



Swedish news Media: a historical perspective and today's challenges



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Important features of Swedish (and other Nordic) media

Strong free speech and press freedom traditions, coexisting with active state involvement in the media sector

Strong state owned public service institutions in radio and television, plus online news

Direct and indirect state media support to secure news media diversity.

The long historical perspective: Early newspapers

1600: First newspaper in Sweden:
“Ordinari Post Tidender 1645”.

Out of a perceived need to intensify
state propaganda (Oxenstierna)

1700: debate about press freedom
and 1766 a freedom regulation (the
world’s oldest constitutional
provision, still in use).

Agitation for liberal reforms

The expansion of newspapers in almost all newspapers leads to broader democratic debate

1830: Aftonbladet, by Lars Johan Hierta. The first modern paper in opposition against the King – who tried to silence Hierta. New name and publisher.... Soon the biggest paper. Supported by upper middle class in favour for liberal reforms.

Inspiration from the US

Inspiration from the expanding, commercial American press. 1864: Dagens Nyheter (DN)

New distribution: the newspaper is delivered to people's home in the morning. Trains make the expansion to other areas easier

Expansion of advertising directed to individual consumers.

The party press

1900: the party press starts to expand

Conservative and liberal press is even established *before* the parties

Social democratic party established 1889, newspapers founded as part of party organisation They had less income from advertising than the conservative and liberal press.

Different aspects of the party press

Owners: This was typical for the socialist press. The liberal/conservative press was mostly owned by rich families/local shareholders

Content: editorials – and news were prioritised and framed to support the party's strategies and ideology (conservative, liberal, socialist etc)

Relations to the readers: Confirming their basic political views.

Gradual death of the party press, professionalisation



1950-60th: Market concentration,
death of small newspapers

Increasing professionalization of
journalism, establishment of
educational institutions

Weakening of the parties. Loss of
party members, organizational
weakening

Less ability to finance and lead
newspapers.

Press subsidies and Democracy (1)

1970: Introduction. Defending political diversity of the press and thereby the freedom of speech

Economic argument: market leading newspapers get a much larger share of the ad-market than their share of the circulation

Direct support to “number 2” newspapers.

Background: the democratic role of the press

1. Bringing information of public importance
2. Being forums for debates
3. Examining the centres of power.

Financial collapse of the labour press

- Press subsidies secured greater political and cultural diversity, but could not prevent the “death” of many newspapers
- The Labour press had a financial collapse in the 1990s. Some important newspapers were closed, others were bought by liberal/conservative owners or foundations.

Political parallelism in new forms

The political parties: no direct influence over the daily press

Most papers and media houses declare their political independence

However: most of them still have an explicit ideological profile

Their editorial commentators still privilege one of the government blocs.

A liberal-conservative hegemony today

(Allern 2019)

90% of the printed circulation and the digital news readership are controlled by media companies with a liberal or conservative editorial profile

The left press exists but is weak

However, this does not include the public service channels.

Public service broadcasting: the beginning

1920: **Radio**

Agreement. Monopoly through alliances between leading actors (including newspaper's editors organisation)

Centralised organisation, consensus and educational ambition.

Public service: the development

1956: **TV**, one channel

1970-85: A second channel, monopoly kept, tv becomes the leading mass medium

1985: change of system, divided into 3 corporations, governed by independent foundations. **Deregulated tv-market**, commercial channels and satellites

2000: **digitalisation**, choice of time and platform.

Public service

Financed through license or taxes.

An agreement with the state:

1. commitment to offer the whole population a diversified choice of television programmes
2. independent in relation to the state, to different economic, political and other interests and powerholders

The ideal of objectivity:

1. matter-of-factness: truth and relevance
2. impartiality: balance and neutral presentation

The public: media consumption

An ordinary day 2018:

82% watches tv on some platform

71% uses social media

61% listens to radio

55% read a newspaper on some platform

36% watches streamed TV

Swedes in average use 6 hours (357 minutes) on media per day. Both young people and old people use more time than the middle-aged – but on different platforms.

