebut statements made about them, that they respect personal privacy, and that they be restrictive about disclosing names. The overall principle is that no innocent person should be subjected to public shame or suffer an invasion of his or her privacy. These rules have strong support in public opinion (Weibull and Börjesson 1995).

There is general consensus that Swedish law protects the integrity of traditional media quite well. In contrast, complaints about breaches of individuals’ personal privacy are not uncommon (Sterzel 1971, Axberger 2016, Hirschfeldt 2016, Petersson et al. 2007, von Sydow 2016). In many European countries the right to freedom of expression and the right to personal privacy are entities of equal dignity, and a balance must be struck between them. This is also the case in both the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and European Convention on Human Rights. Stronger protection of personal privacy necessarily implies limitations on freedom of expression. In Sweden, the media oppose codifying the equality of the two rights on the grounds that it would threaten freedom of expression. The media industry’s code of ethics, they argue, is sufficient (Sterzel 1971, Weibull and Börjesson 1995).

Digitization and globalization – with increasing commercialization and an accelerating convergence of media in their wake – are transforming communication systems in time and space, as well as in terms of social behavior. New kinds of transnational corporations like Google

and Facebook have brought about change in management structures and market orientations, and influenced the functions media perform, insofar as their algorithms strongly affect the content made available to users. The future of the news industry is highly uncertain when a growing share of news reporting takes place via Facebook and other platforms, which also compete for the advertising revenue that has borne up traditional media (Carlsson 2016a). National media companies find themselves facing global competition. Together, these changes are forcing major adjustments.

The growing number of media appear to be contributing to a widening divide in how various groups use the media, including news media. For those who are interested in politics and current affairs, it has never been easier to find initiated information than it is today; as a result, many people have increased their media consumption. On the other hand, it has never been so easy for people who are not interested in public affairs to avoid such news or, for that matter, to be misled and manipulated. These differences imply a risk that knowledge and participation gaps will widen, which in turn may weaken social cohesion and increase inequality between social classes. (Cf. Norris 2012, Strömbäck 2013, 2015, Donsbach 2016).

One decisive consequence of digitization is that the traditional media system has become fragmented (SOU 2015:94) – not only in terms of structure and use, but in legal respects, as well. Many social networks and platforms that are available to people in Sweden on the web do not enjoy the same constitutional protections as traditional media. At the same time, internet, and social media in particular, have opened a door through which sentiments and opinions can reach the public as never before. It has also become increasingly difficult both to draw the line between public and private when opinions verge into hate and harassment, and to separate truth from untruth.

The changing character of the media system have meant that new perspectives on freedom of expression have arisen. Words and images acquire new meaning and influence how we live and work together, and what we think of one another, as well. Consequently, issues relating to personal integrity, security and reliability have become more pressing. Increasingly, we feel a need to think about how these issues can be

resolved without impinging on the fundamental principles relating to freedom of expression set out in Swedish law.

Swedish citizens' trust and confidence in media

Numerous studies relating to media performance, with a focus on their three principal functions – information, scrutiny of holders of power, and providing a forum for debate – have been conducted in recent decades. In Sweden, research has often focused on the extent to which the public perceive the media to be objective, impartial and reliable (Andersson and Weibull 2017). The findings of these studies indicate that by and large people are satisfied with media performance; they feel, for example, that news reporting is accurate, reliable. In other respects, however, they are clearly critical. How people are treated in news reporting is one such area (Weibull 1988, 1998, Weibull and Börjesson 1995, Andersson and Weibull 2017).

The questions posed to a representative sample of Swedish citizens in the present study follow up previous surveys on the subject. They seek to encompass people's expectations of the media and how well media live up to those expectations. The analysis is based on assertions about the media that are designed to cover three main dimensions in people's views: impartiality in news reporting, respect for individuals' privacy, and the quality of journalism. The emphasis of the questions is on news reporting, whether offline or online.

Seven questions were asked about the extent to which the media...

1. ...are skilled at scrutinizing people in power
2. ...avoid covering some topics for fear of threats
3. ...put profit ahead of journalism
4. ...are impartial in their news coverage
5. ...give space to controversial views
6. ...respect people's right to privacy
7. ...let their political leanings guide news selection

Respondents could indicate their opinion on the respective items on a four-point scale. They were also able to indicate that they had no opinion.

As previous studies have found, people's views on the media's performance are mixed (Table 1), positive in some areas, negative in others. Swedes are most critical about what they consider the media's *lack of respect for peoples' right to privacy*; here, nearly two-thirds (61 per cent) respond that media 'to a small extent' or 'to a very small extent' show such respect. Roughly half of the respondents say that the media *are not impartial in their news coverage*. About the same share says that media 'to a very great extent' or 'to a great extent' *let their political leanings guide news selection*.

Table 1 Views of Swedish citizens on statements about Swedish news media, 2015 (percentages and balance scores)

Swedish news media...	To a very great extent	To a great extent	To a small extent	To a very small extent	No opinion	Total	n	Balance score
... are skilled at scrutinizing people in power	7	52	23	8	10	100	1 494	+28
... avoid covering some subjects for fear of threats	7	22	32	15	24	100	1 483	-18
... put profit ahead of journalism	9	24	24	10	33	100	1 468	-1
... are impartial in their news coverage	4	33	28	20	15	100	1 479	-11
... give space to controversial views	6	32	28	13	21	100	1 470	-3
... respect people's right to privacy	4	25	32	29	10	100	1 494	-32
... let their political leanings guide news selection	13	34	25	7	21	100	1 488	+15

Note: The main question asked, "*In your opinion, to what extent do Swedish media...*". The last parts of the question and the response alternatives are shown in the table. The balance scores represent the difference between the number who responded "To a very great extent" and "To a great extent", on the one hand, and those who responded "To a small extent" or "To a very small extent" on the other. The scores can range between +100 (all respondents answer to a large extent) and -100 (all respondents answer to a small extent).