The public: trust (2017)

(SOM-institute 2018)



73% of the Swedish population have high trust in Swedish Public Service Broadcaster

71% have high trust in Swedish Public Service Radio

52% have high trust in their local newspapers

44% have high trust in the biggest national daily, Dagens Nyheter

Polarisation of trust

Polarisation between different political orientations: the more to the political right, the lower trust. People who sympathize with the Sweden Democrats, show the lowest level of trust in news media.

Right-wing populist demands

During the very last years: the Moderate (conservative) Party, the Christian Democrats and the Sweden Democrats (right-wing populist) have demanded that public service should be limited both concerning budget and production

Nordic inspiration: Denmark, the liberal-conservative government 2018 (with support of their right-wing populist party) accomplished serious cut-downs of public service. Hungary and Poland are forerunners for the right-wing parties.

Structural changes in the political and economic foundation of the news media last decades

Party affiliated newspapers and broadcasting as a state-owned monopoly, has become history

Extensive commercial investments in a deregulated media sector, resulting in concentration of ownership and increased profit demands

Challenges to the Nordic Media Model



New types of personalized advertising channels like Google and Facebook challenge and threaten the business models of legacy media

The new digital media landscape is more fragmented and unstable

Keeping public service important

Newspapers combining print subscription with digital subscriptions to survive

Changed relationships

Journalism is an institution defined by its relationships to other institutions in society

Early dependence on the political party turned into a dependence of the state which turned into a dependence of the market

(Ekecrantz 2005)

The 'democratic corporatist' heritage

The Democratic Corporatist (or Northern European) Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004)

Characterized by a **historical coexistence of mass circulated commercial media and media tied to organized social and political groups**, and by a relatively active but legally limited role of the state.

Ownership today

1. State owned, run through foundations (SR, SVT, UR since 1997). Head foundation with political representation, appoints the boards for the three foundations
2. Private, not on the stock exchange, mostly family businesses with long tradition
3. Private foundations, more important over time, explained by the death of the party press
4. Private, on the stock exchange, so far only Schibstedt
5. By different organizations (nearly none)

Today's four different forms of subsidies to the media

1 **Operational** subsidies are granted to printed newspapers or newspapers that are published in a digital format. The subsidies are based on the circulation and on how frequently the newspaper is published.

2 **Distribution** subsidies are granted for each published issue of a newspaper that participates in joint distribution. The subsidies are administered by a distribution company on a monthly basis in arrears.

3. Media subsidies can be given to **general news media** whose primary duty is news coverage, and which also have editorial content consisting of regular and general news mediation comprising a broad range of subjects and perspectives, as well as scrutiny of developments of fundamental importance to democracy.

4. Media subsidy are granted **for local journalism** in areas with poor journalistic coverage as well as innovation and development.

Ethical guidelines: Press

“The Press Ombudsman (PO) and the Press Council (PON) are **independent self-disciplinary bodies**, handling complaints on the editorial content of newspapers, magazines and their websites. --- If PO finds that a publication is subject to criticism, the case will be submitted to PON for review and decision. If PON decides that the publication should be criticized for breaching the press-ethical rules, the restitution for the complainant is that the newspaper shall publish a statement of the PON decision in the newspaper and/or website, depending on the forum of the original publication. The newspaper is also obliged to pay a fee to PO/PON.”

The Code of Ethics

<https://po.se/about-the-press-ombudsman-and-press-council/code-of-ethics-for-press-radio-and-television-in-sweden/>

The Swedish Broadcasting Commission



Is an independent decision-making body. The Commission examines the contents of radio and TV programmes to see whether they adhere to the applicable broadcasting regulations. Viewers and listeners may also contribute.

The Commission consists of a chair, six members and four deputies. All have been appointed by the government. The chair of the Commission must be, or have been, a judge.