Source: The national SOM Survey 2015.

As for the role of media for providing a forum, *giving space to controversial ideas*, views are mixed. Slightly more respondents say the media do not do this, than say they do. Just over half the respondents believe that media *avoid covering some subjects for fear of threats*. At the same time, nearly 60 per cent express the view that journalists *are skilled at scrutinizing people in power*.

When interpreting the findings, it is important to consider the share of respondents who say they have no opinion. The frequency of ‘no opinion’ is in some instances fairly high. For example, one respondent in three has no opinion as to the extent to which media put profit ahead of journalism, and every fourth respondent has no opinion about whether media avoid covering some topics for fear of threats. These dimensions are apparently difficult to assess among people in general.

Overall, the pattern of responses is in line with the findings of previous studies in recent decades (Weibull 1988, 1998, Carlsson 2005). The strongest criticisms of media performance expressed here concern how the media treat private individuals, and perceived bias – particularly in the media’s coverage of politics.

The findings do not suggest that all media fail to respect people’s privacy or that media coverage shows political bias as a rule. Research shows that people rate different media differently, and that their ratings can be influenced by recent events (cf. Weibull 2009, Holmberg and Weibull 2017).

Deeper analysis reveals a high degree of consensus concerning the functions media perform well, and not so well. Some variation in judgments between different subgroups is noted, however.

The eldest respondents express the strongest approval of Swedish media’s investigative journalism: 66 per cent of citizens between the ages of 65 and 85 say the media keep holders of power under scrutiny ‘to a very great extent’ or ‘to a great extent’ (Table 2a). With the exception of political steering of news coverage, the eldest express somewhat more positive views of media performance in other categories, including media’s respect for people’s privacy, as well.

The youngest group is the most critical. More than other age-groups, they believe that media avoid covering some subjects for fear of threats, and that media put profits ahead of journalism. The youngest respond-

ents are also more critical of political news bias in the media than other groups. One possible explanation for the low values recorded among the youngest is that, across all the indicators, a larger share of this group says they have no opinion. This, in turn, may be a consequence of their relatively limited experience of traditional media (Andersson 2016).

Highly educated respondents perceive controversial opinions to be accorded space in the media more than other groups do; they are also less critical about how media treat private individuals. On the other hand, a greater share of the highly educated finds that the media let their political leanings guide their selection of news topics. A greater share among those with little formal education rate perceive the media to be diligent watchdogs.

Table 2a *Swedish citizens' views on the media by sex, age and formal education, 2015 (shares responding 'To a very great extent' or 'To a great extent', expressed in per cent)*

Swedish news media...	Women	Men	16-29	30-49	50-64	65-85	LEd	MLEd	MHEd	HED
... are skilled at scrutinizing people in power	59	58	42	56	62	66	64	59	56	58
... avoid covering some topics for fear of threats	28	31	41	30	30	23	31	34	27	26
... put profit ahead of journalism	29	36	37	40	31	26	24	34	36	32
... are impartial in their news coverage	36	37	29	35	37	41	36	35	37	38
... give space to controversial views	37	39	33	38	38	39	32	34	38	43
... respect people's right to privacy	27	31	23	29	26	34	31	27	28	39
... let their political leanings guide news selection	45	50	48	50	45	47	36	48	49	50
n	755	727	201	402	398	485	216	417	340	451

Note: The percentages show the shares responding "To a very great extent" or "To a great extent". The percentages are calculated on the basis of all respondents, including those who report having 'No opinion'. LEd = Low level of formal education, MLEd = medium-low, MHEd = medium-high, HED = highly educated. For the formulation of the question, see note to Table 1.

Source: The National SOM Survey 2015.

Table 2b *Swedish citizens' view on the media by degree of interest in politics, party preference and ideology, 2015 (shares responding 'To a very great extent' or 'To a great extent', expressed in per cent)*

Swedish news media...	Political interest				Party preference									Political ideology				
	VI	SI	NVI	NI	V	S	MP	C	L	M	KD	SD	CL	SL	N/N	SR	CR	
... are skilled at scrutinizing people in power	58	62	57	40	55	67	54	77	67	64	52	45	61	65	54	62	55	
... avoid covering some topics for fear of threats	33	29	28	27	32	22	18	16	23	28	27	55	31	19	29	33	40	
... put profit ahead of journalism	39	34	29	19	44	27	33	27	35	29	22	41	44	33	29	30	36	
... are impartial in their news coverage	37	40	34	20	46	40	38	39	39	34	36	31	45	44	32	34	35	
... give space to controversial views	48	39	32	22	42	40	46	46	43	38	29	27	42	46	31	38	35	
... respect people's right to privacy	36	31	22	27	30	30	25	34	39	30	32	26	29	30	26	31	30	
... let their political leanings guide news selection	57	50	41	24	47	36	43	44	54	45	60	69	48	39	41	53	64	
n	228	751	420	66	108	349	106	106	69	320	50	212	163	289	420	442	148	

Note: The percentages show the shares responding "To a very great extent" or "To a great extent". The percentages are calculated on the basis of all respondents, including those who report having 'No opinion'. Political interest; VI = Very interested in politics; SI = Somewhat interested in politics; NVI = Not very interested; NI = No interest. Party preferences: V = Left party, S = Social Democrats, MP = Green party, C = Center, L = Liberals, M = Conservatives, KD = Christian Democrats, SD = Sweden Democrats. Political ideology; CL = Clearly to the left, SL = Somewhat to the left, N/N = Neither left/ Nor right, SR = Somewhat to the right, CR = Clearly to the right. Note that the number of respondents in some groups is small so that the percentages are somewhat uncertain.

Source: The National SOM Survey 2015.

There are some interesting ideology-based differences, as well (Table 2b; for information on the Swedish political parties, see page 6). For example, those who say that they prefer the nationalist-populist party, the Sweden Democrats (SD), are clearly the most critical of media performance. They register critical views on all dimensions, but especially in relation to the assertions that media 'avoid covering some subjects for fear of threats' and 'let their political leanings guide news selection'. On the latter assertion they are joined by adherents of the Christian Democrats (KD) and

the Left Party (V). Sympathizers of the Left and the Sweden Democrats subscribe to a greater extent than others to the assertion that media ‘put profit ahead of journalism’ (cf. Andersson and Weibull 2017). Other party sympathizers are closer to the mainstream opinions.

In sum, we note some clear-cut differences between age groups, education categories and people with different ideological leanings regarding the performance of Swedish media. By and large, however, the explanatory strength of the social and political factors is very weak. The results of a regression analysis that focused on covariance show that age is the strongest individual explanatory factor, although the variation explained is low.¹ As might be expected, ideological position had the greatest effect with regard to the proposition that the media ‘let their political leanings guide their news selection’. The perception that media are weak on ethics has strong support in all groups. The same pattern is noted, albeit to a lesser extent, in the case of political bias on the part of the media.

Not surprisingly, we note a positive correlation between exposure to news and perceptions of media performance (data not presented in tables). The relationship is strongest with respect to traditional media – newspapers, television and radio. The greatest difference between high consumers of news and others relates to the perception that media keep those in power under scrutiny. High consumers of news also express stronger support for the assertion that the media give space to controversial views than other groups do.

A corresponding analysis of use of social media shows a somewhat different pattern. Frequent users of social media express somewhat stronger support for the assertions that media ‘put profit ahead of journalism’, and avoid covering some subjects for fear of threats. Infrequent users of social media tend generally to give traditional media more positive ratings. Age may be an underlying factor here inasmuch as younger people are more avid users of social media.

In-depth analysis reveals that respondents who believe that Swedish society functions well also express more positive assessments of media performance, especially in the case of the media’s so-called watchdog function. This group’s rating of media’s respect for individuals’ right to privacy is considerably more negative than the overall average, however.

Having established the patterns of views on media performance, it is interesting to see how these patterns relate to views on limiting freedom of expression. A previous study documents a negative opinion among Swedish citizens to censorship of the press, radio and television (Bjereld and Oscarsson 2014). But, the question of interest here is whether there is support for limiting freedom of expression to maintain or defend other values, such as, for example, respect for personal privacy or national security.

Citizens' views on the limits of freedom of expression

Studies of freedom of expression often deal with phenomena only on the societal level: laws and statutes, political and economic interests, regional and global treaties and agreements, and so forth. Here, the focus rests instead on individual citizens' valuation of freedom of expression. Citizens whose values have a decisive influence on the future of Swedish democracy.

More specifically, this analysis focuses on the balance between the right to express oneself freely and other values in Swedish society. What values are considered important enough as to warrant imposing a limit on freedom of expression? Are there any norm-based limits? The findings of this analysis can then be viewed in relation to our respondents' assessments of media performance, as discussed above.

An analysis of data on issues where freedom of expression may collide with other values was performed. The underlying premise is that the exercise of even a fundamental right has to be weighed against the injury it may inflict on the rights of individuals or groups – sometimes referred to as 'the balance of harms principle' (Waldron 2012, Enjolras and Steen-Johnsen 2014). This, in turn, implies a recognition that there are normative bounds to what a society is prepared to tolerate (Mill 2010, Waldron 2012, Enjolras and Steen-Johnsen 2014). Today, because the public sphere has become diverse and, thanks to digitization, more accessible to a broader variety of utterances, the premise assumes greater salience, and demands for measures are raised (Waldron 2012, Appelgren and Leckner 2016).

In societies with long histories of democratic rule, public understandings of the meaning of freedom of expression are most likely rela-

tively stable over time. At the same time, history tells us that they can change, and change quickly, as a consequence of changes in the social order or the climate of debate (cf. Steen-Johnsen et al. 2016). What may be an important rationale at one point in time may be trivial in another, and the strength of any given rationale may also vary between contexts. Therefore, when interpreting responses concerning what limitations of freedom of expression might be acceptable, it is important to study the relationships between different rationales. Individuals' judgments may be influenced by general principles and/or the importance accorded different rationales in the light of current situations and the climate of debate in society.

The analysis is based on responses to five assertions that reflect the principal dimensions and foci of debate in discussions of freedom of expression in Sweden today. To some extent, they refer to areas mentioned in the Swedish Instrument of Government as possibly requiring some limitation. The five objectives are:

1. to prevent violation of individuals' privacy
2. to protect children and youth
3. to combat racism
4. to defend religious values
5. in the interests of national security

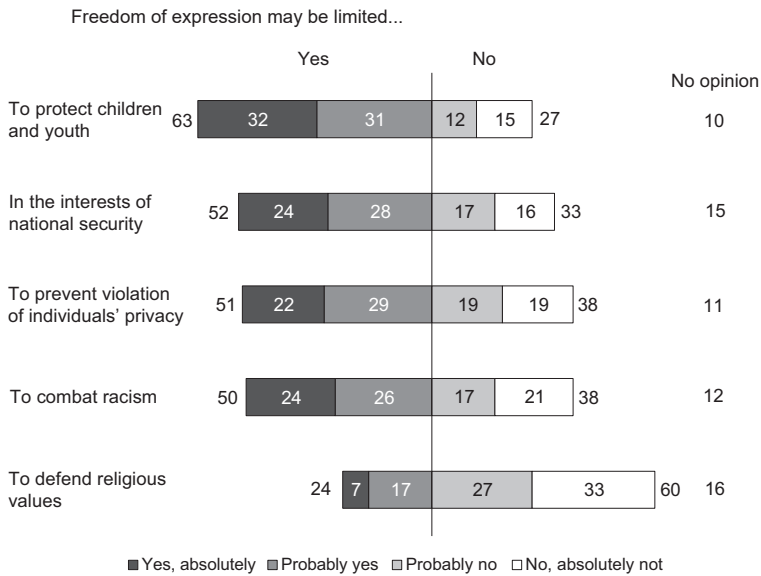
Responses were recorded on a four-point scale, ranging from 'Yes, *absolutely*' to 'No, *absolutely not*'. Respondents were also able to indicate 'No opinion'.

When drafting the formulations in the survey instrument, there was some concern that it might be difficult to obtain definite views on a subject as 'abstract' as freedom of expression. Those worries proved unfounded. Only four per cent of the survey population skipped the question, and among those who answered, the incidence of 'no opinion' on the respective items varied between 10 and 16 per cent – much lower on average than in the case of views on media performance. As in other, similar surveys the incidence of 'no opinion'-responses is somewhat higher among women and young people, but here the differences are small, so that excluding these responses does not affect the overall distribution of responses to any greater extent.

One drawback, however, is that the data provide no information about what kind of concrete measures respondents had in mind. It is impossible to determine whether the responses should be taken as a 'vote' in favor of restrictions or more as a reflection of the values that people seek to protect. It seems reasonable to take the responses as expressions of moral valuations rather than as calls for restrictions.

In four of the five examples specified in the question, a majority of the respondents feel there may be reason to impose limits on freedom of expression (Figure 1). These respondents would approve of measures to defend another value at the expense of freedom of expression.

Figure 1 Views on limiting freedom of expression for different purposes 2015 (percentages)



Note: The question asked, 'Do you think that freedom of expression should be limited for any of the following reasons? The five alternatives indicated above were offered. Percentages are calculated on the basis of all respondents *alt.* all who responded to this question.

Source: The National SOM survey 2015.

The majority is strongest in the case of *protecting children and youth*; more than two-thirds (63 per cent) of the respondents say that there may be reason to limit freedom of expression for that purpose. Half of this major-

ity respond, ‘Yes, absolutely’. Just over one in four respondents would not find a limitation for that reason acceptable. Next-strongest approval was indicated for limitations *in the interests of national security* but here, one in three does not consider limiting freedom of expression for that purpose acceptable. Half of the respondents feel that it might be justifiable to limit freedom of expression in order *to prevent violation of individuals’ privacy*, meaning harassment and hate speech, and about the same share would accept limitations *to combat racism*.

The only purpose that does not receive support from a majority of the respondents is *defending religious values*. Just under one in four (24 per cent) respond that they would accept limitations of freedom of expression for that purpose; but, fully one in three respond, ‘No, absolutely not’.

That such limitations of freedom of expression would be acceptable to a majority of Swedish citizens – with the exception of religious values – is hardly surprising. In the case of national security it is a matter of national existence, and children and youth are, almost by definition, a vulnerable group who may be assumed to need protection. Rules concerning the protection of young people can also be found in other areas, and are very common in public discussions on abuses on the web and in social media.

Views on restricting freedom of expression to combat racism and to prevent violation of people’s privacy may also be taken as an expression of people’s desire to protect individuals and groups from threats and discomfort. Acceptance of limiting freedom of expression to combat racism is probably also a function of the respondents’ ideas about society.

Two perspectives have guided the analysis of the data. First, we look for possible patterns in people’s motives for accepting limitations of freedom of expression when it is weighed against other values and norms in society. Second, we look for general principles relating to views on freedom of expression. The pattern of responses suggests that respondents’ views regarding the different purposes may be interrelated.

Concerning the search for a general pattern, a dimensional analysis confirms our assumption. It reveals that protecting children and youth, preventing violation of individuals’ privacy, and combating racism form what we have chosen to call a *caring dimension*, a desire to protect individuals or groups who may be assumed to be vulnerable. The other two

purposes, defending religious values and national security, represent dimensions of their own.

To answer the second question, the extent to which we can extrapolate general principles from the data, we focus on the two ‘absolute’ categories on the scales, viz., ‘*Yes, absolutely*’ and ‘*No, absolutely not*’. Responses in the two extremities need not necessarily reflect principled positions, but it is reasonable to assume that those who respond, ‘No, absolutely not’ on all five items have a fundamental conviction that causes them to refuse to accept any limitations of freedom of expression. One respondent in ten falls into this group.

Considerably fewer – only five per cent – ‘absolutely’ accept limitations of freedom of expression to serve all five of the purposes. It is less likely that these respondents are exponents of a common principle; instead, they are simply more inclined toward preserving other values than freedom of expression.

Irrespective of social background or political ideology, protecting children and youth has the strongest support, and defending religious values the weakest, but a closer analysis reveals differences between different subgroups (Table 3a).

Generally speaking, women are more likely than men to accept restrictions on freedom of expression for the purposes proposed, with the exception of limitations in the interests of national security. The greatest difference is noted with respect to preventing racism: 54 per cent of women, 46 per cent of men.

The eldest respondents differ from the youngest in that a greater share accept limiting freedom of expression in the interests of national security, whereas the youngest express greater support for restrictions in order to combat racism and to protect children and young people. Other differences are minor.

When we limit the comparison to those having an ‘absolute’ opinion (not shown in tables), we find that a greater share of the eldest group are prepared to accept restricting the freedom of expression than the youngest are. In the case of national security, violation of individuals’ privacy, and protection of children and youth, the eldest are nearly 10 percentage points higher than the youngest. The exception is combatting racism, where no differences between age groups are noted. The largest share

favoring limitations for this purpose, however, is noted among the youngest respondents.

Highly educated among the respondents are less inclined to accept limitations on freedom of expression than those with little formal education. The difference is particularly marked with regard to national security and religious values. Only the highly educated tend to stand out; frequencies among the other education groups are quite similar. When we consider responses in the ‘absolute’ categories ‘yes’ or ‘no’ – differences among the groups are even more pronounced. Highly educated respondents register lower acceptance of restrictions, not only for the sake of national security and to protect children and youth, but for preventing violation of individuals’ privacy. In the latter case, the opinion gap is 15 percentage points. Nonetheless, the rank order of the purposes of concern is roughly the same between the highly educated and respondents with less formal education: both consider protecting children and youth most important, and defending religious values least important.

Table 3a *Swedish citizens’ views on limiting freedom of expression by sex, age and formal education, 2015 (shares of those responding ‘Yes, absolutely’ or ‘Probably yes’ expressed as percentages)*

Freedom of expression may be limited...	Women	Men	16-29	30-49	50-64	65-85	LEd	MLEd	MHEd	HED
... to prevent violation of individuals’ privacy	53	49	51	50	47	54	56	51	50	57
... to protect children and youth	65	62	67	66	60	63	67	63	65	60
... to combat racism	54	46	56	49	45	52	54	51	51	46
... to defend religious values	26	21	25	21	20	28	32	24	22	21
... in the interests of national security	49	56	42	52	52	57	58	54	56	46
n	748	731	202	401	391	488	218	421	337	483

Note: The figures indicate the shares responding “Yes, absolutely” and “Probably yes” regarding whether or not freedom of expression should be limited for the respective purposes. For the exact formulation of the question, see Figure 1. The percentages are calculated on the basis of all respondents, including those who reported having ‘No opinion’. LEd = Low level of formal education, MLEd = medium-low, MHEd = medium-high, HED = highly educated.

Source: The National SOM Survey 2015.

The other group of factors that appear to influence views on limiting freedom of expression relates to political orientation (Table 3b). Interest in politics shows the strongest influence. Those who say they are interested in politics are generally less inclined to accept restrictions on freedom of expression, whereas the smaller group who say they are not interested in politics tend to be more accepting of restrictions for the sake of other values. The only purpose where there is no difference between the groups is protecting children and young people, where both interested and uninterested are prepared to accept restrictions. The same is true, albeit to a lesser extent, with regard to national security; both groups are accepting of restrictions in the interests of national security. Once again, we find essentially the same rankings of purposes, regardless of degree of interest in politics.

Table 3b Swedish citizens' views on limiting freedom of expression by degree of interest in politics, party preferences, and ideology (percentages 'Yes, absolutely' or 'Probably yes')

Freedom of expression may be limited...	Political interest				Party preference									Political ideology				
	VS	SI	NVI	NI	V	S	MP	C	L	M	KD	SD	CL	SL	N/N	SR	CR	
... to prevent violation of indivi- duals' privacy	47	49	54	52	51	60	54	46	52	48	52	42	53	55	50	49	47	
... to protect children and youth	58	64	65	64	63	70	63	57	66	63	62	60	62	69	61	64	58	
... to combat racism	39	51	53	54	57	60	57	43	46	52	44	30	60	60	47	47	36	
... to defend religious values	17	23	28	33	24	29	13	23	22	24	38	16	26	21	25	23	21	
... in the interests of national security	48	52	56	50	37	60	44	46	56	55	63	55	40	53	54	55	53	
n	227	748	419	66	109	347	106	109	67	316	50	210	162	289	422	439	146	

Note: The figures indicate the shares responding 'Yes, absolutely' and 'Yes, probably' regarding whether or not freedom of expression should be limited for the respective purposes. For the exact formulation of the question, see Figure 1. The percentages are calculated on the basis of all respondents, including those who reported having 'No opinion'. Political interest; VI = Very interested in politics; SI = Somewhat interested in politics; NVI = Not very interested; NI = No interest. Party preferences: V = Left party, S = Social Democrats, MP = Green party, C = Center, L = Liberals, M = Conservatives, KD = Christian Democrats, SD = Sweden Democrats. Political ideology; CL = Clearly to the left, SL = Somewhat to the left, N/N = Neither left/Nor right, SR = Somewhat to the right, CR = Clearly to the right. Note that the number of respondents in some groups is small so that the percentages are somewhat uncertain. **Source:** The National SOM Survey 2015

Turning to party preferences, we find that a larger share of those who support the Social Democratic Party (S) declared a willingness to accept limits on freedom of expression, except for reason of national security. Supporters of the Moderate Party (M), on the other hand, were relatively unwilling to accept such restrictions. By and large, the differences between supporters of the respective parties' are not very big – with some exceptions: adherents of the populist Sweden Democrats (SD) are decidedly less willing to limit freedom of expression to combat racism; Christian Democrats (KD) put more emphasis on defending religious values; and fewer Left Party (V) supporters are willing to accept restrictions on freedom of expression in the interests of national security (more information on the Swedish political parties are presented on page 4).

As for political ideology, people who place themselves to the left of the political center are generally somewhat more willing to accept limitations on freedom of expression for the objectives proposed – except in the case of national security, where people to the right are more willing to impose limits. The strongest pattern in the opposite direction is observed for the purpose to combat racism; here, respondents who place themselves to the left are clearly more inclined to accept limitations on freedom of expression.

The background variables studied obviously interact. It is therefore important to try to identify the factors that exert the strongest influence. Our analysis² reveals that interest in politics is the most powerful explanatory factor for all the five motives for limiting freedom of expression included in the study. The effect is most striking in the case of combatting racism and defending religious values. In the case of combatting racism, ideological orientation emerges as a second explanatory factor. Ideology also influences people's preparedness to accept limits on freedom of expression in order to prevent hate speech and harassment and to preserve national security, albeit to a lesser degree.

Level of education is the strongest explanatory factor with regard to defending religious values, but it also contributes to a willingness to limit freedom of expression in the interests of national security, to protect children and youth, and to prevent hate speech and harassment of private persons. Sex is a strong explanatory factor when it comes to

protecting children and youth, but also a positive factor in relation to defending religious values and combatting racism.

In sum, *interest in politics* and *education* are the most potent, and clearly significant, explanatory factors. Their influence becomes even more apparent when we compare those who, regardless of motive, would accept restrictions on freedom of expression with those who would defend it. Those who are interested in politics are overall less willing to limit freedom of expression, while those with little education are more willing to do so for the purposes proposed in this study.

It is reasonable to conclude that neither respondents' acceptance nor their rejection of limiting freedom of expression should be taken as implying any iron-clad positions, but that the positions indicated in the study are more likely dependent on factors relating to the issues for which limiting freedom of expression is proposed. Such a conclusion is confirmed by some patterns of response, such as supporters of the Christian Democrats being more willing than others to restrict freedom of expression to defend religious values.

Freedom of expression and perceptions of the media

Citizens' assessments of the media's performance might reasonably be assumed to influence their opinion about limiting freedom of expression. Overall, citizens' opinions about media performance show no significant effect on approval or rejection of any of the five reasons to impose limits on freedom of expression (data not presented in tables). This reinforces the idea that views on proposed restrictions have more to do with the purpose of the measures than with respondents' valuations of freedom of expression *per se* or perceptions of how media perform.

On only one issue, namely, the extent to which media respect individuals' right to privacy, is it possible to make a direct comparison between views on the media and opinion on restrictions: Do people's perceptions about how the media treat private individuals and their right to privacy affect their willingness to accept restrictions on freedom of expression in order to prevent violation of individuals' privacy?

The results show that a rather large share of the respondents, 40 per cent, are critical of media's perceived lack of respect for people's right

to privacy and are open to the possibility of measures to limit freedom of expression to prevent the media from violating people's right to privacy. Such a correlation seems only logical. However, nearly 20 per cent approve of how media treat private individuals, yet are willing to accept restrictions on freedom of expression 'to prevent violation of the individuals' integrity. This pattern weakens the overall correlation between critical views of the media and acceptance of limiting freedom of expression to prevent violations.

A corresponding analysis was performed to examine possible correlations between use of social media and views on freedom of expression. Only for the purpose of combatting racism do we find a slight tendency among users of social media to be more inclined to approve of restricting freedom of expression. Otherwise, the data reveal no notable relationships between views on freedom of expression and frequency of use of social media.

These results may appear contrary to expectations, but it is largely consistent with other findings in the study. Our conclusion is that with regard to one and the same aspect of media performance, a good number of people may express what would seem to be the intuitive pattern: If media do not perform in an acceptable manner, it may be reasonable to limit freedom of expression. At the same time, there is a smaller group of people who are deeply committed to a given value: Media perform fairly well, but this is an issue of especial importance to me, where I would be willing to accept a restriction on freedom of expression

Conclusions

When questions are posed to Swedish citizens on their assessment of media performance, a distinct pattern of responses emerges that confirms the findings of previous studies. Thus, a first conclusion, when it comes to concrete issues, is that a majority of Swedish citizens feel that the media fail to respect individuals' right to privacy, and half express doubts concerning the impartiality, or lack of bias, in media's news reporting. In this connection, it is also important to note that four in ten respondents express the opinion that media do not afford space to controversial opinions.

To a large extent media are the custodians of freedom of expression in modern societies. Citizens' willingness to accept limitations on freedom of expression for certain purposes may therefore be taken, at least in part, as an expression of criticism of media performance. This critique focuses primarily on problems relating to media's lack of respect for individuals' personal privacy. A second principal conclusion is that when freedom of expression is weighed against the need to protect vulnerable groups in society – children and young people, and individuals who are the targets of racism and violation (hate speech and harassment) – at least half of the population are willing to extend such protection by restricting freedom of expression.

What does it mean, that at least half of the population finds limiting freedom of expression acceptable if the purpose is to defend or protect other values, while ten per cent oppose restrictions for any purpose? Unfortunately, we have no earlier Swedish studies to compare with. A comprehensive Norwegian study, *The Status of Free Speech in Norway* (2014), found patterns similar to those in our study, albeit the studies are not directly comparable. The findings give cause for thought.

The explanatory factors identified in the analysis of our Swedish data have to do with both the 'culture of democracy' – a climate of trust and a valuation of human rights – as well as factors relating to respondents' background – age, level of formal education, interest in politics and, to a lesser extent, sex. Interest in politics has by far the greatest explanatory power. What is more, the study was conducted in a period of major turbulence in our so-called 'communication society' due to ongoing digitization. For that reason, it is interesting to try to determine whether the patterns we note indicate long-term convictions or more short-term opinions (cf. Enjolras and Steen-Johnsen 2014).

The results might be interpreted as a weakening of public support for freedom of expression because of the strong acceptance expressed for restrictions in certain areas. But our conclusion is that the views expressed by Swedish citizens primarily reflect the importance they accord the *purposes* for which freedom of expression might be restricted, rather than principled favor of restrictions *per se*. That is, they reflect normative responses to troubling phenomena in the public sphere. Tolerance of utterances that inflict injury on individuals, groups or society at large

is limited. Thus, citizens' views parallel the intentions of the Instrument of Government regarding restrictions on freedom of expression: to protect individuals' integrity, repute and safety. It is a matter of caring, for yourself and for others – an expression of humanity, which can be interpreted as mutual trust between human beings.

A reasonable interpretation of the findings overall is that they support preserving the fundamental principle of freedom of expression. However, they also reflect a recognition that digitization has changed both the setting in which news media operate, people's media habits, and the meaning of personal privacy. In other words, the picture is complex, with the consequence that most citizens do not place freedom of expression unreservedly above other fundamental rights.

The results are in line with the 'balance of harms principle' (Waldron 2012, Enjolras and Steen-Johnsen 2014); the views recorded in our material express support for freedom of expression, but also a recognition that statements made in the public sphere can inflict injury, and impinge on the rights of others, so that the exercise of this fundamental right may have to be restricted. Considerations like these are important for the maintenance of vital and meaningful public discourse (Enjolras and Steen-Johnsen 2014).

The findings reflect a perceived need to revisit the roles, rights and responsibilities of media in fundamentally new economic, social and communication environments. But, the issue is broader than that and involves many different actors. It is vital that there be broad public consensus about the goals: that everyone should be able to make their voice heard in public discourse, by whatever channel or platform; that policy and legal frameworks be examined and, if necessary, amended to accommodate digital realities, without impinging on fundamental principles of freedom of expression; that media companies strengthen their systems for maintaining self-regulation and safeguard journalism as a profession; that civil society organizations develop their roles with respect to defending human rights and the integrity of individuals and groups (cf. DW Akademie 2016, Carlsson 2017).

There is also reason to emphasize the importance of popular understanding of the meaning of freedom of expression. This is an educational issue that must not be neglected. The complexities of modern society

mean that knowledgeable and committed citizens, equipped with well-honed critical faculties, are key to the survival of democracy. It is especially true in an increasingly digitized media culture, which gives rise to new understandings of freedom of expression and new motives for limiting it (Carlsson 2016b).

Meeting the challenges posed by the metamorphosis of the communication society will require better knowledge in classical disciplines relating to how our societies function – civics, history, languages and the natural sciences – but in media and digital literacy, as well (Mihailidis 2014, Print et al. 2013, UNESCO 2013). That is to say: a basic awareness that includes an understanding of freedom of expression and the rights, responsibilities and consequences for individuals and society that it entails – not least in a digitized environment. Developing citizens' media and information literacy is vital to protecting and promoting freedom of expression – in extension, our democracy. These tasks require a coordinated national policy.

Notes

- ¹ The findings are based on a linear regression analysis with sex, age, education, political interest and ideology (locus on Left-Right continuum) as independent variables and the respective assertions ('no opinion'-responses excluded) as dependent variables. The highest explained variance related to the view that the media 'put their profitability ahead of journalism', with four per cent.
- ² The basis of these findings is a linear regression analysis in which sex, age, education, interest in politics and ideology (Left-Right locus) were the independent variables, and the respective motives for limiting freedom of expression were the dependent variables. The variance explained was low on the whole, ranging between 2 per cent (to prevent violation of individuals) and 6 per cent (to combat racism and defend religious values).

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The Annual SOM Surveys on Society, Opinion and Media

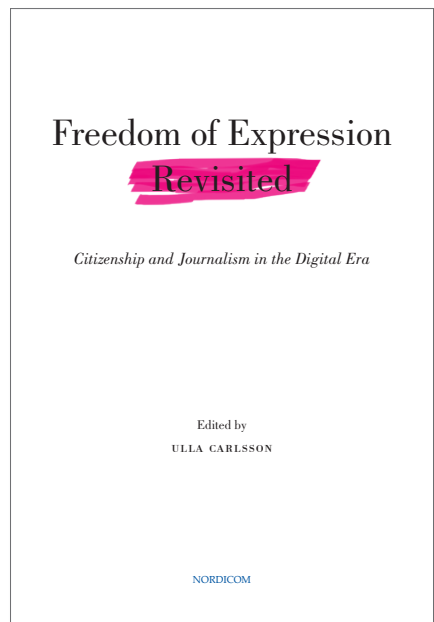
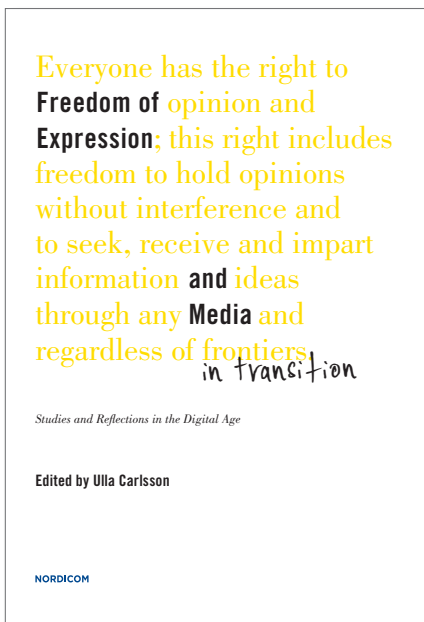
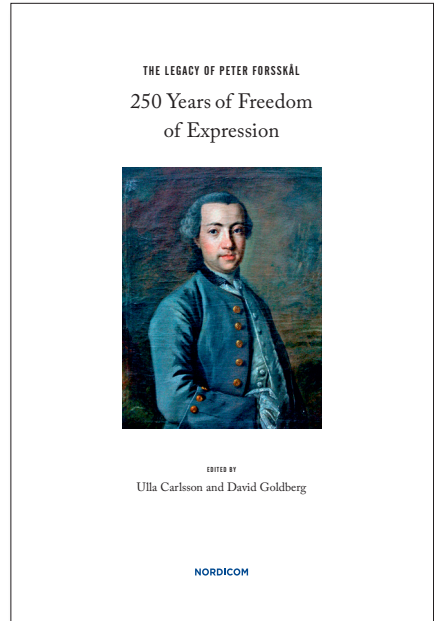
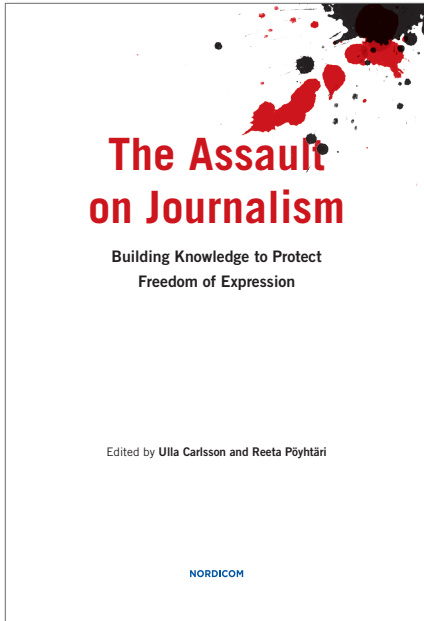
The data originate from the National SOM Survey 2015. The National SOM Surveys are conducted annually. It is in the form of a mail questionnaire addressed to a nationally representative random sample of residents between the ages of 16 and 85. The survey consists of several subsurveys. The subsurvey including the questions concerning attitudes to journalism and freedom of expression comprises of a sample of 3 400 respondents. The response rate in 2015 was 51 per cent. The data files from the surveys are deposited at the Swedish National Data Service (www.snd.gu.se).

The SOM Institute at the University of Gothenburg is an independent research institute at the service of researchers nationwide. Ever since 1986, the SOM Institute has conducted surveys to collect research data and presented annual trend analyses on public opinion and media habits in Sweden. The Institute's analyses are often referred to in the public debate in Sweden and are used to form several important decisions influencing Swedish society. The aim of the SOM Institute is to combine complete research transparency and contemporary international standards for survey methodology with a strong presence in Swedish social debate.

Publications

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

UNESCO Chair on Freedom of Expression, Media Development and Global Policy
at the University of Gothenburg



Freedom of expression is fundamental to democracy, and media serve as custodians of that freedom. Prevailing norms and values among the populace constitute the preconditions for freedom of expression, but also determine its limits. Digital technology has democratized the public sphere, but the new technologies also imply problems concerning the limits of freedom of expression. Particularly problematic is the relationship between freedom of expression and personal integrity.

The present study reports on a national representative survey of Swedish citizens' views on the limits of freedom of expression and on the areas in which limitations of freedom of expression may be acceptable. Public acceptance of possible curtailment of freedom of expression may be taken to represent dissatisfaction with the ways in which contemporary media operate.



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